


Jesus—Outside the Lines

Part 2: The Tribal Tendency

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection

- What urge within us, do you think, makes us want to draw distinctions between people? Whether you're a first grade boy saying "Girls are icky!" or world-leaders defending national borders, **why** do you think we feel the urge to define "us" and "them"? When is it right? When is it wrong?
- Read John 8:48-49. The Jewish leaders *dissed* Jesus with two charges. What were they? Was either charge true of Jesus? But Jesus only contradicted **one** of their charges. Which one? **Why** do you think Jesus pushed back against that charge so vigorously? Was the other charge true or false? Why do you think he didn't even care to refute that charge? How did Jews feel about Samaritans? Do you think **you** have refuted that charge? Why or why not?
- Read Matthew 23:37. The same Greek word appears twice: Jesus **wanted to** protectively gather his people to himself, but the religious leaders of Jerusalem **didn't want** to have anything to do with him. Jesus even said "**how often**" his overtures were spurned! What three to five adjectives would you use to describe our God? Why do you think so many people view God as quick to anger?
- If a neighbor or friend at work asked you, "What kind of stuff do they talk about at your church?", how would you summarize the most important elements of this week's sermon, and the key lessons you intend to apply to your life? Can you explain it in **plain language** anyone could understand?

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Application-Challenge

- On the back of today's *Talking Points Walking Points* is a drawing of the "Moral Circle" we explored today. In the space below it, fill in some factors that you've used **in the past** to define who's "in" and "out" of your circle. (It could be financial status, ethnicity—maybe it's UNC or State or Duke fans.) Whatever they are, **now** take some time to honestly consider how Jesus would evaluate your criteria for who's inside and outside your circle.
- Read the "Seven Woes" recorded in Matthew 23:13-39. Could any of those warnings apply to you?
- Last week, did you try to find a tangible way to initiate love towards someone you'd previously pulled away from? If so, do it again this week! (If not—start this week!)

Take One Step: What is one small, concrete step of obedience you will put into practice this week?



Sermon Summary

Last week we laid the foundation for this series by talking about the perspective of grace. I offered two opposing views of grace: either a reward or a gift from God, and looked at how each of those views could shape our views on God, self, and neighbor. If grace is truly a free gift from God, then we have no reason to view other people as morally inferior to Christians. We haven't earned anything, we don't deserve anything, we have just been the recipients of God's overwhelming grace. This week, we are going to look at how Jesus seemed to view the people around Him, and compare that to how we view our neighbors.

The society we live in is governed largely by lines. Imaginary lines form the borders of towns, counties, states, countries, and even continents. But the lines I want to talk about today are the lines that we draw around ourselves—the “tribes” we create. For many of us the tribal identifiers have changed. It's no longer about geography. We live in a globalized world where it's as easy to talk to someone in Dublin as someone in Durham. Instead, our tribal identifiers have become things like race, language, behavior, politics, and religion—a “moral circle”. Too often, we extend grace to those who are in our moral circle, and withhold it from those who are not. All of us draw our moral circles differently. But there's no questions that they have an impact on how we treat the people around us. Some of the lines being drawn in America today are particularly deep and damaging. One of the most common lines I see drawn is around politics. As soon as someone identifies themselves as being of a different political ideology, we shift our view of them. Others' lines aren't political, but religious. Now, let me be clear: it's not that you have to agree with or condone every action of every person in your circle. It simply means that you don't reserve your most loving, gracious, kind self only for the people that meet your tribal criteria. Jesus, of course, is our best teacher of what a moral circle should look like.

Jesus seems to be placing a tax collector inside his moral circle (Matthew 9:9ff). No good Jew would do this. Tax collectors are thieves, traitors, and outsiders. You shouldn't be seen with them, much less invite them into your circle. The Pharisees wondered if Jesus knew that there were good, reputable people he could be eating with instead of tax collectors and sinners? Jesus continually associated with the sick, the disabled, the poor, the outcast, and the untouchables of his society. The gospels record situation after situation in which Jesus invites unexpected people inside his moral circle. Then there are those moments in Scripture where Jesus doesn't seem to care for people the way he did the woman at the well (see Matthew 21:12-13). He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. These people clearly stirred up righteous anger in Jesus. What exactly was Jesus' problem with them?

This was not a group of innocent merchants. They knew that during Passover week they could take advantage of people who needed a sacrificial animal or Temple currency. In doing so, they were being manipulative, dishonest, and even racist (they took up the only place in the Temple where non-Jews could come to worship). Jesus wasn't OK with that behavior! In Matthew 23, we see Jesus with some especially challenging words for the Pharisees. Your bible might have the same heading as mine for the passage starting in verse 13... “Seven woes to the Pharisees.” I really hope that there's never a heading in any book called “Seven woes to Lanier”! That's when you know you are in trouble. Jesus had some scathing words for the Pharisees. Surely, one would think, with warnings like these, the Pharisees must find themselves outside of Jesus' circle—right? Once again, Jesus' moral insight takes our breath away: Jesus told them: “How often I have longed to gather you together, as a hen protects her chicks under her wings—but you are not willing!” Yes, even after the tongue lashing they just received, the Pharisees are invited in to the circle. Jesus wants to be able to be tender with them, to be gracious to them, to speak gently to them.

It's not Jesus who has pushed them away; the Pharisees pushed Jesus away. The woman at the well, the tax collectors, the prostitutes—all these people came to Jesus broken, thirsty, humbled. Even though they were sinners, even though they missed the mark over and over again, they came to Jesus desperately wanting to receive what He had to offer. And so to these people, Jesus could be gentle. But the Pharisees didn't come humbly. They thought Jesus was the one who needed what they had to offer. They weren't in need of a Savior; they were saving themselves—by excluding people from their moral circle. Jesus' compassion, love, and grace meant nothing to the Pharisees. To the self-righteous, Jesus had to try and rattle their cages, to try and show them that they were hurrying down a path towards destruction. If you go to your doctor's office and you are 20 pounds overweight, your doctor won't ignore it, but she can afford to be gentle, subtle, because your situation isn't a crisis. But if you're 200 pounds overweight, you're going to receive a very different message. Your doctor will be blunt, forceful, and serious. Those who are proud and self-righteous are in crisis. They have deluded themselves into thinking that they can find their own way to salvation—and it'll destroy them if they don't change. Jesus doesn't place people outside His circle; the Pharisees removed themselves from it.

So, if we are to look at Jesus as our model of how to draw our moral circles, who goes in and who goes out? Everyone is invited in. He didn't withhold his most generous, loving, or sacrificial behavior from anyone. We shouldn't either. Everyone should receive our best. But love looks different in different situations. The broken people, the humble people, the searching people in your life need your gentle, compassionate reminders of grace. But the proud, the righteous, the people on the path towards ruin might need a message of woe. You love them less, you don't place them outside your circle. Their situation requires rebuke because you love them.

Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time

**Pastor Lanier referred to “moral circles” we draw—identifying “us” and “them”.
But are we in fact any better than those we judge as morally deficient? What does the Bible say?**

Monday—Read Romans 1:28-32.

- God “gave people over...to do things which are not proper” (v. 28). List all those improper deeds (v. 29-31).
- Did you find twenty-one? Now look up each of those deeds at < webstersdictionary1828.com >.
- Which of those deeds do you judge to be wrong or evil? Which ones (if any) do you think are OK? Do you concur with Romans 2:2?
- We won’t ask you of which you’re guilty, but which ones have you **never** done?

Tuesday—Since chapter and verse divisions are artificial, now read Romans 1:28—2:3.

- Circle all five times the word “practice” appears (twice in v. 32 and once each in v. 1, 2 and 3). Clearly the beginning of chapter 2 continues the ideas found at the end of chapter 1.
- Now, review the list you made yesterday of deeds which you judge to be wrong or evil. Place an “**x**” next to those deeds you have **not** done. (Place a “?” mark if you’re unsure.)
- Write out the text of Romans 2:1. (If that verse is at all unclear to you, use the New Living Translation.)
- What claim does Romans 2:1 make **about you** and those deeds you marked with an “**x**”? For example, “murder” (v. 29) is in that list—and I’m guessing that you marked murder with an “**x**”!
How do you explain what Romans 2:1 claims about you? Do you **believe** it? **Why or why not?**

Wednesday— Read Matthew 5:21-22.

- Explain the principle found in this passage. What is the connection between deed and attitude? (If you need help, look at Matthew 5:27-28, where **the same principle** is applied to adultery.)
- Now, let’s just focus on murder, since according to Romans 1:29, **we’re all guilty of it!** You judge murder as **wrong**—correct? And yet, you’ve been angry before—**correct**? So, **in God’s eyes**, you’re guilty of . . . **murder!** Do you **believe** that? **Why or why not?**
- What does that tell you about God? About yourself? About every person you’ll ever meet?

Thursday— Read Romans 1:28—2:3.

- One more time, review the list you made Monday of deeds which you judge to be wrong or evil.
- Now, if anger is the “seed” attitude behind murder, and lust is the seed attitude of adultery, for each of the items on your list of evil deeds, try to isolate the “seed attitude(s)” behind each one. (Remember, for Romans 2:1 to be true—**and it is**—the “seed” attitude you isolate will need to be so generic, so fundamental, so basic that you **know** you’re guilty of it too.)
- Is your “moral circle” growing? (It **should** be—it includes **you and everyone else!**)

Friday—Read Romans 14:9-13.

- According to v. 10b, what attitude lies behind “judging one another” (v. 10a)? Look up “contempt” at < webstersdictionary1828.com >. What do you learn? (*It ain’t pretty, is it?!*)
- Read Luke 18:9-14. Our same word, “contempt”, appears—**how else** are the Pharisees described (in v. 9)?
- The Pharisees viewed themselves as righteous (v. 9), but how did Jesus evaluate them (v. 14)?
(Also see Matthew 5:20.)

Saturday—**Preparing to gather with your church family tomorrow on “the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10)...**

- How do you use purity: as a tool for accomplishing God’s will—or as a weapon to use against others?
- Do you think that others who don’t share your morality are going to contaminate your purity? Or do you believe that genuine purity can overpower the “unclean”?
- Read Luke 7:36-50. How did Jesus use his complete moral purity?

