

7. Jesus and the Social Outcasts (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

Biblical material: Matt. 21:28–32, John 8:1–11, Mark 5:1–20, John 4:5–32, Matt. 9:9–13.

Quotes

- Judgement is the forbidden objectivization of the other person which destroys single-minded love. I am not forbidden to have my own thoughts about the other person, to realize his shortcomings, but only to the extent that it offers to me an occasion for forgiveness and unconditional love, as Jesus proves to me. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*
- Everybody feels like an outcast because the world is so large and every fingerprint is so vastly different from one another, and yet we have these standards and beliefs, and dogmatic systems of judgment and ranking, in almost all the societies of the world. *Ezra Miller*
- In an expanding universe, time is on the side of the outcast. Those who once inhabited the suburbs of human contempt find that without changing their address they eventually live in the metropolis. *Quentin Crisp*
- There's no need to curse God if you're an ugly duckling. He chooses those strong enough to endure it so that they can guide others who've felt the same. *Criss Jami*
- Jesus ... associated with the outcasts; he spoke with them, touched them, ate with them, loved them. *John Ortberg*

Questions

Why pay attention to outcasts? How does Jesus' approach to those around him help us? How do we decide who is important and who isn't? Do we really see everyone as our fellow human beings? How do we see ourselves—sometimes we don't fit in, and we can understand something of what it is like to be outcasts?

Bible summary

“Tax-collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you,” Jesus told the chief priests and the elders in Matt. 21:31 FBV. John 8:1–11 tells the story of the woman caught in adultery, and Jesus' compassionate treatment of this social outcast. In the story of the healing of the demoniac in Mark 5:1–20 we see Jesus calmly helping a man others were too frightened to help. The wonderful story of the woman at the well (John 4:5–32) shows Jesus working way beyond the taboos of his society, helping someone who by all accounts was an outcast! Jesus' association with tax-collectors and sinners (see Matt. 9:9–13) brought condemnation from the self-righteous Pharisees. Notice how Jesus responds...

Comment

We all have discriminatory tendencies, and we reflect the ideas of our own societies. Yet the Bible tells us that there is no Jew, nor Greek. Nor are we to despise anyone, whatever their situation in life.

In the context of the great controversy we see that discrimination is just another of the Deceivers lies, another way to sow tares among the wheat and create conflict and

chaos. Our role is to demonstrate these fundamental truths that rise above such distractions, and reveal the God who is the creator of all, and father of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Only as the truth of God prevails can we have true unity and harmony, only by this God-given love for each other will all people know we really are God's disciples.

It's fascinating to see how graciously Jesus treated those who were considered outcasts in his society—lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, foreigners... In his dealings with lepers Jesus doesn't treat them as others did. He even touches them, showing his care and concern for a group of outcasts who were both mistreated and feared.

One incident shows how Jesus confronted the concept of "outcasts" head on. In speaking to the Canaanite woman he apparently identifies with the Jewish treatment of this group as "dogs"? This seemingly harsh statement to a group of outcasts is a challenge. Yet the woman, perhaps used to the perspective, is not "fazed" by this, and insists that even the dogs can eat up the crumbs that fall from the table. Jesus' response makes it clear that his challenge was to see how much the Canaanite woman was herself prejudiced! Her answer is a convincing example of winsome acceptance of others who are "different." She receives what she requests because of persistence, despite an appearance of resistance on the part of Jesus. Note this from DA 400-1:

"Christ did not immediately reply to the woman's request. He received this representative of a despised race as the Jews would have done. In this He designed that His disciples should be impressed with the cold and heartless manner in which the Jews would treat such a case, as evinced by His reception of the woman, and the compassionate manner in which He would have them deal with such distress, as manifested by His subsequent granting of her petition.... She was looked upon as a dog, and had she not then a dog's claim to a crumb from His bounty?"

Similarly in the case of the centurion who sought healing for his servant, Jesus expresses his astonishment at such faith. This confident trust shown in Jesus by foreigners is a continuing gospel theme. As the "chosen people," this was a challenge to the Jews, and brought much antagonism. Yet even though Jesus came first to his own people, he made it clear that ethnic superiority was offensive to God. And in the end, Jesus had to tell his own, who had not received him that their house was left to them "desolate." What a tragedy for those who were supposed to represent God truly to the rest of the world! Peter's vision of the sheet with unclean beasts shows that God does not have favorites, and that he wishes to invite all to receive healing salvation.

When it comes to representing the truth about God and his character, does it seem that some groups are more accepting? Are there specific traits that lead to general attitudes and decisions? If so, how do we combat such "traits" so that each one can make an informed decision about God? How do we best represent God to the *whole* world around us?

Ellen White Comments

Jesus sat as an honored guest at the table of the publicans, by His sympathy and social kindness showing that He recognized the dignity of humanity; and men longed to become worthy of His confidence. Upon their thirsty hearts His words fell with blessed, life-giving power. New impulses were awakened, and the possibility of a new life opened to these outcasts of society. {DA 274}

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