



A Sweet Summer

1 – Jesus and the Jerks

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I'm super stoked to be with you here at Woodland Hills. Honest to goodness, my wife and I feel like this is kind of our second home away from home. I want to give y'all an update on our ever-growing family. We have three married kids now with their spouses and we have three grandkids, including little Emmett who was just born a few months ago, and we've got another one on the way this year. We are super happy.

Some of you know we live in kind of a classic California beach town, Santa Cruz, California. When people talk about Santa Cruz and California, a lot of the clichés about most of California just aren't true – the hippies, the redwoods, the palm trees, the surfers. It's all true about Santa Cruz, 100%. Ted tells me there are a lot of California transplants now moving to Branson. Do we have any Californians here? Come on, let's welcome them with some Branson warmth. I just want to say, in a language your Californians can understand, dudes, someone needs to stay in California to help me reach the heathens. A little help here.

Lots of people here, actually in the last couple of days, have been asking me, "How do you handle this long lock-down in California? Well, you know where I've personally found comfort... I know you're going to think I'm going to say the Bible and I'm going to get there, but also in the #quarantinefail. For the last year or so, at times, I've felt like I am losing my mind. I'm forgetting things, I'm forgetting people's names. These posts just kind of made me feel like it's not just me. Like I found this person who proudly installed a kitty door after watching a YouTube video, right? A lot of us spent more time doing it yourself this past year. Unfortunately, when he put the door back, he realized the kitty door was on top of the people door. So, this could work for like spider cats or something like that. And many of us, this year, tried home haircuts. Over in California when the barber shops all closed... like this guy who posted, "No joke, my clippers just died." His buzz cut became a Bozo cut or something.

Early on, at least in California, one of the bright sides was that rush hour traffic, which is so terrible for us usually, was suddenly non-existent, right? Because we were all working from home. Yet, somehow, these two commuters still managed to have a fender bender. Only two cars on the road and they still collide. That is a bad day right there.

Then, finally, one mom, like many moms just trying to support her fourth-grade son doing remote school, found that her son had held this essay up to the camera when her back was turned. It said, "It is not going good. My mom's getting stressed out. My mom's getting really confused. We took a break so my mom can figure this stuff out. And I'm telling you, it's not going good." Send help.

I think this year we all got a little on edge. Anybody get a little on edge this last year? Just a little frustrated at times? A recent article I read summarized every single professional study put out over the last year, analyzing our mental health. This isn't a joke. Here's their summary of our current mental health state as a nation. All of the studies reported symptoms of mental trauma such as depression, mood swings, irritability, insomnia, post-traumatic stress, and anger. Here's why this concerns me. We can feel like it's over, right? With lights at the end of the tunnel. But we are still feeling this post-traumatic stress, we're still on edge a little bit more. People have quicker triggers, right?

I just saw an article yesterday. Southwest Airlines said that they are seeing a huge escalation in violence against flight attendants on their flights. People are just on edge. Here's why this concerns me for the church. There are people out there who make their living by getting you to be even more irritable and even more stressed out and even more angry. Why? Because it gets them clicks, it gets them views, it makes them money. So, are you allowing yourself to be provoked? We're already on edge so we have to guard against it.

Last weekend, Ted wrapped up a seven-week series he called *Into the Neighborhood*, based on John 1:14, ***The Word because flesh and dwelt among us***. And you all have been studying the life of Jesus to see exactly how he did that. You looked at Jesus and Mary, Jesus and Nicodemus. Well, I kind of want to extend that one more week this week. I want to look at Jesus and the Jerks. How did Jesus respond to the jerks? To the people who tried to provoke him, to the people who were always needling him, to the people who were trying to set him off, who were trying to get a rise out of him because they were constantly at him. And they are constantly at you.

I just finished a great book called *Christians in the Age of Outrage*. The author Ed Stetzer says this, and I wonder if you agree. *"Our world seems awash in anger, division, and hostility. Outrage is all around. We are living in a day and this is indeed our moment when we need to live like Christ in the midst of shouting, anger, and hatred."* Amen?

Unfortunately, a lot of times, it's us Christians doing the shouting. In his book, Ed opens with a true story. Just a few years ago, a man named Caleb Kaltenbach found himself in the middle of a social media firestorm. You want to know what he did? He just posted a picture that he took that he thought was funny, that's all.

He went shopping at Costco... Do y'all have Costcos out here? They're like Sam's Club, right? Big warehouse stores. He was shopping at his Costco, looking at their book table. They don't have a book department; they just have a big table that they dump all the books on in stacks, right? He noticed that the bibles were stacked where the fiction books were stacked. Oh yeah? Stay tuned. Because he realized that it was a mistake and somebody had mislabeled the bibles, but he thought it was funny (he's a Christian) that the Bibles were stacked next to the Harry Potter section, so he Tweets a picture of the Bible they were selling with a caption that read, "Costco has bibles for sale under the genre of fiction. Hmmm..." Well, a certain provocateur sees this tweet, runs a story on his website with the headline: "Costco – the Bible is fiction." He goes on and runs with it and decides to promote that Caleb Kaltenbach has discovered a conspiracy against Christians by this company.

Millions forward the story, retweet it, post comments like “How dare Costco.” “This is a slap in the face to all Christians.” And inevitably, “Boycott!”

Now this despite the fact that that same day that the original tweet came out, the CEO of Costco, who is a devout believer, publicly apologized. This despite the fact that before the end of that day, the Bibles had been relabeled, moved back to the Bible section. It did not matter. As Ed Stetzer puts it, “The Christian outrage machine had become a runaway train again.”

So, I have a question for you. Is this how we, as Christians, are taught by Jesus to respond to provocation. I want you to think about that. By the way, this whole sermon was written for me. I’m preaching this to me because this is a lesson that I have to learn. But I want to talk to you about resisting an industry that is trying to provoke you and me to outrage and fear every single time you go on the internet or turn on your television. But this about more than that. This is about our very identity as Christians.

I’m convinced that this is the key battleground right now for our faith because Jesus Christ most counter-cultural trait was this: He could not be provoked. At least four times in the gospels, his opponents try to bait Jesus, try to trick him, try to provoke him into a mistake. It couldn’t be done. Not even when they were slapping him and spitting on him and driving nails into his hands. His disciple Peter saw this with his own eyes and wrote, ***“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example...”*** How was Christ an example for us to follow? He suffered for you ***“...that you should follow in His steps.”***

Watch this. ***“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; When he suffered, he made no threats, but instead entrusted himself to Him who judges justly.”*** Jesus could not be provoked. He was in complete control of his own reactions and strategy. He could not be derailed. This wasn’t just some weird personality quirk of Jesus; this was central to who he was and to who he calls us to be as his followers.

This morning, what I want to do is go verse by verse through a part of the sermon that Jesus preaches in Luke 6. If have your Bibles with your, open there. If you have a Bible app, open it to this. This whole sermon Jesus preaches, the entire sermon is about this topic. Let me set this up just a little bit for you. Jesus, according to Luke, delivers this when he going to start his movement. So, he so goes up on a mountain to commune with God and then he comes down and he selects his leaders, his twelve disciples. Then he calls all his followers together and he delivers them an address about how this community that he is forming is to live in order to be distinct from the world.

Let me ask you a question. When is the last time in the Bible that happened? That somebody went on the mountain, came down, starting a new movement, a new people with a message from God? Moses. He comes down from Mt. Sinai, God gives him all these rules... Some of the rules are pretty weird like don’t eat shrimp. Why? Moses explains why so that people will look at you and say, “They’re so different. They’re different from any of the other nations. Why?

So, Jesus comes down and he does the same exact thing and here are the rules. They are much more difficult than don’t eat shrimp. He says here’s how I want you to be so exceptional that people go, “they

are different than anyone." Why? So, what I want to do is read these verses to you all the way through so you can get the power, the impact of this. And then I'm going to go back and comment.

27 "But to you who are listening... Are you listening? Right now? To what Jesus asks? *I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

In these verses, Jesus is calling this new people that he is forming to three completely counter-cultural choices that I must make if I'm going to come into my neighborhood like Jesus. Three simple easy to remember choices.

1) Resist anger and embrace kindness. You have to resist every day, every hour, every step of the way. Resist being provoked into anger and instead embrace kindness. He says, "Love those enemies. Do good, bless, pray."

To really understand just how counter-cultural this was, it's important to understand Jesus' cultural context. You know that Israel, Judea was under Roman rule, but did you know they were the most taxed people in history. Soldiers could demand anything. "Give me your coat." "Give me your house..." Anything. And the people suffered under Roman violence. At times, Roman governors would just slaughter the people just to prove a point.

Of course, that lead to anti-Romans, the zealots who would attack Romans with violence. Their battle cry was "Restore the Kingdom of God." They were very religious people. "Restore Israel like it was under King David." But what this led to, of course, was just cycles of rebellion, retribution, rebellion, retribution, constant bloodshed, an unending fight. As incredible as it seems, even more divisive than our culture today. Yet, Jesus says, "In that context, you be different than the zealot's response to the Romans. If somebody slaps you on one cheek, turn to the other cheek." What does that mean? Have you ever wondered that? In Jesus' culture, people greeted each other by kissing each other on the cheek.

When I go to Switzerland to visit my family... My whole family is in Switzerland. In fact, I have dual citizenship, Swiss and American. That just lost me all of my credibility among some of you here in Branson. But when I go visit my family in Switzerland, which I often do, they kiss each other on the cheek. You kiss everybody on the cheek, even strangers you never met before, that's how you greet one another. And it's not just once, it's not just twice, like the French, it's three times. Now here's the problem. Every single time I go, so far without exception, I forget which cheek goes first. So, I get off the airplane and I see my first relative come to me. I try to analyze their approach vector. Which cheek are they going for? I always get it wrong, and we always bump foreheads.

Here's my point. In Jesus' culture, that's exactly what they did too. Kissing someone on the cheek is a sign of friendship. So, do you see what's happening here? I want to suggest that Jesus is saying even more than just be passive and let them slap you, it's be proactive and offer them your friendship. Jesus is saying make that enemy into a friend.

Here's my question. Are we doing this? As Christians in general, is that our strategy? Are we known for this? These days, when people in our culture at large think of Christians, do they say, "Those Christians, no matter what we throw at them, they always respond with such grace and kindness. Look at how they even serve those that dismiss their faith."? Because this is exactly what Romans in the first and second century did say with astonishment about the Christians and that is, in fact, how the Christians ended up changing the world. So, is this our testimony as a people to our culture. That's food for thought.

Let me give you two stories. Both stories true. In 2015, a man who calls himself a Christian provocateur posted a photo of a red Starbucks holiday cup on his Facebook page and then he wrote, "Starbucks – REMOVED CHRISTMAS from their cups because they hate Jesus." That's his actual quote. Now, what he did not say was that Starbucks had never put the words *Merry Christmas* on their cups. If you look back at the cup history, and I have as you can see on this photograph, they just used vaguely wintery art. And he did not say that that year Starbucks had gift cards that did say Christmas on them. So, nothing he said in his Tweet was actually true. It didn't matter. You might remember there were boycotts, there were sermons, there was a social media firestorm. His original post, at that point in social media history, was the most forwarded post in history. It was forwarded fourteen million times in a month. Mostly by outraged Christians who never – and this is what's crucial – even bothered to check whether or not it was true. So, do you think the Starbucks board thought, *You know, those Christians sure are gracious and thoughtful. Perhaps they have a point.*

2) Second true story. The comedian and actress Sarah Silverman, not a professed follower of Jesus... Her comedy often very not safe for work. Kind of infamously offensive. Much like your Pastor Ted's comedy. No, just kidding about that. But listen to this. In December 2017, Sarah Silverman is viciously attacked on her social media account. It is the worst. I can't even describe it in ways that do it accuracy. It was the worst profanity-laced, anti-Semitic, anti-woman, hateful posts I could possibly imagine. So, her fans instantly jumped in on the comments section and attacked this guy and defend her. They start swearing at this guy. It becomes the big comment section argument, which we've all seen many times.

Then she starts typing. She responds with such astonishing grace and compassion. She asks, “Can I just ask you why you lashed out?” Again, this is all happening in the comment section while everybody is reading.

That man eventually admits that he has mental health struggles. So, then she types, “I encourage you to seek counseling and I’ll even pay for it.” And then she types, “Wait, I just thought of something better. I’m going to set up a crowd sourced account for your mental health counseling so that all my fans who have been adding their angry comments have a chance as a community to pay to help you. Faced with this graciousness, guess what? That man in the comment section apologizes, agrees to get help and she has now brought her fans along on this journey of healing. She demonstrated how to respond when people insult you.

Now, which of these two people behaved with the kind of kindness Jesus told us to show to our enemies? The Christian self-righteously outraged over a red cup, or the non-Jesus following comedian who could have been righteously outraged at somebody’s truly hateful, personal comments. Again, I don’t endorse all of her comedy at all, but the power of that story of course is the same as some of the parables Jesus told like The Good Samaritan where it was the surprising one who actually behaved in a godly way. So, what about you and me?

Every time I talk about this lately, somebody always comes up to me afterwards and wants to say, “Well, Jesus turned over the money changer’s tables in the Temple,” right? Yes, HE did. And he did not say to his disciples, “Come on fellas, let’s turn over some tables!” He did it alone as proof of his authority as Messiah to reform and replace the Temple system. So, unless you think you are the Messiah, be careful about making that one example as your excuse for losing your cool. You see, I’m preaching to myself here, right? Kind of uncomfortable. This is the kind of messages pastors always bring in guest speakers to say.

So, second choice... Second choice I need to actively make to swim upstream in our culture – **Resist tribalism and embrace grace**. Resist tribalism is a big thing in our culture of course where you increasingly view other people as either for you or against you, part of your group or not part of your group, and it can just get smaller and smaller and smaller.

In his book, Ed Stetzer writes, “In the age of outrage, we are perpetually encouraged to view others purely in categories of friend or foe. Are they on my side or against me? Do they like my politics and politicians? Endorse my worldview? Embrace my ideology? This is a product of the flesh. It is selfish, divisive, wrathful, pretending to be righteous, but simply driven by our flesh.”

Now, in case you’re wondering who Ed Stetzer is, he’s the chairman of the Wheaton College Board of Admissions and Evangelism. And you know, broken in working for Billy Graham, he’s about as conservative as they get, but I think he is right on here. And of course, Jesus addresses this exact thing when he says, “If you love those who love you, so what. Even sinners do that. That’s not what I am calling you out to be like. You need to be like a we don’t eat shrimp level of difference than your culture.” You might pat yourself on the back saying, “Hey, I love my wife and my family. I’d die for them.”

That's fine, but Jesus is saying that's not really exceptional. That's not exceptional. And he's calling us to be like WHAT? Exceptional. Love your enemies. When you're willing to love someone who is nothing like you and when you're willing to be merciful as your Father is merciful.

Just a show of hands. Who is grateful that God has been merciful to you that you did not get what you deserved? So, if grace is at the heart of our faith, then people need to see this grace in us, and receive grace from us.

I heard somebody put it this way. The best argument for our faith is the church being the church as described by Jesus. Anybody got a loved one or friend that you'd love see come to Christ? Anybody got somebody in your life you'd love to see come to know Jesus? Maybe you've been searching for just the right book or just the right sermon. I think those can be very persuasive but the best argument for our faith is God's people behaving in that exceptional way.

We saw it at our own church this year. Let me tell you our 2020 story. It's got a twist to it. Santa Cruz, where we're from, is sort of legendarily liberal. It is a place where there is zero social pressure to identify yourself as a Christian. In fact, I've heard many people tell me to my face, knowing I'm a pastor, that what's wrong with the world is that there are Christians. They are what's wrong with the world. Then, as if this past year weren't hard enough already, Santa Cruz County experienced the worst natural disaster in our history this past August. You might have heard about it. A massive forest fire...

It's impossible to imagine the scale of this. It's like you can't imagine the Grand Canyon. Twenty-two percent of our county burned down. Over a fifth of our county is ashes now. A third of the population of our county had to be evacuated. They became instant fire refugees within a space of hours. Hundreds of homes were destroyed.

What we did was we turned the church campus into a fire refugee evacuation center. It was a village to help anybody who was in need. For a number of weeks, we provided shelter, food, water, power, Wi-Fi, support groups, church services. I did baptisms. It was amazing.

One day I walked around just asking people with my iPhone, "So, how are you doing?" Listen to some of their responses.

"It's just wonderful because where I came from, you know, I was just terrorized. I thought my house was going to blow up. This is like a little slice of heaven. It's so nice. People are so generous and kind and loving. It's just great."

"We came in Friday night and we were evacuated from our home and very few things we brought with us. We were able to get electricity and water and people were dropping things off for donations and food. It was just so overwhelming the generosity of the community and the church members. It has just been wonderful. It has really given us peace and just feeling the love and it's such a scary time for everyone."

"Twin Lakes has just been awesome. This is the best campsite we've ever been to in our life. Meals three times a day. I helped in the donation area today. I helped a homeless woman find the right place for her to be where she felt safe. Everything is awesome."

"When I sent a text message to Val, asking if there might be a place in the parking lot for us to park our trailer for a few days, I never in my wildest dreams expected the shear expression of love when I was greeted by a Barry with water and electricity and Val who came around a few minutes later to say, 'Is there anything else you need?' It just melted my heart. I couldn't imagine a more loving place to be in a time when you just felt broken"

I tell you, every time I watch that, I just... It's amazing. But you know the sorts of things you hear... And I happen to know not far from everybody who was there at that evacuation center were followers of Jesus. Many, many people told us it was there first time ever on our church campus. But I know from experience they are a lot closer to being followers of Jesus. I baptized some of those people. And did you hear some of the things they said. "The shear expression of love." "It's like a slice of heaven." Bringing a little of the kingdom of God, a little foretaste of that. The shear expression of love. They are being brought closer to Christ and it's not because we went door to door in their trailer refugee center, arguing with them about their politics.

Our culture tells us to win at all costs. And, sadly, this attitude has infected the church, but Jesus tells us to serve at all costs because that is how we're different. We're different that way. We're different. And that's how we change the world.

3) And that brings me to the third choice. The third choice that we have to actively make to really be like Jesus is to **resist condemnation and embrace forgiveness**. When he says don't judge, don't condemn, forgive, this does not mean don't be discerning. This does not mean just let yourself be conned. This does not mean you don't speak out against evil. This does not mean you don't maintain biblical, orthodox, historically Christian standards. What Jesus is saying really is you don't stop at condemnation. You see, your goal is not condemnation. You don't go, "There I condemn that. My job is done here." Your goal is redemption. What does the Bible say about Jesus? He did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save the world." So, that's our goal. Make it your goal not to destroy your enemy but to redeem your enemy.

Probably, theoretically, we're all there, so what does this actually look like? One of the most inspiring modern-day examples of this is the story of Daryl Davis. I saw a story on him recently. Daryl is a blues professional musician over in Memphis. He has what you might call an interesting hobby. For the last three years, Davis, a black man, has been befriending members of the Ku Klux Klan. Yes, I said befriending as in literally hanging out, inviting them to his house, going to concerts, going to movies. He has seen more than 200 of them, as he puts it, give up their robes and here he is with one of his friends. That's Scott Shepherd on the right, former leader of the Klan. They now work together with churches and other groups to promote this idea. Something tells me he's been a lot more effective at changing people's minds with friendships than thousands of Facebook posts that never change anyone's mind about anything.

He says here's how you win over your enemies. Step one – Send a text message that says, "Hey, what are you doing Friday night?" That's how it starts.

So, what does this look like for you and me. Imagine a pro-life, Bible believing, theologically conservative, long time Jesus follower saying to their atheist, radical, socialist, Marxist, neighbor who probably just moved from California, "Come on over for a bar-be-que, friend." And mean it. Again, this is not glossing over important issues, it's not pretending differences aren't real. It's not compromising biblical principles. It's believing God has a different timetable with everybody. It's believing they are created in the image of God too, so they deserve dignity. It's believing *Jesus Christ told me to do this*.

Question for you. You can tell this is very personal because I've been wrestling with this myself and growing in this myself? And asking this a lot of myself lately. Are the voices I allow to influence me majoring on condemnation or redemption? The pastors I listen to, the bloggers I listen to, the podcasts and talk shows I watch, are they kind and gracious and forgiving or are the first parts of all these sentences "angry, tribal, and condemning?

Again, you do understand that we now live in an economy where every single headline you read, every piece of click bait online has been crafted to provoke you into the first half of all these phrases. So, will you allow yourself to be provoked? If you are resisting this message today, are you willing to ask why? If this is hard for you, maybe, maybe... Because this is what it was for me. Maybe it's because you struggle with a sense of condemnation yourself. For me to incorporate this message into my life, I had to return to an understanding of the grace of God in Christ. That while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me. This all has to be sourced in that in order for us to move into our neighborhoods as Christ did.

The story I opened with, somebody outraged at how the Bibles were stacked on a table at Costco. Remember how somebody wrote, "This is a slap in the face to all Christians." Well, what if it was?

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your love and grace with us. Help us in our lives, in all of our attitudes to stick with the truth, but also have your love just coursing through us. Help us to elevate and radiate the love of Jesus and not to anger a man, which never produces the righteousness of God. Help us to fight evil, not with evil, but with good. I pray that for us here at Woodland Hills and at Twin Lakes Church and congregations all over the country that together we would just join in a great fellowship of love, and astonish the world as we bow down at the feet of our loving savior together.

In the name and the Spirit of Jesus Christ we pray... Amen.