

“Angry Birds”
by Rom A. Pegram (8/12/18)

We’re a little past midway in our late-summer series called ‘Christian’ ... where we’ve been talking about what that word means and what it doesn’t mean. We’ve discovered that ‘Christian’ is a word used by those outside the faith ... to describe those inside—not a nice word either. But, Jesus’ followers didn’t call themselves ‘Christian’ and Jesus never called his followers that. He had a very specific, very technical word he used to describe those who followed him: *disciple*. And, folks, unlike the word ‘Christian’—mentioned only 3 times in the Bible and never really defined, *disciple is very well defined*. You can be a Christian and do just about anything, or be on any side of any issue, etc., because the definition is up to you...

BUT, if you decide to be a follower of Jesus, it’s disturbingly clear what that means—to be his disciple. It means we’re people who first and foremost ... *love one another*. And we learned last week we have to love one another ... *the way Jesus loved*. Do you remember how that was? As the Apostle John described it, Jesus loved everyone by embodying both truth and grace...

We looked at a few scenarios from scripture that showed Jesus’ kind of love, didn’t we ... his teaching on divorce ... and the woman at the well? We watched him modeling this type of love. But today, *I want to get into where Jesus actually taught this kind of love*. And the thing that makes this teaching so significant was ... *Jesus’ audience*... Let me set it up for you, as we transition into today’s message...

Jesus found himself surrounded by two different groups of people: *One*, a group of people who felt like they were so alienated from God that God would never approve of them; *and another*, a group of people who felt like they were so good that God had already approved of them. And Jesus looked at both groups and realized ... *they were both wrong!* But, because Jesus was the master teacher, he decided not to go right to the central issue. This was a teachable moment, and like many parents who teach their kids, Jesus decided ... ‘You know what, I’m going to take the right approach.’ And instead of diving directly into this very emotional issue (a theological one) head-on, he decided to pull both of these very diverse groups onto the same page. And it all starts in Luke, Chapter 15. Listen...

Luke 15:1 says, “Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear [Jesus].

Folks, even these first words of this verse are huge! *Look closely at the audience*...

- *Tax collectors* were what some would call multi-level farmers. If you’ve ever been involved in a pyramid-type or multi-level organization, where one person sponsors another, and they sponsor another, and they sponsor another ... all the way to the top, you know what I’m talking about. And in actuality the person on the top is the only one making the money. That’s how tax collectors of Jesus’ day

operated. And that's why people hated tax collectors. As long as Rome got it's share, they didn't care how the money was made. And they were so bad, they actually had a category all their own, which we see in this verse...

- And then there was everyone else. These were the folks who knew God would never approve of them because of their occupations, or their lifestyle, or their morality or ethics. They were *the sinners*...

So the worst people in 1st century society gathered to listen to Jesus... That means, if you were a pastor or a good church person, by the time you got to church the front rows would be filled with the worst people in the culture, who couldn't wait to hear what the sermon was all about. Now that's different isn't it? [*All those in the front just looked like they wanted to move back a ways...*] But, when we get this right, when we embody both grace and truth the way Jesus did, everything changes! So the front row was filled with who? The worst people in society... And then the story goes on...

² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"

And eating with someone in those days was considered a very intimate thing—something you did only with the closest of friends. They'd invite you into their home; *that's personal*. Some couldn't figure out why people who were nothing like Jesus ... *liked Jesus*! And they couldn't figure out why Jesus, who was nothing like them, seemed to like *them*. Jesus was actually more like the Pharisees and the teachers of the law—almost 100% (the theology, belief system, etc.), and yet he attracted this group of riff-raff that were nothing like him *like a light attracts bugs* [anyone been camping lately?]

Again, there's a tension here in the way Jesus lived. And the main question from Jesus' critics was this: *Does Jesus condone their behavior?* I mean, have you ever heard him actually condemn them? Have you heard him actually come out and say, *You need to quit collecting taxes, and you need to quit sleeping around, and you need to give up your occupation?* So they're left with this tension between grace and truth. *Does he or doesn't he? What's the deal?*

And so Jesus decides to tackle this situation. But again, he's the master teacher, so *he doesn't address the issue of how God views sin, which is what he wants to talk about*. He doesn't actually address the issue of how God views sinners, even though that's what's really on his mind. *Jesus, instead, begins to talk about something they would agree on*—the master communicator. He decides to talk about ... *sheep* ... and he tells them a parable—*absolutely brilliant*...

⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Folks, for the first time in their lives, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law ... and the tax collectors and the sinners ... all nod in the same direction! They've never agreed

on anything in their lives! But before they can make a comment, Jesus sees some women in the audience and says, *Isn't it true that if you lost a precious coin [a keepsake, a family treasure], if you lost one of those precious coins, isn't it true that you'd take all the furniture out of the house and you sweep that house until you found it?* And all the women—regardless of background or morality—were going, *Yeah!* And all the husbands—regardless of background or morality—were going, *Yep, that's what she'd do!* **People are more passionate about what they've lost than anything they've never misplaced to begin with!** And they all agreed, because everyone's lost something; they know how it feels ... so now Jesus has got 'em...

And then he says, let me tell you one more story (The Prodigal Son): *There was a man, and he had two sons, an older son and a younger son.* And Jesus understood birth order, folks, before it was even written about. He said, *The older son was a 'behavior' and the second born was a 'misbehavior'.* There was the older firstborn who's like, *I'm going to do everything right.* And then there was the younger son in this fictional story, where Jesus drives to almost a ridiculous extreme to make his point. He said, *The younger son, the younger brother, the second-born comes to the father and essentially says this: Dad, I wish you would go ahead and die so I could get my inheritance, but you won't seem to die. So, would you pretend like you're dead and just go ahead and give me my inheritance now, so I can do whatever I want with it?* Now, everyone in Jesus diverse audience was equally offended (he was trying to keep them on the same page)—Pharisees with sons, teachers of the law with sons, tax collectors with sons, and sinners who had children. This was so offensive in any culture, but especially this kind of 1st century Jewish culture.

And then Jesus (because he can take this parable in any direction he wants) says, *And you won't believe this, but the father said, 'You know what, son, I'm going to do that—exactly what you've asked me to do.'* *And the father began to sell things and trade things and he began to split up everything he owned. And then he gave the younger son what the younger son would have gotten if the father had suddenly died.* And you probably could have heard a pin drop in Jesus' audience. Who would do such a thing? And then Jesus' went on and said, *And the son hung around for a while, but then decided 'This little town is too small for me.'* *So he liquidated everything he could, loaded up as much cash as he could, and headed off to a distant country where no one would know who he was or what he was up to...*

And you guys know this story (The Prodigal Son). *And then he bought into a lifestyle he couldn't really afford for very long. And so in a time frame much shorter than he'd imagined, he used up everything it'd taken his father a lifetime to save.* And, again, the anger and sense of offense in Jesus' audience was probably just about to explode, with everyone! And then Jesus said, *And then it got worse. A famine came to that part of the country and this young man not only ran out of money, but he needed a job and couldn't find one. He got fired from one job, then couldn't find another. But then he finally found one ... feeding pigs—the only job this Jewish boy could get.* At this point, his audience is like, *Yep, he's getting what he deserved.* In fact, they're a bit nervous now, because never have these diverse groups agreed on so much before in their entire lives!

And then he becomes so hungry, Jesus said, the only thing he could think about eating was what the pigs ate. And now Jesus has driven this story, in a Jewish culture, to the ultimate extreme! And if Jesus would have stopped the story there, it would've been a lousy story, but he goes on (so that it would be a story told around every supper table that night). With both audiences on the edge of their seats, he says:

¹⁷ “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! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father....”

And the audience is going, Oh man, this is going to be good; he’s going to get it now! We thought the story should have ended with ... and he fed the pigs the rest of his life, but this is pretty good, too! He’s going to get what’s coming to him! And everyone in the audience knew what this young man deserved; they knew what they would do if it was their son. Then Jesus goes on with this (v. 20)...

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

Anger, right? They were trying to anticipate what Jesus was going to say—where the story was going to go. And to this audience—all of them—righteous indignation was the only response! Or was it? Listen...

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

Do you guys remember how Jesus loved? He was the embodiment of both grace and truth ... and he was driving his audience crazy! So, in Jesus’ story, the father does the unthinkable; the kid didn’t get what he deserved after all. So, the son starts his speech, because he’s rehearsed this all the way home:

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick!....’”

I don’t know about you, but this kind of bothers me here. I’d be more inclined to say, after all the son had done, ‘Let’s just take this slow; let’s see where things are really going here.’ But the father says, Quick! And Jesus puts more words into the mouth of the father...

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘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 then, of course, they kill 'the fatted calf' which always means a huge celebration...

And how does it end? And everyone lived happily ever after? NO! Don't forget about that older brother (v. 28, NIV): **"The older brother became angry and refused to go in."** Let me ask you a question: Ever met an angry 'Christian'? You know, those *disputatious* Christians? They're just *mad at the world*, aren't they? Well, that's this older brother: *He was angry and refused to go in*. We're back to truth, aren't we? The tension continues... Well, the older brother had a speech, too (vv. 28-29):

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. [Son, I know you're angry, but I want you to come to this party! To which the older son said, NO, and here's why...] ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders...."

Can I mess with you for a second? Do you know why some Christians are angry? Because they're all this [show TRUTH] ... and not this [show GRACE]. Sometimes the holier we get, the angrier we get. And we wish the story would have ended like, *And he spent the rest of his life feeding the pigs—the end!* If that's you, you may be a good Christian, but I'm not sure about the disciple part ... and that's what Jesus is concerned with. You may be a good Christian; but you're not like Jesus... Folks, here's the crux of today's message...

GOD VIEWS SINNERS AS LOST, AS IN SEPARATED... V. 32 says, "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

If we're Christians who lean toward loving others with TRUTH only, it's gonna make us angry ... just like the older brother. Where does this anger come from? After all, God never gets mad at lost things, does he? And neither do you, right? You never get upset when you lose your cell phone. You never get upset when you're in a hurry to go somewhere and you can't find the car keys. Right?

Folks, why do we get mad at lost things? Where does the anger come from? Self-righteousness, that's where. Somewhere in the back of our minds is this: You know what, I've been faithful. I've been in church. I-I-I-I—and God says, That's awesome. Somebody wrote all that down. But that's not the issue here. The issue is this: Much of why will act like we do depends upon this understanding:

THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A 'CHRISTIAN' AND A DISCIPLE IS: *God could not love you more; nothing you can do will cause God to love you less*! A disciple understands that ... and that's the point of why the father did what the father did ... and why we should love the same way...

Folks, I want you to remember these takeaways today...

- **Takeaways for followers:** Again, ***sin should break our hearts***. We should view people who are in rebellion against God as lost/separated. Sin should break our hearts because it breaks people; it has a 'gotcha' as we learned last week. *Disciples don't get angry at lost things; they go looking for them!* Also, ***repentance should stir our hearts***. This is why we cheer & celebrate & make it as easy as possible for those who are turning toward God...
- **Takeaways for prodigals...** Your sin is hurting you AND others. The longer you run, the worse it will be. So give it up. Return. Repent. Tell someone close to you today. Come home. Come clean. Get on your knees...

And when you do, we will rejoice! Why? To put it in Jesus' terms: *We have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother or sister of ours was dead and is alive again. You were lost, and now you are found.* That's why the father did what the father did ... and why we should do the same!