

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

The People You Don't Want in Your Church

Monday, April 3rd, 2017

One of the greatest film series known to man is Jurassic Park. The films are incredible mainly because the dinosaurs were so life-like, especially in a time when any attempt at depicting extinct creatures looked silly. Not only were the dinosaurs brilliantly recreated, but the films are also scary, thoughtful, suspenseful, and downright thrilling. One of the prevailing themes of the series is that there are some animals that man should have no control over - like a 9-ton monster known as Tyrannosaurus Rex. In the third installment of the series, one of the members of the team - Billy - stole two velociraptor eggs, causing the raptors to hunt the team. When the leader of the team, Dr. Grant, realizes what Billy has done, he confronts him. Here's the dialogue that ensues:

Billy Brennan: You have to believe me, this was a stupid decision, but I did it with the best intentions.

Dr. Grant: With the best intentions? Some of the worst things imaginable have been done with the best intentions. You know what, Billy? As far as I'm concerned, you're no better than the people that built this place.

Billy, presumably out of guilt and the feeling that he owed the group something, ends up risking his life for the team later in the movie.

What's interesting here, and relevant to today's passage is Billy's statement.

"I did it with the best intentions."

So often, we are like Billy. It's why we feel empathetic toward him in the scenes following his interaction with Dr. Grant. How many times have you done something that you thought was a good thing, but it ended up hurting other people?

Today, we're going to look at a story in the gospel of Mark where Jesus reacts to people who allowed their preferences to hinder other people's ability to worship.

Mark 11:15-19

¹⁵And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." ¹⁸And

the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. ¹⁹And when evening came they went out of the city.

This situation seems, to us, to be so out of character for Jesus. When we think of Jesus, we probably don't think about him flipping over tables and running people out of a temple. Why did Jesus do this? What drove him to this sort of behavior? By simply reading the text, we might conclude that Jesus was upset because people were selling items in the temple, or that they had turned the temple - a place of worship - into a place of business. While these factors may have contributed to Jesus' frustration, there's something deeper going on. The area in which the money changers and the other salesmen had set up was an area specially designated for gentile believers. [Joseph Benson](#) writes,

“The Jews, it must be observed, reckoning the lower and outward court of the temple a place of little or no sanctity, because it was designed for accommodating the Gentile proselytes in their worship, not only kept a daily market there of such things as were necessary in offering sacrifices, but suffered the common porters, in going from one part of the city to another with their burdens, to pass through it, for the sake of shortening their way.”

That they were proselytes simply means that they had converted from one religious belief to the Jewish belief. Unfortunately, because they were Gentiles, they had their own section of the temple in which to worship. The Jewish leaders of the temple, indifferent to the needs of the Gentile worshipers, allowed the money changers and merchants to set up shop in the gentile court. They also allowed people to pass through the gentile court merely to shorten their trip through the city. Jesus, in his admonishment of the priests of the temple, says, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." What's important here is that he says God's house should be a place of worship for *all nations*, which included Gentile nations. The priests allowed people to inhibit the worship of the Gentiles either due to indifference or hatred.

What does this have to do with us? We don't have specific sections of the church cordoned off for different people. It's not likely you'll see a money changers booth set up at the expense of certain groups of people. No, though it would be atypical to find something like this, we can still glean something from this passage.

The incredible thing about Scripture is that no matter how often you read it, it can speak to you. It is alive and powerful, cutting between soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12). As followers of Christ, we believe this about Scripture, and thus

every time we open our Bibles, we are hoping that God will speak to us. It is our hope that every time we pour over the word of God, he will both encourage and challenge us. For this story, it might be easy to read and discount it as something that happened in the 1st century, but not today. However, when we sincerely and honestly examine our hearts, we can approach people the same way the leaders of the temple did.

No, we may not set up physical barriers to those who might be seeking God; however, if we're honest, we'll admit that we've used our words and actions to set up barriers that many people have given up trying to cross. Like the priests in the story, we tend to become indifferent to the needs of those that are different from us. We wouldn't say out loud, "*we don't want them to come to our church,*" but sometimes, our actions communicate that very sentiment.

As Ben Snyder said this past weekend, we, like the priests, have people whom we struggle to value.

Who is this for you?

Are there certain people that you struggle to value?

It's possible that you might not be able to point out specific times where you've prevented others from worshiping God; however, our thoughts are so vitally important that they produce evil actions (Mark 7:21). The first step in aligning with God on this matter is to love people no matter where they are or what they've done.

We can do this by showing people they matter. Instead of setting up barriers, we need to knock them down so anyone can feel like they can worship God.

What are you going to do this week to show people they matter?

Prayer:

God, I know that your heart is for people. I know you want me to love people as you have loved them. Help me to knock down any barriers I've set up, and help me to have a spirit of love for people whom I typically haven't. I want to show people that they matter to me and that they matter to you. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

It's Time to Act Like Children

Tuesday, April 4th, 2017.

What is your greatest fear? Mine used to be spiders until I had kids. When our oldest daughter became a toddler, I found a new greatest fear, the infamous temper tantrum – not any old temper tantrum mind you, but the worst of all temper tantrums: the public tantrum. This is the kind that occurs with strangers all around, staring, gawking, gazing, and giving unsolicited advice. Apparently peeling a screaming three-and-a-half-year-old off the bakery floor at Kroger can be done in just four easy steps.

Anyone who has kids, and even those without, know that children can, and will, act childish. Even with all the amazing qualities that children bring to any situation, they can many times cause frustration, annoyance, or hinder progress due to their apparent “immaturity.” Case in point, just ask a three-year-old to clear the dishes off the table. Your dog, if you have one, will thank me.

If we're not careful, we'll allow the childish acts of kids to cause us to view children as an inconvenience. Our culture often pushes us to see children as a hindrance to success or fulfillment. We begin to look down upon childhood as "less than" and look forward to when children will "grow up" and mature into productive members of our households or society. Sadly, we can all too easily miss the gift that we are given through the children among us.

One of the most important lessons we can learn in life is captured in the children around us. Jesus saw the gift we are given in children and used it to focus his followers on a primary truth. We see this play out in Mark 10:13-16.

Mark 10:13-16

¹³One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

¹⁴When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” ¹⁶Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

Several things are important in this text. The first is that Jesus pointed out the number one requirement for a person to receive the Kingdom of God, mainly, childlike faith. It is interesting that Jesus does not identify a single "childlike" quality that is necessary to enter God's kingdom, but the overarching disposition

of a child, humility. Looking at the mirror passage in Luke 18:15-17, we see that Jesus is specifically referencing an infant in this teaching. What is an infant capable of on its own? Nothing. An infant is wholly reliant on his or her parent for everything. When it comes to our relationship with Jesus, this dependency is what should mark our lives. In a sense, we are to admit the fact that we are helpless without God, incapable of living the life we are created for or finding eternal life.

The second thing that is important to see in this text is what Jesus is talking about when he says, "Kingdom of God." Understanding what is meant by the Kingdom of God is so important because most Christians take the Kingdom of God to mean heaven. If Jesus simply means heaven when he references the Kingdom of God, then the entire focus is on some future event that overlooks the here and now. Jesus' focus, though, is very much on the here and now. In Mark 1:15, Jesus declares that the "Kingdom of God has come." Here in Mark 10, Jesus is again bringing our attention to the fact that **the Kingdom of God is not just a future eternal heaven, but rather the current reality we find ourselves in as we submit to and humble ourselves before a reigning, eternal God.**

How do those two truths connect with and apply to our lives today? Our level of humility is seen in our dependence on God in every area of our life. If we say we cannot save ourselves and we need Christ's sacrifice on the cross for salvation, yet we refuse to trust God with our finances, relationships, schedules, and other such things, then we aren't ushering forth the Kingdom of God as we are called to do. We cannot in one breath say we have humbled ourselves in full dependence on a holy God, then go out in another breath and act out of rivalry or conceit toward a fellow human being. True childlike humility will permeate every area of our life. Thus, as we take a step in dependence on God, we will simultaneously be expanding the Kingdom of God in all its goodness, righteousness, justice, and loving kindness to a broken and hurting world. It is this childlike humility that leads Paul to continually press the early believers to be focused on the good of others as he writes reminders such as, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). To think of ourselves as humbled before and submitted to Jesus while ignoring the plight of others would be simply, childish.

So, how are you doing with:

Your relationship with God:

Are you living as if you have to work to earn something from God?

Are you submitted to God in all the different areas of your life such as finances, relationships, career, and family goals? In which area do you need improvement?

Relationships with others: Do you put the needs, preferences, and interests of others before your own? How are you intentional about looking out for the good of others?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, my life is not my own. To think my life is my own would be childish. My life is yours. Grant me the childlike faith and humility to depend completely on you. I cannot save myself. There is nothing I can do to earn right standing before you. You accomplished that with your death on the cross. Thank you. As I go forward today, grant me the eyes to see the needs of others. Grant me your compassion for those who don't know you. Let my life be poured out for the good of others and the expansion of your kingdom, here and now. Amen.

Want to Get Ahead? Serve Others.

Wednesday, April 5th, 2017.

There have been events in my life that have changed my course. Most of those moments were difficult at the time I was going through them. But now, looking back, I see that the corrected course has been for the better! Although I suffered through each situation, the process shaped me, making me and my faith stronger. During most of those events, I sought the counsel of my spouse, family, and closest friends. I would try to sort through their varying opinions and devise my own unique approach to the problem or situation. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't! While I'm still asking for their advice, I find that the older I get, asking God first in prayer leads to much better outcomes! A moment with Jesus truly can change everything!

Mark 10:41-45

⁴¹When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. ⁴²So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. ⁴³But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

So why did James and John want to be next to Jesus? Did they think they were more deserving than the other disciples? Why were the other disciples indignant when they heard the request?

Have you ever felt like James and John? Have you ever felt like the other disciples? Jesus told them that they must be different from the world! And what did he mean when he said, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else"?

What does this mean for us? What do we have to do?

James and John wanted the highest positions in Jesus' kingdom. But Jesus told them that true greatness comes from serving others.

Most businesses, organizations, and institutions measure greatness by high personal achievement. In Christ's kingdom, however, service is the way to get ahead. The desire to get on top will hinder, not help. Rather than seeking to have your needs met, look for ways you can minister to the needs of others.

Jesus paid a ransom for us because we could not pay it ourselves. His death released all of us from our slavery to sin. The disciples thought Jesus' life and power would save them from Rome. Jesus said his death would save them from sin, an even greater slavery than Rome's.

What kind of radical life-giving service is Jesus calling us to do?

What can you do today to place others above yourself?

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for giving me a purpose and direction and the confidence to follow through. Help me to remember it's your will, not mine. Amen.

God Made You to Bear Fruit

Thursday, April 6th, 2017

Have you ever tried to grow a garden, or maybe just plant a flower? Sometimes it is not as easy as we imagine, or the plants don't grow as successfully as we pictured. There are requirements for a sustainable garden and a flourishing flower. In the same way, we as disciples have been "appointed to bear fruit that will last" (John 15:16), but there are a few things Jesus tells us we are accountable for in order to bear good and lasting fruit. He explains this in Mark 11:22-25.

Mark 11:20-25

²⁰The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it had withered from the roots up. ²¹Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, "Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died!" ²²Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Have faith in God. ²³I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. ²⁴I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours. ²⁵But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."

From this text, we learn that the first thing Jesus points out to us is that we must not doubt. James repeats this in James 1:6, "But when you ask Him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind." Another interesting point Jesus makes is that we are to believe that we have **already** received what we are asking for, not just believing that God can make it happen, but believing we already have it.

The second thing Jesus tells us to do is to forgive those whom we are holding a grudge against. Sometimes forgiving someone who did wrong against us is very difficult. Jesus cursed the fig tree because it was not bearing any fruit. Similarly, if we can release the anger from our hearts against others and ask for forgiveness from our sins, we allow room for Jesus to lay the foundation for what he is revealing to us, and our faith can experience growth, or as Jesus says, "mountains will be moved."

What is keeping you from believing and trusting God in your season of life?

What is hindering your ability to bear fruit?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the opportunity to bear fruit today. Help me to produce fruit that will last. Please reveal to me the things I need to lay at your feet and help me to forgive anyone whom I am holding a grudge against. Thank you for never giving up on me.

What is the Most Important Commandment?

Friday, April 7th, 2017

Christianity gets a bad reputation for being restrictive, constraining, and all about rules. The Jewish people lived by very strict rules - rules for behavior, rules for keeping the Sabbath, rules for sanitation, dietary rules - they had rules for everything! So, it is no surprise that we read several accounts in the Bible of Jewish leaders asking Jesus about the law. Jesus came to earth to fulfill the law. His sacrifice on the cross also changed the need for many of the Old Testament laws. Do you ever feel that Christianity is all about rules? Are you burdened or worried about knowing how to behave and what others think about your actions?

In Mark 12:28-34 Jesus is asked the ultimate question about rules - what is the single most important rule to obey? What a great question! Wouldn't life be easier if we only had one rule, one law, to obey? Jesus' answer was "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." Heart, soul, mind and strength encompass every part of your being and every area of your life. This wasn't a free pass to ignore the Jewish laws, but if God is put first the rest will fall into place.

Notice that Jesus begins the first commandment with a doctrinal confession: "The Lord our God is the one and only Lord." Then, the religious leader said he understood that these two commandments were the most important, even more so than offering sacrifices. Because of his knowledge (realizing how much he understood), Jesus says, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." This man understood the teachings, but perhaps he didn't practice them. Recall that Jesus said you must love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We cannot merely know about God - though this is essential - we must do what he says. This is what it looks like to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. When we do these things, we are living in the Kingdom of God.

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. ³⁰And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' ³¹The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

³²The teacher of religious law replied, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. ³³And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.”

³⁴Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

What is your perception of Christianity when it comes to rules? Do you feel like the rules are clear and reasonable, or numerous and impossible to keep? Why do you feel this way?

Reread Jesus’ words in Mark 12:28-34. What did Jesus say was the most important commandment? And the second? If you were to keep these two commandments, how would that impact all areas of your life?

Technology has allowed us to access information on virtually any topic at any time. We are overloaded with information. While we may know a lot about Jesus and his teachings, how is that different than loving Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Where are you at with knowing about Jesus versus loving Jesus?

Prayer:

Dear God, Thank you for your Word and the moments with Jesus we get to read about. Help us to go beyond knowing about you to loving you.