

Passing Judgment

Leaving Life to Join Jesus

April 21, 2024

Today we're taking a closer look at our invitation to the Lord's celebration. Cuz *He* made it obvious we're all *welcome*, but until we see we're all *starving* for what *He's* serving, it's easy to drag our feet on the way to His feast. So to test our *taste* for our new *life*, we're gonna work our way through *this* question: **How hungry for the Lord are you?**



Now, last week Bruce broke down *our* assignment in *God's* party plan: **go out and bring in every hungry, hurting, and hopeless human by any means necessary!** Because the bottom line is, **no matter who you are or what you do, God wants and welcomes you.** And His VIPs are those *most* in need, cuz they're the most *hungry* for His *healing*; like Jesus said:



It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the *righteous*, but *sinner*s to repentance. – Luke 5:31-32 NIV



And like *Bruce* said, down here, **there's only two camps: the sick who know they're sick, and the sick who don't.** And Jesus can't do *anything* with anyone who *doesn't* see *their* need to seek *His* help. Because **a doctor can't cure a thing until the patient pursues an appointment.**



[But, regarding our call to come, we're all also warned to] Seek the LORD **while** He may be found; call on Him **while** He is near. Let the *wicked* forsake their ways and the *unrighteous* their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and He *will* have mercy on them. – Isaiah 55:6-7 NIV



You ever wonder about those *stipulations* "**while He may be found**" and "**while He is near**"? I thought Jesus was open for business 24/7, so what's with the *window* of time? Well, it's *our* window. **He can only be found in those times our hearts are inclined to find.** It's a window of *willingness* that opens when we welcome His Spirit into our heart during our *already brief* and *unpredictable* time down here *on earth*.

Meaning, the second you feel a hunger for truth, "*strike while the iron's hot*" cuz "*there's no time like the present*"! All opportunities can be *lost* by waiting till *later*; like ex-NFL coach Steve Mariucci said, "**I never wear a watch, because I always know it's now – and now is when you should do it.**" And since *our* response is the *only* thing that slows *God's* plan, He'll do whatever it takes to make us more *hungry* for His help. *ASAP!* And that means making us feel a sense of *urgency!*

And that can seem *strange*, but it's actually pretty *common* between *parents* and *kids*. Like back when my oldest was a new teenager and *therefore*, equal parts *curious* and *invincible*. He was sitting in the back seat playing with a glow stick and as he fearlessly *squeezed* and *studied*, it suddenly *burst* into his open eye. And as he just *sat* there *screaming*, I swung around to see it glowing *behind* his closed eyelid – so I did what any loving dad would do, I started *yelling* at him! "**Don't just sit there! Open your eye! Get a water bottle! Keep blinking and don't stop squirting!**"

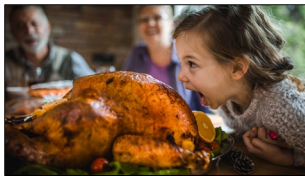
Because I was *mad* at him. Because I *loved* him. And **anger is just the defense of something we love**. And every second he wasted *without* water was a second that *I* saw someone I loved *continuing* to suffer. And *I* would've done *anything* to get *him* to do *something* to *stop* the suffering.



And we *all* know that “mom or dad mean business” tone – cuz every one of us has made a stupid, *self-harming decision* that led to us *sitting* in some *senseless, self-made suffering*. But, once the mistake has been made **it's not what was done that angers parents, it's what's not being done**. Because **learning from our mistakes is what stops our suffering**.



And because God loves *His* kids too much to let us suffer a single second more than *necessary*, **He doesn't just offer help, He commands we come to Him**. The invitation to His feast *isn't*, “If you're free next Friday, stop by cuz I got something for you...” it's “Dinner's ready, **come and get it!**” It's “**Follow Me, now!**” And there's no *judgmental* discussion about what you *did* or whether you're *worthy*; **His only goal is getting you out of your suffering by getting you into His house. ASAP!**



Listen, we're called God's *children* not *just* because we're *messy* and *immature*, but because He intends to *grow* us as He *raises* us. So, like *any* kid, **it's okay to be a mess, but not okay to stay a mess**. Because, **God's help is meant for sinners**, but **sinners don't stay sinners with God's help**.



Which is why His *dinner party* is such a *great* analogy; the *feast* is meant for the *hungry*, but the *hungry* don't stay *hungry* at a *feast!* They're *filled!* First with *food* and *then* with *appreciation* for the *invitation*.



Because, **God invites us to change us**; to get us *out* of our *self-imposed* suffering, **ASAP!** It's an *urgent* matter for a loving Father!

So, He sent Jesus to push the pace. Cuz **Jesus embodied a limited time offer that'd pass you by if you didn't act now!** And He performed powerful *miracles* and spoke perfect *truth* to *force* open our *window* of willingness so, while He was *near*, we'd *have to choose* to call on Him... *or not!*

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, **so that the blind will see [when they seek His help]** and **those who see will become blind.**" [when they don't.] – John 9:39 NIV

And to this day, *Jesus* is God's *instrument* of urgency that pushes us *all* to walk the same *two steps* that can take anyone from *suffering* to *savoring*; step one: **SEE OUR NEED** and step two: **SEEK HIS HELP**. So, *how* does Jesus *push* us to **see our need**? Well, He just holds up a *mirror*; like the time

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman ... and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do *You* say?" They were using this question as a *trap*, in order to have a basis for *accusing* Him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. **Go now and leave your life of sin.** – John 8:3-11 NIV

Whether we're the self-aware sinner or the self-deceiving righteous, *change* begins when someone *challenges* us with the *king of convicting* questions: **"How's that working out for you?"** Cuz whatever *truth* we *believe* or *action* we *take*, the *proof* is in the *pudding!* And by simply putting the focus on *ourselves*, **Jesus makes us see what we're doing just ain't working!**

And once we *see our need* for a *new* approach, we take our first step to *stop* the suffering; **leaving our old ways behind.** Because we *throw out* worthless things. And Jesus is the *master* of helping us see *what's worthless*. The adulterous woman saw **her sin kept her a stone's throw from death**, while the Pharisees saw **their "righteousness" wasn't real.** So, after *their* encounters with Jesus, *both parties* were left to literally *leave* their ways behind.

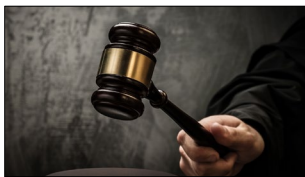


But, **as enlightening as that may be, notice what it's not; judgmental.** Jesus even *explicitly* points out that He's *not* condemning the *obviously* guilty woman. *Why?* Well, there's a *clue* in the very *next* verse:



When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12 NIV

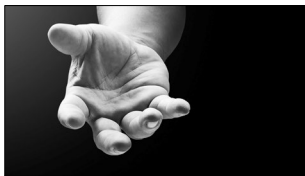
Jesus doesn't push us to *see our sin* so we'll *stay* in our shame and *suffer*, **He pushes us to see our need so we'll seek His help and be saved!**



Problem is, **it's easy to confuse offering help with offering judgment.** I know, cuz just the other day, someone stopped me and asked, **"Are you alright?"** and I was like, **"Yeah, I'm great... why?"** and they said, **"Oh, you just looked like you were in pain."** And I've been *self-conscious* ever since. What's *wrong* with the way I *walk*?! Don't answer – I *now* know I *lumber* like a *sleepy* sasquatch with a *limp*. *I'm working on it!*



[But Jesus said:] "If anyone hears *My* words but does not keep them *I do not judge* that person. For I did *not* come to *judge* the world, but to *save* the world. **[From all its suffering! But]** There is a judge for the one who rejects Me and does not accept *My* words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. – John 12:47-48 NIV



So let's be *crystal* clear, **Jesus is all about invitation, not condemnation!**

But, after we *receive* His *invitation*, **our response to His words can lead to condemnation.** Cuz *turning down* help means we *don't* think we're *sick* and *remember*, only the *sick* get His life-saving *treatment*; only the *blind* get *sight*; and only the *sinner* gets *saved*. So be *careful* not to *confuse* who's *doing* the *judging*; the only *reason* Jesus wants us to *see* our *need* is to *urge* us to **seek His help!** Cuz once we've seen the need to *leave* our old lives, we're naturally *led* to wonder, **"Where now?"**

And *Jesus* wants to *answer that* as fast as He gets us to *ask* it – so we'll spend *less* time suffering:

[Ahem...!] Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry... – John 6:35 NIV

Cuz *here's* the mind-blowing *miracle* about Jesus' *speech* that *proves* He has the heart of our loving Father: **Even His most convicting interactions always contain His most convincing invitations.**



Take the adulterous woman; it seems like He sends her away but what did He really say? **"Go now and leave your life of sin."** But put yourself in her shoes and ask yourself this: **"Where now?"** You're left there, in front of the Guy who just won an argument against religious experts trying to get Him to admit He doesn't sin cuz He's the Son of God... and He just commanded you to leave your life of sin. What's your first step? Your thoughts would be racing – **"Every path anyone's ever taken leads to sin! And this Guy knows I'm just gonna mess things up again because this Guy is the only One... to live life... without sin. That's it! I'm not going anywhere!"** And right there, He set her up so **"the blind will see"** Because **the only way to leave a life of sin is to join the life of Jesus!** So even His command to go was an invitation to come. ASAP!

But what about those Pharisees? Why did He tell them **"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."**? Well, put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself this: **"Where now?"** You wanted to kill this Guy for saying He's the sinless Son of God, so you tried to make Him admit it by getting Him to judge this woman, but then He turned it around on you. Your thoughts would be racing, **"No, I asked You to throw a stone to prove the blasphemous claim that You're as qualified as God to judge people. And then ... we could ... stone You... Uh oh. Then I'd be making the same claim. I have to admit I'm not qualified."** And right there, Jesus set them up so, **"those who see will become blind"** Cuz **the only way to heal the healthy is making them see they're sick!** So once again, **even His angry accusations lead to loving invitations!**

Cuz here's the deal – God can't stand each second we stay suffering in our sin so He gave us His Son because, **with Jesus, we're all never more than two steps from being saved.** We just need to answer the invite!

It's a lot like walking past a bakery right when all the cookies are coming out of the oven; regardless of how hungry you felt, in that moment you realize – you could eat! And the only question is, **do you slow down and follow your nose or keep walking until you lose the scent?** Well what if the owner was standing out front screaming at you to come in cuz these cookies can keep you satisfied forever? You'd at least stop for a taste, right? If you didn't, you'd sure feel like an idiot later, when the hunger hit. And **every ensuing step would sting as we judged ourselves for passing.** And all we'd think about was how we hoped to have another opportunity!

Well here's the good news, **God is always on the move** – to make sure we will cross paths with Him every day. He's part of every interaction in our walk, and He's always yelling out an invitation to make the one choice that can stop all our suffering: **following Him.** All we have to do is be willing to hear what He really has to say. Cuz He came to save the world! ASAP!

[And following Him means sharing the invitation, cuz Jesus said:] I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. – Luke 4:43 NIV

And the sooner we see the need to leave our old lives, the sooner we'll seek His help and get to join Jesus on His mission to pick up every hurting, hopeless, and hungry human on our way to the feast!

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.