

An Attitude that Saves

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[0 : 00] G'day everyone, my name's Jeff. It's good to see a few of you here who are here to serve and it's good to see you at home.

I hope I'm looking at you, I can't really tell, you know better than me. Just like Daniel said, it'd be good to keep your Bible open because I'm going to be talking about the passage that Brendan read for us and if you don't have a Bible at home, Bible Gateway is a good place to go and there's going to be a few outline headings that will come up on the screen as I work through this.

How about I pray? Heavenly Father, thank you that we can still gather though in a different way. Please be with us as we hear your word and think about it. Help us to understand and know how to respond in repentance and faith.

Amen. How often do you think about your attitude? To be honest, I don't think about mine very much.

[1 : 13] However, your attitude can have quite a big impact on your life, can't it? At school, I had a pretty bad attitude towards learning.

I don't mean that I was unpleasant as a person. I just had no desire to learn. And this attitude prevailed throughout high school and even into my apprenticeship.

And even though I probably could have changed, I suffered because of this. I found it hard to advance and it caused friction with my boss.

I wonder if you found yourself in a situation like this. A bad attitude that's made life hard in some way. Maybe even your attitude toward God.

Well, that passage today changes slightly from what we've looked at in the previous weeks. What we've seen is Jesus telling parables in response to the blindness of the Pharisees.

[2 : 18] Jesus has been making points about the Pharisees' love of money and their tendency to ignore God's warnings. Last week, Jesus illustrated their attitude of a desire for worldly wealth at the expense of those in need and even at the expense of their eternal condemnation.

Back in chapter 15, we heard about their attitude toward Jesus, who was happy to welcome and eat with sinners. In this passage, the Pharisees are less in view.

But the context of Jesus' lessons about them is really clear. Jesus begins here by speaking to his disciples. And while the ideas in this passage seem a little bit disconnected, stumbling, faith, forgiveness, service, they are connected by Jesus teaching his disciples about the appropriate attitude for those who trust and follow him.

So our aim is to see the attitude that Jesus wants his disciples to adopt. You know, at times this teaching feels a little bit confronting, but I consider with the tendency that we all have to forget God and our place before him, it is appropriate.

Jesus begins his lesson on attitude in verse 1. And unlike the attitude of those who've forgotten or ignored God's love, a disciple's attitude, point 1, must make them ready and willing to forgive.

[4 : 03] Have a look in your Bibles, verse 1. Jesus said to his disciples, Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come.

It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves.

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them. And if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them.

In these verses, Jesus touches on two issues, stumbling and forgiveness. I find this interesting because with the backdrop of the Pharisees and all the wrong they're doing, like so blatantly ignoring those in need, it's interesting because Jesus' focus isn't the sins that are bound to come,

but instead it's those who cause these little ones to stumble.

I wonder if it's sort of like saying to a new driver, accidents will come, there's almost nothing you can do to prevent them, but watch out for careless or reckless drivers.

[5 : 24] It's not to say that Jesus doesn't care about the sin that's going to come, but the focus here is being wary of those who will cause the stumbling.

And it's this focus that makes it clear to me that Jesus has the Pharisees in mind, those he calls blind guides in another place.

Jesus is warning and teaching his disciples to not be like them, never be the one who prevents this little one, a brother or a sister whom God loves just as he does you, from continuing in faith.

Jesus says, if this is the way you treat your brother or sister, then you're not treating them the way that God has treated you. And this is just what the Pharisees do when they look down on Jesus for welcoming and eating with sinners.

They're making judgment calls about accepting people that even God isn't making. Yes, sin struggles will come.

[6 : 32] It's impossible that they won't come, even more certain than car accidents. But this lesson isn't about preparing for sin, but about not putting yourself in the shoes of the master and the judge, saying, I don't accept that person.

They've gone too far. I just can't see past their wrong. And what does Jesus say about the person who does this? He says, woe.

Woe to that person who causes stumbling. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a stone tied around their neck. The attitude of the disciple mustn't be making decisions about who's in and who's out, especially ones that God doesn't make.

Our attitude as followers of Jesus must mean we're ready and willing to forgive and to keep forgiving. And not because we're punching bags, but to imitate the love and forgiveness shown to us.

Now, I don't know about you, but I am often tempted to judge. I find it very easy to look down on people and decide they haven't yet reached the level of righteousness that I have or that I think is appropriate for followers of Jesus.

[8 : 06] And I worry when reading and thinking about this because I think I do cause stumbling. I think I don't love and accept people with the love and kindness that Jesus has shown me.

And so I begin to wonder, will I escape this harsh judgment? And I wonder if the disciples might have been thinking the same thing.

Or at least they were daunted by what Jesus taught. How are we going to do this? I know, says one bright disciple, I know what we need.

We need greater faith. We need an injection of pure faith right into the heart. I once had such a severe infection that I needed a catheter that went straight into my heart.

It went in my arm right here. Regular antibiotics weren't enough. I was in a really bad way. It was the only thing that could help me.

[9 : 16] I wonder if the disciples are thinking a bit like this. We can't do this alone. Increase our faith, Lord.

Make us super disciples. Give us the power we need to conquer sin and failure. Have you ever felt this? Have you ever desired such an injection of faith?

Well, unsurprisingly, Jesus' response is different than what they expected. Have a look at verse 6. He replied, If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you.

The issue isn't the amount of faith, because mustard seed faith can move trees. And while most people don't actually do this, Jesus' point isn't to search or even ask for faith that can do this.

Instead, they're to desire the attitude of faith appropriate for a disciple. The attitude, point two, is to be ready and willing to serve.

[10 : 35] Jesus goes on to give a short illustration or a short parable, and a pretty confronting one about a servant who knows their place and does their duty. I think it's worth saying that Jesus tells this story in a culture where slavery is common, and it would be a mistake to think that Jesus is making a cultural comment about slavery.

What he's actually doing is using an image that the disciples would have understood to explain what their role and their attitude should be as slaves in the house of God.

Have a look at it. I'll read it from verse 7. Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now and sit down to eat?

Won't he rather say, prepare my supper, get yourself ready, and wait on me while I eat and drink? After that, you may eat and drink. Will he say to the servant, he did what he was, will he thank the servant, sorry, because he did what he was told to do?

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, we are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty.

[11 : 58] This parable has a prickly sound to it, doesn't it, in our culture? But we need to remember that Jesus' point isn't about slavery being good or bad, and it's not about how you should treat people.

The point he's making is, if you're a slave, you know your place. A slave isn't a member of the family. A slave doesn't come home and put their feet up and decide that tonight dinner's going to be cheese on toast, or me goreng, if you can find any left.

In this time, if you're a slave owner, you treat your slaves like slaves. And even though we might read this, especially verse 10, and think, ugh, that's not very nice.

That's not the point. The relationship in this story, it's a bit like a contract. You do what is expected of you. It's not too different than having a job.

You work according to an arrangement or a contract. You signed on the dotted line. I will arrive at a certain time. I will do the duties expected of me. I will obey the boss.

[13 : 13] When you rock up to work, well, it doesn't usually matter what kind of day or night you've had before. Like the slave in the parable, you might have had a tiring day or night. You might have had no sleep.

You might have had a family problem. You may have been tired from your other job in the field. But when you arrive, what do you do? Do you take a seat, kick your shoes off, and get something to eat?

No. No. You do exactly as your boss and contract expect. The slave in this parable knows their role, and the master expects the slave to do what is expected of them.

So what point is Jesus making? The apostles asked Jesus to increase our faith.

They thought they needed more faith, super faith, so they could love and forgive in the way that Jesus does. But Jesus says no. It isn't super faith that is required to have the attitude of Jesus.

[14 : 19] Rather, it's knowing your place before God. Well, how is that the answer? Well, just think for a moment. What would super faith or a misunderstanding about my position in God's family do to my head?

What's more likely to happen in that case is me thinking more highly of myself than I ought. And from my new lofty position, how easy will it be for me to look down on you and make judgments about the wrongs and the rights of those under me?

You may remember very similar behavior to this in chapter 15. The older son, do you remember? When God showed his mercy and forgiveness toward the younger son who squandered his property, the older says, I won't have any part of this.

He had no heart for his brother who was lost, didn't deserve it. Jesus doesn't give his disciples a reason for pride. He gives them a reason to remember their place.

The right attitude of a disciple is being ready and willing to serve. They remember their place. Unworthy servants who have done their duty.

[15 : 44] And if they remember their place before God, unworthy, sinners, loved, redeemed, it's much less likely that they, that we, will become arrogant and proud judges who decide who should and who shouldn't be forgiven.

Why? Because I know my place. I know that I have no rights in his house.

I know that I, that what I have, I have been given. I know that it's not my job to make demands. Rather, it's my job to do as my master tells me.

And this is a hard lesson, isn't it? It's hard to hear. And I'm sure it would have been hard for the disciples because they'd seen Jesus' power, hadn't they?

They'd seen Jesus do the impossible. And it can still be very easy to think, we need that power. We need the power to do the impossible so we can love and forgive like Jesus.

[16:57] But what the disciples were still to learn and what we already know is the way Jesus most powerfully demonstrated love and forgiveness.

And it wasn't by remembering his place, but it was by giving it up. It was by taking the nature of a slave.

It was by being made nothing, being made in human likeness and becoming obedient even to death on a cross. Can you look at the willing death of our master who made himself like a slave, yet be unwilling to say, we are unworthy servants who have only done our duty?

Because it is that attitude, the attitude that is ready and willing to serve that equips us to be like Jesus, loving and forgiving like him.

Well, our passage ends in a new place. Jesus is continuing his journey to Jerusalem. And while he's walking, he comes across 10 lepers who want mercy.

[18:15] And while it seems like the narrative has moved on with Jesus, teaching about his disciples, sorry, teaching his disciples about the right attitude, this little interaction, it perfectly illustrates the point Jesus has been making.

Specifically, we see in the attitude of the leper who is ready and willing to praise. Point three. Just have a look with me from verse 12. As he, Jesus, was going into a village, 10 men who had leprosy met him.

They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, master, have pity on us. When he saw them, he said, go, show yourselves to the priests.

And as they went, they were cleansed. There is a sense in which this story sort of gets us back to where we began.

The idea of forgiveness and reconciliation really stands out to me as I read about these 10 outsiders, these people who are kept away from God's presence, away from God's people because of their uncleanness.

[19:26] And when they see Jesus, they shout from a distance because they can't approach him. Jesus, master, have pity on us.

And with no comment about their status, Jesus sends them to show themselves to the priest.

In Leviticus 13, we can read about the priest who inspects skin diseases to determine whether someone will remain isolated or be allowed to re-enter the community.

Feels very familiar, doesn't it? As these leprous men go to see the priest, they were cleansed. Now, there are things that are striking about this.

Jesus doesn't touch them. And he doesn't even say you're healed. Jesus is immediately merciful.

And on top of this, we see Jesus as the means of their reconciliation.

[20:28] But despite these striking ideas, the key theme, both in the previous passage and here, has more to do with the attitude of those who follow Jesus.

In this healing, we see a stark contrast between the two groups of people, those who were healed, sorry, those who came back and those who didn't. Look at verse 15. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, were not all 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine?

Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? Then he said to him, rise and go. Your face has made you well. Jesus miraculously healed 10 diseased outsiders, but only one of them gave him thanks and praise.

I think what's being taught here is specifically about Israel and their lack of love and recognition of God who has chosen and protected and saved them.

[21:47] The love of God to his people is clearly seen in this healing. And while the nine obeyed, doing just as Jesus said, go to the priest, what's also clear is their heart.

They obeyed, but their heart played no part in their response. Jesus showed them the mercy that they desired and they didn't give him thanks and praise.

Much like the Pharisees that we've been seeing, the letter of the law had blinded them to the spirit of the law. Out of their desire for maximum obedience, they forgot the God who mercifully chose and saved them.

Remember what we read in Hosea? I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. And before we judge, and it is easy to judge the Pharisees, isn't it?

Before we judge, let's not forget about our own capacity to forget, to take our position for granted. Let's not forget how we can do the same thing, obedience, rather than love.

[23 : 00] Let's think about coming to church, for instance. It can be so easy to come to church out of obedience and habit and think, this is what God desires.

As long as I'm here, I'm okay. today. But what about in times like this, when all churches are cancelled? We're challenged to see that God cares more, cares about more than our attendance at church.

What God really cares about is our attitude towards Him. An attitude that says, I'm here because I love you, not out of habit, but because of heartfelt thanks and praise.

This is the attitude we see in the one who turned back and fell at Jesus' feet. And you see Jesus' shock? Only this foreigner who returned to praise God?

None of those who should know, who should love, who should praise and thank? And then Jesus says something striking.

[24 : 16] He says, rise and go, your faith has made you well. What's so striking about this is they were all healed, but only to one does He say this.

What Jesus means is your faith has saved you. His response was one of faith. Now, of course, the response of the others, it doesn't nullify God's power.

They were still healed. But it's the attitude of the one who thanked and praised God for His kindness that we see the faith that can move mountains or trees. Faith of someone who knows their place at the feet of Jesus.

this is the appropriate attitude for a disciple of Jesus. This is the attitude that saves, the one that forgives and loves like Jesus does, the one that humbly serves like Jesus did, and the one that accepts this gracious offer with thanks and praise.

And so, it's important for us to consider our own attitude toward Jesus. Both those who call Jesus Master and Lord and also those who don't.

[25 : 40] Because like with the nine who didn't return in praise, God has still offered new life to all when Jesus died the death we deserve. And like with the healing, we know that those who don't receive it with thanks and praise, they don't nullify God's offer of salvation, but they also don't receive it.

And so, if you have not yet, like the Samaritan, turned back to Jesus, fallen at his feet, and given him thanks and praise for this kind offer, then he has not yet said to you, your faith has saved you. Can I encourage you if you're hearing this tonight, don't ignore this offer. For those who have accepted, those who follow their Lord and Master, does Jesus have nothing to say to them, to us? No, of course not. He says, remember your place. Not to Lord it over you, not at all. When he says, remember your place, he's saying, remember the place I took for you.

Join me in that place. Love like me. Forgive like me. Serve like me and praise like me. Don't be like those who've forgotten what they've been given.

[27 : 12] Don't be like those who refuse to accept those that he is willing to accept. Rather, adopt the attitude of our Savior, the attitude that saves.

Will you join me as I pray? Father in heaven, we thank you for our Lord Jesus who died the death that we deserve so that we can be part of his family, so that we can be his servants.

Father, help us to serve and forgive and love and praise like him. Help us not to ignore this gracious offer, but to live in the way that he desires us to live.

Amen.