

Matthew 10:5-15 “Find Out Who is Worthy?”

Heckuva scripture you're dealing with this morning Jesse. Oh yeah. But I warned you didn't I? I told you that June was going to be dedicated to ... shocking requirements that the New Testament lays out for those who want to follow Jesus. Last week we talked about Paul's appeal to the Corinthian Church to “agree with one another.” That wasn't *too* bad. We didn't struggle with that one *too* much. First of all it was Paul, and ... you know ... Paul. Yes he was one of the most important and influential founders of the church, and yes he had a dramatic conversion when he came face to face with the Risen Christ, but he was just a regular guy. He had regular human hangups like we all do. And once we established that, it was a little easier for us to work with this “agree with one another” passage.

But what happens when you run across a passage where *Jesus* comes off like a *jerk*? That's different! Man, that just sounds *horrible* coming out of my own mouth. Because this is Jesus, right? The one who we confess as the Christ, the son of the living God. The one who we proclaim as Lord and Savior. The one whose path we pledge to follow! Right here in the first gospel of the New Testament only one chapter after Jesus finds his final disciple Matthew, he sends those disciples out into the world with these instructions: “Stay the heck away from the Gentiles and Samaritans.” Now granted, that's the Jesse Kearns paraphrase, but it doesn't sound too much worse than, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”

I read a story once about a guy who was touring the Pinewood Studios in England when he was a kid. He was there when they were filming the 1989 Batman movie. Michael Keaton, the actor who played Batman was a chain-smoker at the time. And the writer of this story was remembering how horrified he was to see his hero the Batman right there on the Pinewood studio set in costume *smoking*. And you've got to understand, this guy was a little kid at the time. He was hardly old

enough to know that Batman was a fictional character and that this was an actor. It rocked his boat. Have you ever had one of those moments? A moment when you had a hero or a mentor that you placed on a pedestal, who in your eyes could do no wrong, and you found out that they were ... *human*. Now for every person whose world is rocked by this realization, there's someone else who is sort of *comforted*. It's like, "Hey, that person is just like anyone else. That person is like *me* even." However you want to look at it, the realization that someone you admire is flesh and blood and goes through the same sort of trials and temptations that you do is impactful.

But again, we're not reading about Batman here. We're not dealing with a camp counselor, or a school teacher, or a singer or anyone else we admire or put on a pedestal. We're talking about Jesus. And to complicate matters even more, starting in verse 11, Jesus tells the disciples to specifically seek out only people who are *worthy* and give them your peace. If they're not worthy? Take your peace back. And if they don't welcome you or listen to you, then shake the dust off your feet, get out of town and let God's judgment fall on them. And by the way God's judgment is going to fall on those unwelcoming people harder than on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and if you don't know the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, let me tell you it did not end well for them. As in scorched earth.

Again, what is going on here? This does *not* sound like Jesus. But ... what's the first rule in approaching a passage of scripture that baffles us? Always look at the context in which it was written. Find out the who, what, where, when and why.

So let's talk about the who. This is Matthew's gospel. Remember that there's not just one story of Jesus in the Bible. We have four. Four books that tell the story of Jesus. Two of them start from birth. They all go to his death, and they all write about his resurrection. Three of these gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are similar in the way that they're laid out. John is very different. We're going to set John aside this

morning. Of the three other gospels, Matthew is the most “Jewish flavored.” In other words, it has the most Jewish world view. Nothing wrong with that. Jesus was a practicing Jew. What!?! What are you talking about, Jesus was a Christian. Nope. Jesus followed the Law of Moses. He studied the Prophets. He observed the high holy days. He followed the customs. Mind you, he had his own take on things, but that’s what set him apart from other Jewish rabbis of the time. He was unconventional. But he was not a Christian. Matthew paints the most Jewish picture of Jesus and that tells us that this gospel was clearly intended for a Jewish audience.

And Matthew writes that Jesus’ top priority was to the lost sheep of Israel. He was a lot like the Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. Reclaim the faith. Re-claim the tradition. Re-claim your relationship with God. Be the people that God chose you to be. You are God’s chosen. This is clear throughout Matthew’s gospel. Especially right here in this passage. And this wasn’t the first time that Jesus said that his mission was to reclaim the lost sheep of Israel, nor would it be his last time. But somewhere along the line, things change as far as how Jesus deals with those who are *not* among the “lost sheep of Israel.”

A key story in understanding how this plays out is in Matthew 15 where Jesus seems to disrespect a Canaanite woman who wants him to heal her daughter. He said the same thing to her. “Listen, I came here to claim the lost sheep of Israel. It’s not fair to take children’s food and serve it to the dogs.” Oh boy, there goes Jesus acting out of character again. But she snapped back ... “Yeah, well even the dogs eat crumbs at the master’s table.” And Jesus replied, “Woman, you have great faith.” And he healed her daughter right there on the spot. Two chapters back from this morning’s text in chapter 8, Jesus healed a Roman Centurion’s son, and marveled at this non-Jewish person’s faith. He was so impressed that he said, “I haven’t found this kind of faith even in Israel.”

So you can see how Jesus’ attitude about Gentiles ... those who aren’t Jewish ... is sort of morphing and evolving. Until finally after his death

and resurrection, he commissions his disciples to go into ALL the world and to teach ALL nations. That's a whole lot different than the first commission he gave them when he said, "Just go to the Jews and to heck with everyone else."

But why would Matthew do this? Why would Matthew portray Jesus like this? Jesus was supposed to know exactly why he came ... he had a predetermined plan. He knew all along that he was going to spread his good news to all the world. He must have just messing with his disciples when he said that his message was only for Israel. He really didn't mean that. There's no contradiction in *anything* Jesus says. He was perfect in every way. No, we're just not reading this story in chapter 10 correctly, and we're totally missing the point in chapter 15 when it looks like this Canaanite woman teaches Jesus a lesson. See, Jesus is supposed to be the one teaching the lessons here. Not some Canaanite woman! To suggest otherwise makes Jesus look too human.

Well ... he was. That's the beauty of Jesus' story no matter which gospel you read. He was human. But wasn't he divine? Yes. See, that's part of the tension in the gospel story. Jesus was both fully human, and fully divine. Maybe Matthew just emphasized that humanity in a different way than the other gospel writers. Matthew's audience was Jewish. They needed to hear that Jesus came for them. He needed to be the shepherd for those lost sheep of Israel. In fact, that's how his ministry started out. Jews first. The Gentiles? The Samaritans ... those so-called Jewish people who did their own thing instead of adhering to the laws like "real" Jews did? No way. Let them burn like Sodom and Gomorrah. But then as the gospel goes on, these Gentiles and Samaritans start growing on him. He starts to see that they have faith ... more faith than even than the hard-core, law-abiding Jews who wanted Jesus all for themselves. Until finally, after all is said and done, after his earthly ministry ended, and his new ministry as the resurrected Christ began, he extended his welcome to ALL people. And all means ... all.

Remember when I said that sometimes knowing that our heroes are “only” human can either damage us or strengthen us? Some people can’t get their heads wrapped around Jesus changing his mind. They can’t even entertain the possibility that his attitude toward Gentiles and Samaritans evolved. That somehow this takes away from his divinity. But for me? It actually helps me. It helps me because I look at all the people I have marginalized in my life ... all the people who I thought weren’t worth the effort ... all the people who I shook the dust off my feet for and left for God’s judgment. I don’t have to love them. I don’t have to waste my time on them ... especially if they don’t want to hear me. But how can I continue to do this ... to have this kind of attitude towards people that I don’t particularly like, when I see Jesus come to the realization that everyone matters ... that everyone deserves love ... that everyone deserves to hear and maybe even respond to the good news that God is reconciling the world? How can I say “no” to Jesus’ example ... to Jesus’ transformation. Jesus ... the one whose footsteps I’m required to follow. When I say, “yes” to being a Disciple, I say “yes” to being like Jesus. And Jesus calls me and shows me how to change my attitude and to love others as God loves them.