

- ***READ Acts 17:1-8*** As Paul is making his way through Macedonia, he arrives in Thessalonica and according to his habit he goes into the synagogue and begins reasoning with those there concerning the Scriptures. His main focus was on Jesus and His need to be killed and raised so that He might be proclaimed as Lord and Christ. There were many that came to believe in Jesus through the hard work of Paul, and while this was a great win for the kingdom...it didn't come without some negative consequences. Namely, the Jews who were in this place that didn't believe the words of Paul stirred up the crowd to the point that they attacked the house of Jason.
 - This antagonized crowd brings Jason and some other disciples before the authorities of the city and accused them as being those who have *"upset the world."* While the meaning of their accusation can be well understood as is, I do appreciate the wording of other translations where they render this as *"These men who have turned the world upside down."* (ESV/CSB) The crowd sees Jason and these other disciples as people who are disrupting the normal course of how things are supposed to be run. Particularly in this case, the accusation is that they were speaking up of there being another king other than Caesar...that being Jesus. **(Acts 17:7)**
 - We know, of course, that this was precisely what was being taught by men such as Paul, Silas, and other disciples. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had been established as the king of the kingdom of heaven that He had come to earth to establish, and His subjects were going to carry out His desires to go about in every place proclaiming the risen Savior and heavenly King. While this might've made complete sense in the minds of the disciples, the reality is that this type of teaching was totally contrary to what was understood as the reality of this place at this time. To the every day first century citizen of the Roman kingdom, there was only one king and that was Caesar, and anyone who spoke otherwise...well...they stood in danger of suffering for any other such belief.
 - What we realize from this text and many other within the New Testament is that God's people have been called to go against the flow of the world in which we find ourselves in. I'd like for us to have our study this morning based upon this thesis statement of sorts. **God's people are a different kind of people when compared to the people of the world.** We will begin by noticing that this is a common trend among those who call themselves the people of God. We will then consider that this type of living will often bring negative attention upon ourselves. Then we will conclude by looking at what is necessary if we want to live lives that go against the flow of the world, and why this is something that is worthwhile for us to do.
- I. **From the beginning, God's people have been called to be different than those of the world around them.**
- A. **The patriarchs and Israelites were called to be different than the people around them.**
1. When I first think about those who lived in such a way that they stood out from the world that they lived in...I can't help but think firstly of the man Noah. In **Genesis 6:1-8**, we come to find out that the world during the days of Noah was exceedingly wicked and that might actually be an understatement. The Scripture tells us that *"the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* (**Genesis 6:5**) The entire flow of the world was going in the direction of wickedness and evil, but then there was Noah who the Scripture tells us was righteous and blameless man who walked with God. The world was walking to the sinful beat of their own drum, but Noah was going against that flow and walking with God instead.
 2. When the Lord called Israel out of Egypt to fulfill His promises to Abraham, He made it very clear to the nation as a whole that He wanted for them to be a different people from those around them. This can be easily seen when we consider the Law that was given to the Israelites. Within this Law, they had very specific dietary restrictions, clothing guidelines, relational guidelines, familial guidelines, and of course they were given very specific spiritual guidelines that they were to follow. To help facilitate their being a different people, God even

commanded for them to wipe out the nations that surrounded them. Notice what is said in **Deuteronomy 7:1-6** as to why God commanded for this to happen. Notice that God's main focus was on them not being influenced to serve other God's so that Yahweh's anger wouldn't be kindled against them. Israel, as God's chosen people, was to go against the flow of the world and be a different kind of people from what was seen all around them. This didn't change once God moved on to include all people as his chosen people.

B. Time after time, inspired writers note the different kind of people that disciples ought to be.

1. There are many different ways in which we are to be different from the world around us, but I want to focus for just a moment on these three differences:

a) We are to be different in regards to the sin that is within our lives. Twice in Paul's letters to the church in Corinth, we find the Apostle seeking to remind these disciples that they are different from the world and that this demands that they live differently in regards to sin. In **I Corinthians 6:15-20**, Paul urges them to remember that their bodies have been bought with a price and that they were not to live like the world and engage in sexual immorality. Paul later on in the second letter expands this line of thinking into a wider net when he writes about sin in general and how disciples of Jesus shouldn't carry the same weight of sin in their lives as the people of the world do. (**II Corinthians 6:14-18**) Would you notice that he cements the point by drawing their minds to the words that God first said to Israel? God had always demanded that His people abhor and avoid sin even if everyone else in the world is pursuing it. Being different from the world isn't about being different for different's sake...it's about being different for purity and holiness's sake.

b) We are to be different in regards to our understood purpose of life. While the world is has it's eyes set on doing whatever might bring it pleasure and happiness, we would do well to note that God's people are not seek their own pleasure and happiness, but we are to pursue that which pleases God. **Romans 12:1,2** seems to make this point abundantly clear. We are not to just go with the flow of the world and be conformed to them, but we are to be a different and transformed people who only seek to do God's will regardless of what the world is doing all around us.

c) We are to be different in regards to where our hope is founded. Often what we find the world doing all around us is seeking to fulfill the desires of the fleshly body that we live in now in this life. However, as disciples of Jesus we recognize that our hope is in something greater than what this body and life have to offer. As new creatures in Christ (**II Corinthians 5:17**) we are looking towards something far better than what this world has to offer. We are looking forward an eternal dwelling with God. Therefore, we are willing to suffer for a short time in this life because we know that there is something far better waiting for us when this life is over. With this hope in mind, we are so much more willing to go against the flow and be pleasing to God rather than pleasing ourselves or others. (**II Corinthians 5:1-9**)

2. We might not think that these differences between ourselves and those around us are all that significant, but the reality is this way will cause us to truly stand out from those who are around us and not living in this manner. If we are not doing many of the things that the world does... people are going to take notice. If we talk differently, dress differently, and live differently... then people are going to realize that we are just different. Some people won't care or mind all that much, but others will not just take notice...they will let us know that they notice.

II. As a different kind of people, we often attract attention because we "don't fit in" with the world.

A. It wasn't all that difficult for a disciple of Jesus to be spotted in the first century world.

1. Even as Jesus was on trial and preparing to be executed, His disciples and Peter specifically were singled out as being men who had been with Jesus. Some people recognized him for him

being a Galilean, but in **Matthew 26:73** even the way Peter talked gave himself away as having been one who had been with Jesus. This didn't stop once Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven for from this point on Jesus's disciples were easily noticed because they continually spoke of the risen Savior and that there was no salvation that could be found in anyone else. (**Acts 4:10-12**)

2. This different type of teaching and living might have been applauded by Jesus and our heavenly Father, but it often only brought ridicule and difficulty upon first century disciples. Remember what we just read a few minutes ago from **Acts 17**. In that text, disciples were drug before city authorities and reprimanded for speaking concerning the kingship of Jesus. Time and time again throughout the book of Acts we read of the Apostles and other disciples being mocked, ridiculed, dragged before authorities, and even beaten for professing the name of Jesus and calling all other people to repentance. Those disciples were not willing to simply go with the flow of the world, but they were instead very willing to go against the flow and say what needed to be said and live the way they knew they needed to live. That same type of living is what is demanded by us as disciples many years removed from the first.

B. Even in our day and location where Christianity is common place, we often will stand out among the crowd as being people who are just different.

1. When we look at our lives and compare them to the lives of those who don't profess Jesus, it doesn't take too long at all to see just how different we are. When we are not willing to go along with the sin of the world then people are not only going to take notice, but they will often express their displeasure at our unwillingness to go along with them in their way of living. Peter warns all disciples of this being something that is likely to happen in **I Peter 4:1-5**.
2. Peter begins by speaking of the sufferings of Christ and emphasizing to us that if Christ suffered in the flesh then we should be ready to suffer in the flesh in the same way. This is especially true if we used to live in a worldly fashion for people are going to take notice that things have changed within our lives. People of the world will often participate in whatever the desire of the day might be. Peter says it might be sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, or some other sort of abominable idolatries. If we have spent time in our lives engaging in these things then Peter says that we have spent enough time in them and it is now time for a change.
3. However, he warns that we shouldn't be surprised when those who we used to run with turn on us and begin to hate on us because we don't run with them anymore. That's just how it is going to be for those who are new creatures in Christ. We have been changed and that change must be reflected in the way we now live. People will see it, but sometimes they simply won't like it and they'll be very quick to let us know about it. This type of pressure and persecution can be difficult to handle because we all want to be accepted and liked by those around us. However, the reality is that being a Christian means going against the flow of this world that has been given over to Satan and his wickedness. We are to be different, and that means sometimes suffering for those differences. Suffering is never enjoyable, but it comes with the territory.

III. Conviction and courage are demanded if we want to stand up against the world's scrutiny.

A. The life of a disciple comes with its own set of difficulties, some of which is worldly scrutiny.

1. While there are many aspects of life that are bettered when we come to profess faith in Jesus and commit to Him as a disciple, we must recognize that there there will be parts of life that are going to become more difficult when we become Christians. Unfortunately, there are some who try to paint the life of discipleship as being an easy life where there is nothing but blessings, joy, and happiness. They make discipleship seem as if it is the cure to the difficulties of life, but neither Jesus or any inspired writer made such claims in the New Testament.

2. In fact, Jesus told His disciples that their following after Him would demand that they consider that there would be a cost to their discipleship. In **Luke 14:25-33**, Jesus tells those who are coming to Him that they must first consider the cost of what it takes to be His disciple. They must be willing to put Him first before all other people. They must be willing to die to self and live only for Jesus. And they would only do so if they truly believed in Jesus.

B. If we are convinced that Jesus is Lord, then we can take courage knowing that He will be with us.

1. In **Matthew 10:16-22** as Jesus is sending out His disciples on the limited commission to the Jews, He warns them that their going out in His name would only lead to them coming under difficult persecution. He sums it up by saying that they would be hated by all because of His name. Bearing the name of Jesus within their lives and behavior would cause for them to be hated. They would be hated for coming in the name of Jesus and teaching His teachings.
2. This was true for these men as they went out among the Jews, and it is equally as true for us as we go out into all the world bearing His name and sharing His teachings. With this being the case, we would do well to be firmly convinced of our faith in Jesus because we will only be willing to suffer for that which we honestly believe to be true. Only if we are truly convicted of who Jesus is and what He demands will we be willing to be of great courage and stand up for Jesus even in the face of hate from those around us. The Apostles and those early disciples were able to stand up and speak the truth of Jesus with courage because they truly believed that Jesus was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one would be saved apart from Him. This conviction gave them courage, but there were also some other words that Jesus said at the end of **Matthew 10:22**, *"the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."*

IV. If we will embrace God's different standard, then we will receive a different reward in the next life.

A. There will be some who are not able to handle the hatred given to disciples by the world.

1. These people are spoken of by Jesus in the parable of the sower. *"The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away."* (**Matthew 13:20,21**)
2. These people heard the Gospel and made a commitment to Jesus, but they were not willing to fully go where Jesus demands we go because they weren't willing to suffer for His name. They had not counted the cost or they were not willing to fully stand up for Jesus's name.

B. We must be willing to do what these people were not if we want to make the suffering worthwhile.

1. We'll close with the encouraging words that were written to the church in Smyrna in **Revelation 2:8-11**. *"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."*
2. Jesus knew that this group of His people were about to go through extremely difficult days. They were going against the flow of their wicked society, and for it they were going to suffer in various ways. He wanted for them to only remember that their willingness to always do what was right and to remain faithful even in the face of death would result in their being saved in that which truly mattered. Their souls would be saved even if their bodies perished.

Those same encouraging words are available to us as we strive to go against the flow of our own wicked society. If we will be committed to being different from those who walk in sin then we will receive the great reward of heaven when this life is over. May God help us as we give every effort to live only for Him in this life. May He strengthen us as we walk only in the ways of our true King, Jesus the Christ.