GOD LOVES SERIAL SINNERS

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SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

INTRODUCTION

ATTENTION-GETTER: One Sunday morning when Mary was doing the Kiddie Kapsule the visual aid for her lesson was a smoke detector. She asked the children if anyone knew what it meant when an alarm sounded from the smoke detector.

Dylan spoke up and said, “It means Daddy's cooking dinner.”

☺

Atheist: “Do you honestly believe that Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish?”

Preacher: “I don't know, sir, but when I get to heaven, I'll ask him.”

Atheist: “But suppose he isn't in heaven?”

Preacher: “Then you ask him.”

☺

Yes, God loves us all, but He favors “fruits of the spirit” over “religious nuts!”

SCRIPTURE: 1Corinthians 1:26-31 NIV: *“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”*

PRAYER

1. I am not quite sure how I came to this sermon title, except that it started with an apparently random comment I heard recently when a good friend confessed to being a “repetitive sinner.” I pondered that expression because I hold this friend in high esteem as a truly godly person. I see much to admire and very little that seems like “repetitive sin” to me. And yet there it was.
   1. Repetitive sinner.
   2. In truth, that’s the way I feel about myself much of the time. If I am honest, I freely confess that I fall far short of what I want to be. With the Apostle Paul in Romans 7, I declare what I don’t want to do I do, and what I want to do I don’t do. Which makes me a repetitive sinner and in the language of Romans 7, *“What a miserable man I am!”* (NCV)
   3. I am a repetitive sinner, guilty of sins of omission and commission.

Apart from God’s grace, even our best efforts are nothing more than empty hope. Even my best efforts fall well over into the “self-righteous” category that is worthless when it comes to being forgiven.

This side of heaven, we’re a pretty sorry lot, but that’s where God’s grace comes in. No one will be saved by what they do. Our only hope of heaven is to run to the cross and lay hold of Jesus Christ. And we won’t even do that unless God helps us to do it, and even then he must give us the strength to hang on and to keep believing.

* 1. Apart from God’s grace, even our best efforts still leave empty, hopeless, frustrated.

1. Let’s accept the fact that we are all …

* Serial sinners who fail daily to do what we should do and not do what we should not do.

1. Why did so many of the heroes of the Bible have serious flaws? That’s all God has to work with. All the perfect people are in heaven. The only ones on earth are the folks with serious weaknesses.
   1. The talent pool has always been pretty thin when it comes to moral perfection. So God works with sinners because that’s all he has to work with. In heaven we will all be vastly improved–perfected by God’s grace. But until then, he uses some pretty ornery people who fall short in many ways–and he does some amazing things through them.

Consider the roll call of God’s imperfect heroes:

The talent pool has always been pretty thin when it comes to moral perfection.

Noah who got drunk.

Abraham who lied about his wife.

Jacob who was a deceiver.

Moses who murdered an Egyptian.

Rahab who was a prostitute.

Samson who had serious problems with lust and anger.

David who was an adulterer and murderer.

Paul who persecuted the church and consented to the death of Christians.

Peter who denied Christ.

If God chose only well-rounded people with no character flaws, some of the credit would inevitably go to the people and not to the Lord. By choosing flawed people with a bad past, a shaky present, and an uncertain future, God alone gets the glory when they accomplish amazing things by his power.

In case we don’t understand this, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 makes it abundantly clear. If you want the message of this passage in one sentence, here it is: God won’t tolerate human pride, so he chooses people who have nothing to brag about.

* Three things we need to see in our Scripture today:
  + THE FACT STATED
  + THE REASON GIVEN
  + THE PURPOSE EXPLAINED

THE FACT STATED

*“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”* (1 Corinthians 1:26 NIV).

1. Paul begins by reminding them of what they were when God saved them. The word *“called”* refers to their position in the world when they came to Christ. Not many of them came from the educated or upper classes of society. Not many had what the world calls “good breeding.”
   1. The Corinthians by and large were not “blue bloods.” In a sense, he holds up a mirror and says, “Take a good look. What do you see?”
   2. If they were honest, they didn’t see many impressive people. They saw ordinary men and women, from undistinguished backgrounds, whose lives had been utterly transformed by Jesus Christ.
2. Memory can be a blessing or a curse. In the spiritual life, it can be very healthy to remember what life was like before we met Jesus.
   1. If you remember where you started, you’ll appreciate much more the grace of God that has brought you to where you are today.
   2. In the spiritual life, it can be very healthy to remember what life was like before we met Jesus.
3. Today’s Scripture tells us that when God chooses his team, he starts with the people the world chooses last. He actually prefers to choose the weak instead of the strong. We must not miss the implication of this teaching.
   1. It’s not as if God intends to take equal numbers from every social class in the world. And it’s definitely not true that God populates the church from the upper classes but sprinkles in a few from the lower classes.

The opposite is closer to the truth.

* 1. God populates his church with the rejects of the world and then sprinkles in a few wealthy and influential people. He prefers those who have failed and know it.
  2. God deliberately chooses the forgotten of the world and he prefers the company of the poor. He loves to save the uneducated, the foolish, the addicted, the broken, the downcast and the imprisoned.
  3. In short, he specializes in saving those whom the world counts as nothing.
* Now we move from the Fact Given to…

THE REASON GIVEN

*“Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. 29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.”* (I Corinthians 1:27-29 NLT).

1. In these verses Paul makes his teaching even clearer. God chooses “powerless things” and “foolish things” and “despised things” and even “*things counted as nothing at all.*”
   1. These “things” are actually people—weak people, lowly people, despised people, and people who are invisible to the world. In short, God makes a choice, and the choice he makes is to choose the people the world would never choose.
   2. The words of Isaiah 55:8 come to mind, *“‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord.”*
      1. Here’s a simple way to remember this truth: God is different. Ponder that statement for a moment. God is different from us.
      2. He is different in what he thinks and he is different in what he does. He does not do what we expect him to do because his thinking is entirely different from ours.
      3. He nullifies the mighty by using the weak instead. He nullifies the proud by using the humble. He nullifies the wise by using the simple.
      4. He nullifies the professional by using the blue-collar worker. He nullifies the PhD by using the high school dropout. God’s “nullification” demonstrates how fundamentally different he is from us.
      5. This truth—elementary as it may seem—is actually quite vital to a healthy Christian worldview. Our God stands alone.
      6. He does not bind himself to do what we think he ought to do. He is holy and he is sovereign and he is absolutely free to do whatever he pleases to do. He can humble the proud any time he chooses. No one has the power to stand against him.
2. Our God stands alone. He does not bind himself to do what we think he ought to do.
   1. Consider the implication of the text. When the world throws a party, the beautiful people are always invited. You know the names: Ben Affleck, J-Lo, Jessica Simpson, Jay-Z, Britney Spears, Tom Cruise, 50 Cent, Halle Berry, Shania Twain, Jennifer Anniston, Mariah Carey, Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Miley Cyrus, and the rest of the current crop of Hollywood superstars. They rent a nightclub and hire a security team to keep the ordinary people out. Only the “in crowd” makes it past the rope line. Helicopters circle overhead and the paparazzi strain to a get a picture they can sell to People magazine. It’s all about who shows up and who is wearing what kind of dress, and trying to match this man with that woman. That’s how the world throws a party.
   2. But God does it differently. Jesus told a story in Luke 14:15-24 about a certain man who invited many guests to a huge banquet. All the invited guests made a series of excuses—they were too busy, they had other plans, they had business to attend to, and a hundred other “legitimate” excuses.

So the master ordered his servants to go out into the highways and byways and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. When that had been done, there were still some empty seats so he told his servants to go out into the country roads and find anyone who had been overlooked and invite them to come to the party because the master declared that every seat must be taken.

If those who had been invited first would not come, then the master would go after the outcasts who would never otherwise come to such a fine affair. That’s how God does it. He goes after the people the world overlooks because the “beautiful people” have no interest in coming to him for salvation.

1. God does it this way for three reasons:
   1. To destroy all human pride,
   2. So that no one can boast, and
   3. So that all would be equal in God’s family.

* As someone so aptly said, “There is equality at the foot of the Cross.”

1. We need to hear this word because American Christianity is entertainment-oriented and celebrity-driven. We are far too prone to swoon over the latest “celebrity conversion” and to rush the latest “hot convert” to the pulpit so that we can all applaud and congratulate ourselves on catching such a big fish for God.

* When we were in Lexington, Nebraska our State Representative visited our church. A member came up to me all excited and said, “Did you see who is here? It’s our State Representative.” But I’ve been waiting for someone to say, “Tom, guess what? We’ve got two prostitutes visiting the church today. Isn’t that wonderful?” Or “Tom, there’s a man here with AIDS and he wants to know Jesus.” Or “Tom, here’s a single mother with six children. This is her first time to visit.” Or “Tom, this man just got out of jail and he came to worship with us today.”
  + The sin is not that we make much of the celebrities; it’s that we make so much less of the other people who visit us.
  + And while I’m on the subject, I should mention that occasionally someone will say, “I wish so-and-so would get saved. They have so much to offer,” which usually means they have money they could give. Is God so broke that he needs another banker in his family?
  + Is God so confused about the economy that he needs another stockbroker on his team? Nothing could be more unholy than valuing lost people based what we think they could contribute to God’s Kingdom.
* The fact has been given, the reason given, now let’s conclude with…

THE PURPOSE EXPLAINED

*“Because of what God has done, you belong to Christ Jesus. He has become God's wisdom for us. He makes us right with God. He makes us holy and sets us free. It is written, ‘The one who brags should brag about what the Lord has done.’”* (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 NIrV).

1. The reason God does what he does is to demonstrate that he alone is the source of our salvation. “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.”
   1. It’s not your wisdom or your intellect or your memorized Bible verses that brought you to Jesus. And you are not a Christian because you are a good person or a church member or because your father was a preacher and your mother was a Sunday School teacher.
   2. Paul says plainly: “It is because of him.” Salvation is of the Lord. God wants us to know that he is the reason we came to Christ. And in Christ we find wisdom, righteousness, holiness and deliverance.
   3. If we believe this, then our boast will be in the Lord alone. When it comes to salvation, we contribute nothing but the sin that makes it necessary to be saved. God does the rest. God chooses whom he pleases, and he does so by choosing those whom the world overlooks.
   4. Nothing could be more harmful than valuing lost people based what we think they could contribute to God’s Kingdom.
2. If we believe what this Scripture teaches, it will change the way we look at ourselves, and it will change the way we talk about ourselves. Some of us talk so much about ourselves that we hardly talk about the Lord at all. Our real problem is the vast difference between our view and God’s view.

* We look at the outward. God looks at the inward.
* We value popularity. God values character.
* We look at intelligence. God looks at the heart.
* We honor those with money. God honors those with integrity.
* We talk about what we own. God talks about what we give away.
* We boast about whom we know. God notices whom we serve.
* We list our accomplishments. God looks for a contrite heart.
* We value education. God values wisdom.
* We love size. God notices quality.
* We live for fame. God searches for humility.
* Our view is shallow. God’s view is deep.
* Our view is temporary. God’s view is eternal.
* We list our accomplishments. God looks for a contrite heart.

1. At the end of the day, we discover that God destroys human pride two ways:
   1. By sending a Savior to die on a hated Roman cross,
   2. By choosing the weak over the strong to be part of his family.
      1. We wouldn’t have done it this way, but that brings us back to the fundamental point that God is different.
      2. He doesn’t play by our rules.

ILLUSTRATION; This week I read some thoughts from our son’s blog that he titled Remade, Reclaimed, Re-Purposed. This kind of sums up what Paul is saying in our Scripture today.

My brother-in-law and his wife recently bought an old bank building in Brookings, South Dakota. They completely gutted it and are using the space to house Jael’s photography business and boutique. They also have gone in with some others and established a restaurant called The Old Market: Eatery + Bake Shoppe + Bar. What is really cool is that almost everything they have used in decorating – from lights to tables to the bar itself – is not new, but used.

They have reclaimed wood from a grain elevator. They are using insulators from telephone poles as the globes for some of the lights. An old door from an abandoned farm house, scrap metal, and discarded furnishings from the bank all add to the vintage charm. They have an eye and a talent for taking what a lot of people would say is useless or worthless or good-for-nothing and re-purposing it and making it into something incredibly beautiful and functional.

So does God. God has a knack for reclaiming those whom the world has abandoned and discarded and making them into something beautiful. Maybe you think you are past your prime, past your usefulness, or that your past is too full of mistakes and failures for you to be used by God. But God can re-purpose you. The God who makes all things new can make you into a new creation; He can give you a fresh start; He can take all those regrets and failures and turn, not just them, but you, into something beautiful.

A few months ago Tenth Avenue North released a song that captured this thought: “You are more than the choices that you made; you are more than the sum of your past mistakes; you are more than the problems you create; you’ve been remade.”

You can be remade by your Creator; reclaimed by the Lover of your soul; and re-purposed by the Author of your life. •

No matter where we come from, in God’s eyes we are all people with gross imperfections, but who He can remake, reclaim, and re-purpose.

CONCLUSION

1. Why are there so many miserable misfits in God’s family? The answer is two-fold:
   1. God chooses misfits because that’s all he’s got to work with.
   2. God chooses misfits because that way he alone gets the credit for anything good we accomplish.
2. Here is the good news. When serial sinners, miserable misfits and those who fail and know it, band together to seek the Lord, God does amazing things. Seas part, the walls come tumbling down, the enemy is routed, and the church rolls on for the glory of God. Amen.
3. PRAYER & INVITATION

God Runs Toward You—Max Lucado

Brighten your day by envisioning God running toward you.

When his patriarchs trusted, God blessed. When Peter preached or Paul wrote or Thomas believed, God smiled. But he never ran.

That verb was reserved for the story of the prodigal son. *“But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”* (Luke 15:20 NKJV)

God runs when he sees the son coming home from the pig trough. When the addict steps out of the alley. When the teen walks away from the party. When the ladder-climbing executive pushes back from the desk, the spiritist turns from idols, the materialist from stuff, the atheist from disbelief, and the elitist from self-promotion…

When prodigals trudge up the path, God can’t sit still. Heaven’s throne room echoes with the sound of slapping sandals and pounding feet, and angels watch in silence as God embraces his child.

You turn toward God, and he runs toward you.