

May 28, 2017

Christian: It's Not What You Think (Based on series by Andy Stanley)

Angry Birds

Luke 15

We have been talking about what is a Christian and what isn't a Christian. Actually, Jesus never called His followers "Christian." He called them something else it is a terrifying word, anyone remember what it is? "Disciple". Disciple is a terrifying word because it is so clearly defined. You can be a Christian and define that any way you want. You can be a Christian and believe anything; You can be a Christian and do anything because it is not clearly defined. But Disciple... that's different, because it is terrifyingly clear. Jesus Himself defined it, and it is narrowly defined, as a matter of fact He defined it like this: He said if you are to be my followers you must "Love one another" and not just love one another, but love one another "as I have loved you."

Then last week in the Gospel of John we saw that John said, "as I watched Jesus, I think I figured out why He loved so well and I think I have figured out how we are to love each other as He did." John said this:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14 NIV

John must have wondered just how to put this unique phenomenon, how to explain Jesus relational style. Then the Holy Spirit gave him these words he said: Jesus was full of grace and truth. Not a balance of but the full on, full measure, embodiment of grace and truth.

We know what grace is and we know what truth is. Truth says, "You are a sinner." Grace says, "but I forgive you." Grace says, you're forgiven, truth says, yeah but your accountable. We have to get this, because if we are just one or the other something is missing. If we lean too much on grace, truth is missing, if we lean too much on truth, grace will be missing. But Jesus was always full of both and as His followers we have to figure out how to get there. As His body we should embody grace and truth. As His body we must figure out how to embody His love which is one of grace and truth.

You see you can call yourself a Christian and say, "I don't want to show grace to that person, they hurt me and I don't want to forgive them." And you can call yourself a Christian and decide not to confront someone with truth – speaking the truth in love. But as followers of Jesus we are to love as He loved and His love was full of grace and truth. Whoa! You see, it's easy to be "Christian" but this follower of Jesus stuff is a whole other thing, it's hard, it's terrifying.

Last week I gave you some illustrations of how Jesus brought both grace and truth to bear in every situation and with every person he related to; His amazing ability to give just the right amount of both grace and truth. Today I want us to look at a time when

Jesus actually taught on this. Last week was how He modeled it, today how He actually taught it. And the thing that makes this teaching so significant is His audience. As He brings this teaching He finds Himself surrounded by two different groups of people. One group felt they were so alienated from God that God would never approve of them. Another group thought they were so good God had already approved of them. And both groups were wrong. And Jesus is such a Master Teacher that He decided not to address the specific issue, because it was such an emotional issue, a theological issue, it was a personal issue. So Jesus doesn't dive in and attack the issue, because it is so emotional that one group would feel alienated and the other group would feel disrespect to be told they had been wrong their whole life. So Jesus takes the right approach in teaching about this issue of grace and truth and what it looks like in everyday life in the real world. Jesus does what Jesus would always do He presents it in a way that left everyone gasping for breath because He took their breath away. Let's take a look at Luke 15 which begins by introducing us to Jesus' audience. Luke 15:1 NIV

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him.

Gathering around to hear Jesus, if we just stopped to reflect on this, that is a huge statement. Tax collectors were a despised group. These were the guys driving around in big expensive cars, wearing \$1000 suits, and a lot of bling. They show up with their entourage, with someone holding the door open for them. And they were making their money by ripping off the less fortunate. They were hated because they could take as much as they wanted as long as Rome got their share. People hated tax collectors so much they didn't want to offend the "sinners" by lumping them in with the sinners. They were in their own category. They were really bad, then there was everyone else - tax collectors and sinners. This was the group (tax collectors and sinners) that believed God would never approve of them because of their occupation, God would never approve of them because of their life style, God would never approve of them because of their morality and their ethics they were the sinners. And those people gathered around to hear Jesus. That's like if church people came to church and when they got there the front rows were already filled with non-church people who came to hear what the sermon was about. Now that's interesting isn't it, that's different isn't it. But you know what, when we (followers of Jesus) embrace grace and truth, when we embody grace and truth like Jesus embodies grace and truth, when we get that right - that is what will happen. Sinners will gather around to hear Jesus.

The front row was filled with the worse people of society and the back row – no offense to those of you sitting in the back, but the back row was filled with these people:

Luke 15:2 NIV

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (who also came to hear Jesus speak) muttered, "This man welcomes (as in, embraces, as in come on in, as in I've saved a seat for you as in let's go have dinner after church) sinners and eats with them." (and in that society eating was a very intimate thing, there weren't restaurants like we have today. When you ate with somebody it means you invited them into your home.)

And they could not figure out why people who are nothing like Jesus, like Jesus. And

they couldn't figure out why Jesus, who was nothing like them, liked them. Because Jesus actually had more in common with the Pharisees and teachers of the law than the tax collectors. In fact Jesus was 100% in agreement with the theology and the belief system of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Yet, He attracted these people who were nothing like Him. And this was their question, "Does He condone their behavior?" is that what it is? He must welcome them and they must like Him because He condones what they do. Yet, they come to find out that wasn't it at all. But it was this tension between grace and truth as we talked about last week. That is what is going on here.

So Jesus the Master Teacher is going to attack the issue but He doesn't directly address the issue of how God views sin though that is what He wants to talk about, He doesn't directly address the issue of how God deals with sin though that is what He wants to talk about. Jesus begins by talking about something they all can agree on, because He is the Master Teacher. He decides to talk about sheep. And He uses a parable. A parable is something untrue used to illustrate something that is true. A parable is a story that never happened, used to present an emotional topic or a subject that is difficult to understand. So instead of addressing what He wanted to address Jesus tells a story. And by doing so He gets this very diverse audience all on the same page because He is The Master Teacher. And He asks them a question that everyone in this diverse group would all have the same answer to. Jesus is so brilliant, He says:

Luke 15:3-4 NIV

Then Jesus told them this parable (story): "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. (Jesus starts with a common emotion, loss. Everyone has lost something. And everyone does the same thing when they have lost something of value... well first they worry and grieve then they go look for it.) Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

And for the first time in their life time this very diverse group, usually at odds with one another ; the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the back row and the tax collectors and sinners in the front row are all nodding their heads in the same direction. They have never agreed on anything in their life time, and this makes them a little nervous, but yes they all nod yes, I would go after the lost sheep until I find it. That is what all of us would do. Then He says, "And when you found it wouldn't you be full of joy that you found it?" And they all nodded yes. "And wouldn't you tell your friends and everyone you know that you had found it?" And they all nodded yes. "And wouldn't you want them to rejoice with you that you had found your lost sheep?" And they were uncomfortable they felt the tension of being in agreement with one another, but they were all nodding their head in the same direction. And before they could ask a question or go anywhere Jesus says, "Did you know that in the same way there is rejoicing in heaven over something that was lost and is found then over something that was never lost?" And before they can put it all together He addresses the women in the audience, because there were woman there also. And He says, "Women if you had ten silver coins and lost one wouldn't you light a lamp and move the furniture and sweep through the house in search of that one coin until you found it?" And all the bad women and all the good women were nodding their heads and their husbands were nodding because

they would have had to come home from work to move some of that furniture because she would not go to sleep until she found that precious coin. Because when you lose something precious that loss has your undivided attention. You are more concerned about something you lost than something you have never misplaced to begin with. And they all agreed because everyone has lost something. And Jesus said, "Do you know that God is more excited and the angels with Him about a lost person returning to fellowship with Him than with the ninety-nine that were not lost to begin with?" And again before they can put this all together He jumps into what is the most familiar story to us.

And He says, let me tell you one more, there was a man and he had two sons. An older son and a younger son. The older son was a behavior and the younger son was a mis-behavior. Then Jesus brings the story, this made up story in an extreme direction to make a point. The younger son - and I'm going to put this in a way to bring about the emotion Jesus would have brought to that culture at the time - the younger son said, "Dad I wish you would die so I can get my inheritance! But you just don't seem to die. Do I really have to wait? Why don't you just pretend you died and give me my inheritance now so I can do whatever I want to with it?" Everyone in Jesus' audience was equally offended. The Pharisees were stunned, the tax collectors were stunned, the teachers of the law who had children, the sinners who had children, to everyone listening this was so offensive. Even more so in that first century Jewish culture.

And because this is a made up story and Jesus can go in any direction He wants the father says, "You know what son, I'm going to do that." And the father began to sell off things and do what he had to so he could give the amount of his estate that would go to his sons if he had suddenly died. And I imagine that you could hear a pin drop in Jesus' audience. Who would do such a thing! The son hung around for a little while but then thought this town is too small for me. So he gathered up all he had and left for a distant country, where nobody would know who he was or what he had done. In that distant country he lived a life he couldn't afford to live. He lived above his means, and squandered or wasted all his wealth in wild living. And in a short time, certainly shorter than he anticipated he lost in a short time what it took his father a long time to amass.

And again the anger and the offense could be seen in that audience. Then Jesus said it got worse. A severe famine hit that part of the country where he was. This young man not only ran out of money, he needed a job. And the only job this Jewish boy could find was feeding pigs. And at that point everyone in Jesus' audience said, "Yes! He's getting what he deserves." And it's a little scary but these two groups in the audience are again in agreement. Then Jesus says it gets even worse for the boy because the only food he could think of eating was the food the pigs were eating. And now Jesus has driven this story in this Jewish community to the extreme; A young Jewish boy, taking care of pigs, thinking about eating what pigs eat. And if Jesus would have stopped the story there this would have been a great story. As a matter of fact everyone in the audience would have gone home and shared it around the table that night, "Kids let me share with you a story I heard today, here's what happens if you disobey and don't respect your father, here is what God is like, you reap what you sow, you get

what's coming to you, what goes around comes around. This would have been a great story if Jesus stopped there, but Jesus continued... Luke 15:17-20a NIV

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned (this was not a mistake this was sin, this was horrible) against heaven (God) and against you. (and to let you know I have come to grips with my sin) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

And everyone in Jesus' audience is thinking, "This is going to be good. I mean I thought the story was ending with him feeding pigs for the rest of his life but this is even better." Because now he is going to get what he has coming to him. And everyone in that audience knew what he deserved. And everyone in that audience knew what they would do if it were their son. The son is not going to be asked to return to his position as a son, and he knows that, and he is not even looking for that. He just wants a better job and he knows that his father treats his servants better than how his boss was treating him.

But Jesus is telling this story to make an emotional point. So he continues Luke 15:20b

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with ...

And if Jesus said to His audience, "filled with... fill in the blank." They no doubt would have said, anger, anger, anger. Because how dare the son humiliate the father this way. Anger, that's the way you are suppose to feel when someone takes advantage of you and then comes back, and the father didn't know why the son was coming back. We know, because we know the story but the father doesn't know. And this is about to get good. When the father see the son who did what the son did there is only one thing the father can be filled with – righteous anger.

Luke 15:20c

compassion for him; he ran to his son, (and everyone in the audience gasped) threw his arms around him and kissed him.

And now everyone listening to Jesus' story is confused. Because they know that whenever Jesus tells one of His stories someone usually represents you and someone represents God. And up to this point I was pretty sure that the father represented God the kid was going to get what he deserved because that is what the sinners and tax collectors thought; live it up because if there is a God is not going to be good for me. And the Pharisees and teachers of the law the self righteous were looking down at the unrighteous and thought I deserve the good that is coming to me and they deserve the bad that is coming to them. And this father that I thought represented God throws his arms around this stinking son who did everything to hurt and disrespect his father and kissed him. And everyone in the audience was confused. And that's what Jesus does because He is the embodiment of grace and truth.

Then the son begins to speak because he has rehearsed this all the way home:

Luke 15:21NIV

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven (God) and against you (the father). I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

And no one argued with that, because that is absolutely true.

Luke 15:22

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! (Now that bothers me, "Quick" because we want him to say, let's wait and see if he's sincere. Is he really sorry or is it just that he has run out of money and is acting all sorry to get over on dear old dad again? And Jesus put into the words of his father, Quick) Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (Which means my son, is going to be my son). And oh, by the way I want you to...

Luke 15:23

Bring the fattened calf (that's the one we've been saving for a special occasion, like a wedding or a graduation. You know the calf we've been saving it for that special event we have planned. Well forget all that) and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.

Wait, what? Celebrate? That's messed up, and Jesus has them confused.

Now if you heard this story before in a sermon or a Sunday School class most likely this is where the story ended. But in the beginning Jesus said there was a man who had how many sons? Two. And the behaving son, the first born he was out doing what the good son does - he's out in the field working. And he is finishing up his day and he is headed back up to the house and there is dancing and music and excitement. And he sees one of the hired servants, calls him over and says, "What is going on?" The servant tells him his brother is back. Oh really? Yeah, and your father has killed the fattened calf and ...whoa. Dad's killed the fatten calf? That was for my wedding, or that was supposed to be for that special event we have coming up. He should have killed my brother. Well, there is going to be a celebration, so he wants you to get cleaned up and join them. Join them? At this point everyone in Jesus' audience can relate to the older brother, because they are thinking if my younger brother did that to my dad, and Jesus goes ahead and puts the word in their mouth.

Luke 15:28

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in.

Have you ever met any angry Christians? Ever grow up with an angry nun? Angry pastor? Ever watch a TV preacher and think he's just angry? Ever leave a church because they were just angry, disputatious Christians? You didn't know what their problem was, but they just seemed so angry? They not only believe in hell, it seems like they can't want to see all of suffering happen. It feels like they are against everything. It feels like they are against me. I know the hymn Jesus loves me this I

know for the Bible tells me so, did anyone tell them about that?
The older brother became angry and refused to go in.

So let me review, you have the dad happy that his son is home, he's killed the fatten calf, he has invited the community, there's music and dancing go on; and on one side of the house is a son who doesn't think he deserves to come to the party and on the other side of the house is his older brother who agrees that his brother doesn't deserve to come to the party. So neither of them want to be at the party. And the dad is like, I just want to have a celebration, and one is, well I don't deserve to go, and the other is he's right he doesn't deserve to go and if he does go, I ain't going. And the audience is confused because they don't understand God the father, just like we don't understand how God the Father views sinners. And Jesus didn't just say it because He knew they wouldn't believe it. So he continues the story

Luke 15:28

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

He pleaded with him, I know your angry, but I want you to come to this party. And the older son said no and here's why. The younger son had a prepared speech, so did the older son.

Luke 15:29 NIV

But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

Do you know why there are angry Christians? Because they think they deserve something from God that someone else might get. Because they have been so faithful and so obedient and did what they were suppose to do, and went to church and gave their tithe, and did all the right things, and the holier they get the angrier they get. And I'll tell you why, because they don't embody grace and truth. And you believe in hell and secretly are glad people will get what they deserve and you wish the story ended with and for the rest of his life he fed the pigs, the end! Because you reap what you sow and you get what you deserve. And your angry, and self righteous and you are not like Jesus. You're a good Christian, you're just not a good follower.

Luke 15:29 NIV

All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

But... Luke 15:30 NIV

But when this son of yours (not my brother) who has squandered your property with prostitutes (that's right dad, prostitutes, I wasn't going to tell you, don't tell mom, but yes that's your son) comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him! and he is angry. That bothers me, that is unjust. "My son," the father says, you ready for this... Luke 15:31

"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me,

Wwhat? "You're always with me." Dad, did you just change the subject? Did you hear my speech? "Son, you are always with me." What does that have to do with anything? "shhh, it has everything to do with it. It is what I value the most. You have always been with me and everything I have is yours. It's not like I'm going to split everything up again, it's not like he is going to get another 30%. Son, look you're getting your reward. I haven't forgotten you. You are always with me. But... Luke 15:32

But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead (he wasn't *with us*) and is alive (he is *with us*) again; he was lost (I mean we knew where he was, but he wasn't *with us*) and is found." (he is *with us*).

And I need you to come to the party, not because he is getting what he deserves, this isn't about performance. This is about proximity. He's back and you never left. That's why I'm having this party, I don't know what you're so mad about. I don't even understand your speech about how hard you've worked, that's not what this is about, and you need to talk to your brother because he is hung up on the same thing, you are so much alike. You think this party is about performance. He didn't think he was good enough, you don't think he's good enough. That's not why I threw the party. I want to be with you.

Do you know what is at the root of following Jesus, this will change you:

God could not love you more.(&) Nothing you do will cause Him to love you less. And anyone that you are ever eyeball to eyeball with: God could not love them more and nothing they do will cause Him to love them less. Nothing! Look at it this way, God never gets mad at lost things, ever. Either are you, you might get mad at yourself for losing your phone, but you are not mad at your phone. Why do we get mad at lost things, where does that anger come from? I'll tell you where it comes from, it comes from self-righteousness. Somewhere inside is this thought that I was faithful, I was obedient, I was committed, I, I, I. But that is not the issue the issue is "*with*." When we love like Jesus, that is when we embody grace and truth then Sin will (always) break our hearts and Repentance will (always) stir our hearts.

When someone moves into sin, when a whole segment of our society accepts and moves into sin it wouldn't make us angry anymore. It will break our hearts. And if it doesn't break your heart, you got work to do. Jesus teaches that when that son came home the father's heart was full of compassion because his compassion never went away as offended as he was by what had happened.

And He says to the self-righteous Pharisees and to the unrighteous tax collectors and sinners God could not love you more & there is nothing you can do to make Him love you less. And sin will (always) break my heart and Repentance will (always) stir my hearts. It is about being with those who were not with. It is the tension between grace

and truth and we must hold on to that tension because if we give up one or the other we lose something really important.

And if you are a prodigal I want to address you, if you are living in sin, and you know it, you know you are away from God and need to come back to Him. And what I want to say to you is, "Come on back!" And here's why, sin has a gotcha. At some point it goes bad, at some point it causes scars, it has consequences and you will have things you will never ever recuperate from and the reason I know that is because I am one of them and all of us are one of them, we have all been prodigals. And we know that it is better to be with than apart, it is better to be with than apart, it is better to be with than apart. So I want you to come back. You know the things you are doing wrong and you have ignored it and ignored it. But listen, God is not mad at you. But sin has a gotcha and I don't want, and He doesn't want it to getcha. And when you come back we are not going to act like the older brother. We don't care what you did, we will just rejoice that your back, we just want you to be ... with. And we will celebrate you know why, because we have all been prodigals and to put it in Jesus' words...

We have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother or sister of ours was dead (and you're tired of being dead, you're tired of that battle with your conscience, you're tired of the guilt, you're tired of having to medicate it away, you're tired of having to drink it away, you're tired of lying it away, you're tired of pretending it away – you're ready to come back to life) and is alive again; you were lost but now you are found. And if you repent you will be found. You will be found not because God doesn't know where you are, you will be found because you will once again be ... with. And that is why Jesus came by the way. I have not come to call the righteous, but the unrighteous and to seek and to save that which was lost.

And to the degree that we are followers of Jesus, we will to that degree be about the same thing. May we be characterized by a love that is full of grace and truth.