

A Way for the Outsider

Introduction:

Good Morning!

ME:

- John Perkins was a black man who grew up in Mississippi during Racial segregation.
- He was born in 1930, and when he was a teenager, his older brother was killed by a police officer.
- Filled with deep anger, hatred, and fear, he fled the state, only to later return at the age of 30.
- He had become a Christian and wanted to begin ministry in that area.
- He was later brutally beaten by police when he entered a police station to post bond for two students who had been arrested.
- He experienced what happens when people begin to see others as fundamentally different. When people see others as less deserving of dignity, compassion, and love.

(but how does somebody get to the point where they believe that they're justified in treating another human like that?)

WE:

- How does somebody begin to see another person as less valuable than themselves
- How do we get to the point where we distrust somebody just because they're different from us?
- And how does somebody convince themselves that God is actually on their side when they're doing it?
- I don't think most people wake up in the morning thinking, "I want to be hateful today."
- I assume it starts more subtly, being cautious and distrusting of people who are different or don't share our values or who aren't from around here.
- We surround ourselves with people who are like us and we then think that people outside of our group are dangerous. Then that becomes prejudice and prejudice becomes contempt.
- How does a person become so convinced that someone else is different, dangerous, or unwelcome that mistreating them begins to feel justified?
- but the reality is the struggle is actually ancient, and we find it among God's people throughout Scripture

- But as we examine the Scriptures we're going to see that the Holy Spirit calls us to love outsiders just like God does.
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GOD:

ACTS Chapter 1:1-14

¹ In the first book,

- This morning I'll reference a lot of passages. They're going to be listed on the bulletin. Because we won't possibly be able to read every single one in the time we have.
- We're eventually going to land in Acts chapter 8 and chapter 10.
- When we went through Acts, I did the exegesis of these passages but
- Today we're taking a broader scope of this topic throughout Scripture.
- We're going to start in the Old Testament.
- Israel was surrounded by nations worshiping other gods. God was calling his people into a covenant relationship, teaching them to live differently.
- Leviticus 20:26 “You shall be holy to me for I, the Lord, am holy and have separated you from the peoples that you should be mine.”
- Deuteronomy 7:1-6 Warns them to not intermarry because that will cause them to torn away to other gods. “³You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly.”
- Deuteronomy 12:29-31 Warns them to not borrow the ways that others worshiped their gods, and then use those to worship Yahweh. “Take care that you do not become ensnared to follow them...And that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? That I also may do the same." You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates, they have done for their gods. For they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”
- 1 Chronicles 8, Ezra 9, Nehimiah 13, and more, talk about how God required Israel to remain separate from other nations so that they are not led away form God.
- And notice that these verses are not like a universal command to avoid every foreign person, rather the concern was the danger of idolatry.
- However, we know that from each of the individual contexts of these passages, plus the rest of Israel's scripture provides ways for foreigners to join God's covenant.
- Fast-forward to less than a couple of hundred years before Jesus came, that's possibly when the Jewish people (as a result of likely a bunch of social and cultural situations) decided to bring in the perspective that a **Gentile was to be considered unclean** because

they didn't follow the ritual purity laws the Jewish people followed. There's no particular law of Moses that says that, but we start to see that historically arise around that time.

- And what happens is **people isolate these passages**, taking the legitimate commands, distorting their purpose, and then use them to justify their attitudes that God never actually commanded.
- When you cherry-pick some Bible verses out of context, of course it's not going to turn out well.
- They equate different with dangerous and they become cautious and suspicious and eventually prejudiced against people who are different.
- But this is not all that God teaches about foreigners!

- Those passages are actually less about how to treat foreigners and more about Israel's need to stay faithful to Yahweh.
- Here's what Yahweh actually says about how to treat immigrants or foreigners:
- Exodus 22:21 “**You must not mistreat or oppress foreigners in any way. Remember you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.**”
- Exodus 23:9 “**You must not oppress foreigners for you know what it is like to be a foreigner, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.**”
- Leviticus 19:9-10 Teaches to not harvest the corners of your fields so that the poor and foreigners would have a free portion.
- Leviticus 19:33-34 “**Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.**” (sound familiar? Second greatest commandment?)
 - Verse (10,18,33) 18 “**Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.**”
 - In the New Testament Jesus is asked which commandment is the most important of all and Jesus responds with two:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”
 - The man then asks, “Who is my neighbour?”
 - Jesus replies with this parable of the Good Samaritan, where an outsider of the Jewish faith is the one that cares for a Jewish man who has been beaten. Can you see the connection to Leviticus 19??
- Deuteronomy 10:17-19 “**For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. 19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.**”

- Deuteronomy 24:17-22 “True justice must be given to the foreigners living among you and to orphans and you must never accept a widow's garment as security for her debt. Always remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from your slavery.”
- Numbers 15:15-16 “Native-born Israelites and foreigners are equal before the Lord and are subject to the same decrees. This is a permanent law for you, to be observed from generation to generation...”
- Can you see God isn't just simply tolerating outsiders? He doesn't say to ignore them or to leave them alone. He explicitly commands love and he consistently reminds Israel that they were once outsiders in Egypt.
- Even Jesus was an immigrant when he was younger, in Egypt.
- **God called Israel to be different from the nations but he never gave them permission to stop loving the people of those nations.**
- And we see examples of foreigners entering into God's promises and care many times through Scripture. Here are a few:
- Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6. She's a Canaanite woman and she responds in faith and she's welcomed among Israel
- The book of Ruth in the Bible is a story of a Moabite widow, and she finds protection and belonging among God's people and she ends up becoming an ancestor of David, and eventually Jesus!
- Then there's Naaman in 2 Kings 5, who gets healed by acknowledging Yahweh as the true God.
- And in 1 Kings 17 God provides for a widow who's a foreigner through Elijah. That's the story where the oil and flour that never run out.
- And then in Isaiah 56 it says that God promises a place among his people to foreigners who join themselves to him.
- And then of course there's **Jonah**.
 - 4 Chapters. Not Sunday School version...
 - Goes on to preach to Nineveh, a Gentile Assyrian city
 - And the Assyrians are brutal to the Jewish nation. They eventually go on to actually conquer the Jewish northern kingdoms.
 - And Jonah hates them. They haven't even done any of that stuff yet.
 - But in the book of Jonah we learn that God cares about Nineveh because: He is God over all nations not just Israel. // The wickedness of Assyria mattered to God // He's merciful to those who repent. // He has compassion on people beyond just Israel.
 - Jonah didn't merely misunderstand God's character. He knew God was gracious and merciful and that's exactly why he didn't want to go.
 - Jonah wanted judgement and God wanted repentance.
 - Jonah believed in God's mercy! He just didn't want his enemies to receive it.

- And centuries later when Jesus arrives, we see the same prejudices and the same struggle still present.
- Jesus confronts these things. As mentioned, the story of the Good Samaritan. The very mercy that God commands comes from the exact person Jewish listeners would have distrusted.
- John 4: Samaritan woman at the well.
 - A Jewish rabbi speaking with a Samaritan woman one-on-one.
 - And she's surprised because of the prejudice and hate that exists between these people groups.
 - She even has a different theology than Jesus and tries to argue with him. And he doesn't avoid it. He addresses it.
 - And as a result not only does she believe but she goes back to where she came from, and other Samaritans believe.
- Jesus didn't need to agree with her theology in order to treat her with dignity, speak truthfully, and offer her salvation.
- But then get this: look in.
 - Luke 9:51-56. Jesus and disciples are travelling toward Jerusalem.
 - A Samaritan village refuses to welcome him. (religious division)
 - James and John respond by saying "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"
 - Jesus rebukes them. And they move on.
 - James and John were ready to call down fire on the very people that Jesus had come to save!
- But here's what's so interesting about that: it's not the end of John's story with the Samaritans.
- After the crucifixion John gets the **Holy Spirit**.
- Stephen, the first martyr, dies at the hand of Saul (Paul) in Acts 7.
- Then the disciples scatter to try to stay alive. Philip goes to Samaria.
- Philip's up there preaching the gospel and crowds of people are getting baptised.
- The apostles in Jerusalem hear about what's going on in Samaria so they send Peter and John to go see what's going on.
- Then Acts 8:14 says, "When the apostles of Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that **they might receive the Holy Spirit** (for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus)."
- **It's John!** The same John who wanted fire to fall from heaven on the Samaritan village is now laying his hands on Samaritan believers and praying that the Holy Spirit would fall upon them.
- That's a great character arc.

- It's almost like the Holy Spirit was waiting for the apostles to show up so that they could personally see with their own eyes and have no doubts.
- Then in verse 25 it says, "Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans." Very cool.
- John wasn't merely tolerating Samaritans. He was now participating in bringing them the gospel.
- But the Holy Spirit's not done. Acts chapter 10!
- Peter has this vision of a sheet coming down from heaven that challenges his understanding of clean and unclean.
- The Holy Spirit tells Peter to accompany men to a gentiles house ('Not okay')
- And Peter says, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."
- He proclaims salvation through Jesus and as he's talking the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles.
- Verse 45 says that the other Jewish believers were amazed that the Holy Spirit would come to the Gentiles.
- And then they're all baptised. Peter says this powerful line in verse 47. He says, "Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"
- But Peter's not done.
- He goes back to Jerusalem, and Jewish believers there criticize him for entering the home of a Gentile.
- And Peter tells the story again and emphasises that God Himself is the one who acted. He says in chapter 11, verse 17, "Then if God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who am I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard these things they fell silent and they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."
- The church has never been asked to decide whether outsiders deserve God's love. God has already made his decision clear.
- And here's the sad part. Peter witnessed the Spirit fall on Gentiles. He had defended their inclusion before the Jerusalem church yet he himself could still be influenced by social pressure and fear.
- In Galatians chapter 2 you can read about where Peter had been eating with Gentile believers in the church in Galacia.
- When other Jewish people arrive, Peter withdraws, and other Jewish believers follow Peter's example.
- Paul publicly confronts him and calls out Peter's hypocrisy

- It's crazy because Peter witnessed the Spirit fall on the Gentiles.
- You can believe the right things about people and still treat them in a way that contradicts what you believe.

(And if even Peter struggled with this after witnessing the Holy Spirit's work, perhaps we shouldn't be so quick to assume that we have nothing to examine in ourselves.)

YOU:

- As Christians are called to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.
 - Were called to holiness and warned against adopting the values of the world
 - We are also called to love our enemies and treat outsiders with wisdom and grace.
 - The point is not to erase distinctions. It's to refuse to turn distinctions into excuses for mistreatment.
 - “We don't have to agree with someone's beliefs in order to love them and we don't have to affirm every decision someone makes in order to treat them with dignity. In fact you don't even have to compromise your convictions in order to show compassion to somebody. **Jesus never required us to choose between truth and love.**”
 - The struggle isn't new. It's not limited to just one place or time.
 - The Holy Spirit welcomes outsiders.
 - Take care to watch for attitudes of suspicion or assuming the worst about someone because of the group that they belong to. I'm not going to listen to them because they're part of such-and-such religion or such-and-such group.
 - Pay attention to your fear. Fear is the enemy of faith. And fear keeps people at a distance because their beliefs or lifestyle make us uncomfortable.
 - And as Christians we believe we have a corner on truth but we can't let that produce an attitude of moral superiority.
 - And we must be careful to not ignore people's needs and avoid being generous and kind towards people who are different than us.
 - And keep in mind that these attitudes can exist even when we sincerely believe that we're trying to be faithful to this area.
 - As we continue to learn how to depend on the Holy Spirit, we have to ask the Holy Spirit to help us hold true to our convictions and then to shape us to live out those convictions with love.
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WE:

- Remember at the beginning I mentioned a guy named John Perkins?
- After the violence he experienced, he could have understandably just let hate and bitterness consume him.
- But his faith in Jesus moved him toward forgiveness and reconciliation.
- He went on to plant three churches in his lifetime personally and then started an organisation called the Christian Community Development Association, which then worked with thousands of leaders and hundreds of churches to equip and empower them to create inclusive healthy communities across all 50 states in the U.S.
- But the point is that his faith, he says, is what motivated him to break down the walls of us versus them.
- John once wanted to destroy a Samaritan village and later brought the gospel to Samaritan villages.
- Peter struggled with entering a Gentile home and later he defended God's acceptance of Gentile believers.
- Perkins experienced the destructive power of prejudice and then devoted his life to reconciliation.
- In each case we shall see how the Gospel and the Holy Spirit challenge the boundaries that people create.
- So who is your neighbour, and who have you been keeping at a distance, and who might the Holy Spirit be prompting you to love?

Gospel Call:

- Before we pray, some of you who are here feel like you are outsiders.
- Might not be a race thing or a culture thing. But you come into this place and you feel like you don't belong.
- Well know this: the Holy Spirit includes everyone and we don't ever want to be the obstacle standing between other people and encountering the love of Jesus.
- Mistakes will be made. However I want you to hear the Gospel clearly today because the Holy Spirit is calling you.
- **The world is full of brokenness and sin.** Sin is when people rebel against the ways that God wants us to live: the commands that He gives us to love Him and to love others.
- You have been living your own way, apart from how God wants you to live.
- That is sin.
- The price of sin is massive. The Bible says blood has to be shed.
- But even though you're a sinner, Christ died for you.
- Jesus came to earth, God in flesh, lived, died, and rose again in order to pay the price for your sin.
- He took your place so that you could be forgiven. In order to do that all you need to do is acknowledge that you're not living the way God wants you to live, that you're a sinner,

and then to say you're sorry, to apologise and repent. Repent means to turn away from. In other words don't go back to your sin.

- And instead follow Jesus. Trust in His work on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. Believe that He is the Lord. Get baptised and follow Him.
- And then when you put your trust in Jesus and you follow him, then your life can truly begin.
- Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." He said, "I came so they may have life and have it abundantly."
- If you want to chat more after the service or have some prayer, we'd love to pray with you and spend some time with you. Just come up to the front, off to the side here, and we can continue to chat. We'd love to connect.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your incredible love and mercy towards us. Thank you that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. You didn't wait for us to get our lives together before you reached out to love us.

As we've surveyed your Word this morning, we've seen your consistency in how you demonstrated your love for people, even those who would be considered outsiders.

And God, we recognise that sometimes we struggle in this area. Our fears, assumptions, and prejudices (or just even sometimes a sincere desire to protect our convictions) cause us often to put up barriers between ourselves and the very people that you call us to love.

Holy Spirit, would you search our hearts and reveal to us attitudes that don't align with your ways? Please convict us so that we can repent.

And God, if there are people here who feel like an outsider or feel they don't belong in this place, I pray that they would know your invitation to come to Jesus is for them too.

You don't want them to continue to struggle and fight in the ways that they have been. You want them to fully surrender to you, to repent and find forgiveness and new life in Jesus.



And may we as a church never stand in the way of what Holy Spirit, you want to be doing here, and instead help us to faithfully just follow what you're doing, to follow your lead, and to demonstrate your love to the world around us.

We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Benediction

May we stand firm in God's truth and allow His love to overflow from us to everyone. Romans 15:5-7 says, " May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may, with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"