

Week Four: The Gospel & Interpersonal Relationships

Introduction

Now that we've laid a foundation for understanding what the gospel is and how it shapes our identity, we'll spend some time looking at how it shapes the way we live. We will see that it shapes us differently than how the messages of the world shape us. This week we will begin by looking at how the gospel impacts our interpersonal relationships with those in our lives.

The Friend/Enemy Dichotomy

I want you to think back to your days in school with me.

That time may have been a good experience for you or perhaps a bad experience, but I want you to recall how you viewed the people there. If you were anything like me, most of the people you knew fell into one of two categories.

1. Friends
2. Enemies

This is the default story that we tell ourselves when it comes to most of the people we come across in our day-to-day lives, and it has been this way since men have been able to gather in gangs around the fire. "Those who are with me are my friends. Those who are out there are my enemies." Notice how skeptical this story makes us of those who may be outsiders to our particular gang or tribe. Is it any wonder that people have a hard time getting along?

While this might be human nature and the way we've been shaped to view others throughout the course of our lives, we must keep in mind that it is fallen human nature. When man fell from his original estate and status, one of the things that was promised was that humanity would now experience strife, enmity, and desires contrary to one another. This curse wasn't just aimed at Adam and Eve as husband and wife, but at all of humanity. The story of the Bible records this curse playing itself out in the lives of Cain and Abel, Noah and his son Ham, and throughout the rest of the Bible, especially in the story of Israel when the northern and southern kingdoms split and go their separate ways.

Viewing people in the friend/enemy dichotomy leads to destruction. We see it not just in the biblical story, but also in our own culture today in various ways, which we'll discuss more later.

What we're going to propose here is a new story for viewing people that is found only in the Way of Jesus, which is of course rooted in the Gospel. You can think of it as a

redeemed framework for how to view people. It's how we were actually created to view people.

Seeing People As Jesus Sees Them

In the Gospel of John, we find an important story where Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman. For those who are unaware of the significance of this, the story is loaded with meaning and you have to know the background to properly understand the story.

The Samaritans were a rival tribe for the Jewish people. They claimed to be descendants of the northern Israelite tribes who weren't deported to Babylon during the Babylonian exile, and they actually considered themselves to be the guardians and keepers of God's word. They considered Samaritanism to be the true religion of the ancient Israelites and regarded the Jewish religion of Jesus' day (Judaism – Which was the religion of the southern part of the kingdom) to be an altered religion.

They even had their own version of the temple mount at Mount Gerizim, where they still celebrate the Passover today. As you can imagine, there was major tension between the Jewish people in southern Israel and the Samaritan people in northern Israel because the Samaritans regarded their mountain, not the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, to be the holiest place in the world. This is why John notes in his Gospel in Chapter 4 that the woman was a Samaritan woman. She was a woman from a rival clan.

In the text, it says this:

“4 Now when Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John

2 (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples),

3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

4 And it was necessary for him to go through Samaria.

5 Now he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 And Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, because he had become tired from the journey, simply sat down at the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me water to drink.”

8 (For his disciples had gone away into the town so that they could buy food.)

9 So the Samaritan woman said to him, “How do you, being a Jew, ask from me water to drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered and said to her, “If you had known the gift of God and who it is who says to you, ‘Give me water to drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep! From where then do you get this living water?”

12 You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, and his sons and his livestock?”

13 Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

14 But whoever drinks of this water which I will give to him will never be thirsty for eternity, but the water which I will give to him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or come here to draw water!”

16 He said to her, “Go, call your husband and come here.”

17 The woman answered and said to him, “I do not have a husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have said rightly, ‘I do not have a husband,’

18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you have now is not your husband; this you have said truthfully!”

19 The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship.”

21 Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, that an hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews.

23 But an hour is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for indeed the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers.

24 God is spirit, and the ones who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

25 The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (the one called Christ); “whenever that one comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

26 Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.

27 And at this point his disciples came, and they were astonished that he was speaking with a woman. However, no one said, “What do you seek?” or “Why are you speaking with her?”

28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into the town and said to the people,

29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Perhaps this one is the Christ?”

30 They went out from the town and were coming to him.” - John 4:4:-30 LEB

This text is very important for shaping the way we view others. We learn in the text that Jesus didn't view this woman through the friend/enemy dichotomy that the Jewish people of his day did. This is noted even in vv. 9. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes “So the Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How do you, being a Jew, ask from me water to drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?’ (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)”

Rather than viewing her as a friend or enemy, Jesus viewed her as someone who was simply lost and was in need of being rescued. She was one of the lost sheep of Israel that he talked about in Matthew 15:24 who was in need of the care of the Great Shepherd. He didn't just ignore her like the rest of the Jewish people would have. Nor did he leave the well and gossip about her to others saying “Can you believe that Samaritan woman has had this many husbands?” Rather, he made himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant and offered Himself, ultimately, to this woman (Phil. 2:7).

In & Out Of the Covenant

When we allow the Way of Jesus to shape how we view people, we see that it shapes us to see them differently. Rather than becoming clannish or tribal and seeing people through the destructive dichotomy of friend or enemy, it causes us to see them as fellow “image-bearers of God” who are worthy of love because they bear God's image and who are either “in the covenant” or “needs to be in the covenant.”

We must keep in mind the Bible teaches us that no matter how sinful and broken, or different and strange people may be, they are not our real enemies. That means that the people at work, the people at school, the people in your family, and even the people in the church are not your real enemies. We have a real enemy, and they're not it. The Apostle Paul says it this way in his letter to the Ephesians:

“Our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” - Ephesians 6:12 LEB

We must not lose sight of this. If we do, we will split off into clans and tribes and go to war with everyone around us rather than fulfilling the commission Jesus gave us. Our real enemy is not flesh and blood – other people. Rather, our real enemy, according to the Apostle Paul, is the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places that influence people from the unseen realm to continue on in their sin and brokenness.

Recognizing this spiritual reality that our struggle isn't against people, but against the spiritual forces of evil allows us to see people in a completely new way. It

allows us to see them as people in desperate need of rescue, just as Jesus did. It empowers us to pray on their behalf without rejecting them. It also allows us to remain in their lives as a presence of goodness, truth, and beauty that declares and displays the Gospel to them in hopeful expectation that Jesus would liberate them from the darkness.

Discussion Questions

12. How do you typically view people? Be honest. Do you view them as primarily as friends/enemies or as fellow image-bearers of God who are “in the covenant” or “need to be in the covenant?”

13. What are some ways that we see the friend/enemy story playing out in our world today? Think about it at a societal level and even at the church level.

14. Do you struggle with seeing people how Jesus sees them? Be honest and share.

15. What do you think is the root cause for you for viewing people the way Jesus does? Past hurt? Guardedness? Personality? Dislike for people in general?

16. As broken people, we will continue to struggle to see people the way Jesus does. But, we must wage war against our passions, pick up our cross, and follow Jesus. Who is someone in your life that you need to view the way Jesus would?