

Ugly Jesus #4
Ugly Company
Matthew 9:9-13
7/31/16

- How many here have ever taken the subway in a major city? It can be pretty intimidating. It can even be a bit scary at times. I used to ride the “L” in Chicago. They call it the “L” because once you get out of downtown, it elevates and the train rides above the street. Downtown, it’s a subway that runs underground.
 - o I met the most interesting people on the subway. I don’t know what it is. I have the kind of face or demeanor or something that just says, “Come and talk to me. Pour out your crazy life to me. I’ll listen.” Maybe it’s because I smile too much. Maybe it’s because I make eye contact. I don’t know. This became a bit concerning when riding the subway because all kinds of people ride the subway.
 - o Some of them aren’t very stable. Some of them are the kinds of people we would like to avoid. Some of them aren’t the kinds of people you want to be drawn to you to have a conversation with you. Some might even seem scary. If you’ve ridden a subway, you know what I’m talking about.

- Yet, maybe the subway, among all the different people, even people that we might think are crazy, is exactly where we should be drawn to be because maybe that’s where Jesus, if he were here now, would be drawn to be. Let’s watch this video.
 - o **Watch video “Jesus Rides the Subway.”**

- It’s a thought-provoking song, right? Where would Jesus most likely hang out if he were here now?
 - o We’ve been in this series for four weeks now called Ugly Jesus. This song talks about how Jesus relates to the people our society might call ugly or even crazy. In fact, Jesus relates more to the ugly than the pretty.
 - o In his day, he was counted with the low class of people and he spent most of his time with the lower classes of people to bring them hope. The elite of society, the Jewish leaders, saw Jesus as ugly right along with all the other crazies and people beneath them.

- Nobody knew this quality about Jesus better than Matthew. Today, we’re going to read one of the most heartwarming and touching scenes in the whole Bible. It’s when Matthew gives his personal testimony.
 - o Matthew, as we know, wrote the book of Matthew – the first book of the New Testament in the Bible. Now, in chapters 1-8, Matthew tells about all the amazing things Christ did for others.
 - o But then, in chapter 9, he has the honor of telling all the world for all of history what Christ did for him personally. It was a time when Jesus wasn’t on a subway,

- but he was walking a normal street among normal people one day and met Matthew who all the normal people thought was ugly.
- Let's read Matthew testimony of how he met Jesus, the encounter that would change his life from ugly to beauty. Read **Matthew 9:9-13**
- In this passage, we find out just how different Jesus is. We find out why Jesus would ride the subway.
 - He would ride the subway first because Jesus chose to run with the ugly crowd.
 - Matthew was an ugly guy for Jesus to call as a disciple. Now, we don't know what he looked like. He might not have been ugly on the outside. But, he was considered ugly on the inside. Matthew was probably hated by absolutely everyone except other tax collectors and sinners.
 - There was some good reason for the hatred. Tax collectors were thieves, liars and traitors of their own people. Tax collectors were Jews who turned on their own people and their country to serve the occupying Roman government. They received minimal payment from the Roman government, but were told they could charge extra for the taxes and pocket the extra.
 - So, they extorted money from their own people while working for a foreign government that controlled their country! Yes, they were certainly hated!
 - But, Jesus sees Matthew and decides this guy is exactly who he wants as his disciple. And, probably much to the surprise of many, Matthew accepts the position. Then, Matthew wants Jesus to meet his friends. Matthew is a great evangelist.
 - So, he invites Jesus to his home for dinner and invites his friends. But, his friends consist of people like him – other people who were hated and ostracized from the normal people and especially the higher classes of society.
 - Now, I think I've shared before that in the culture of that day that to have dinner with someone in their home was a way of saying they are like family, you accept them completely. If you were religious, you didn't hang out and have dinner in the home of just anyone because it would give a bad reflection on you.
 - But, what does Jesus do? Jesus just goes up in Matthew's house and hangs with the whole bunch of other tax collectors and hated people. In effect, he was saying that he accepted them just as they were.
 - Jesus was just so different than most of His followers then and now. He didn't avoid sinners; He sought them out. Thieves, liars, prostitutes – He socialized with them. He became friends with them.
 - He didn't just "preach at them." He treated them with respect and acceptance. He made eye contact with them. He smiled at them. So they felt comfortable around Him and poured out their lives to him.
 - And, he defended them. He defended the ugly. I think the NLT version that we read from probably gives the best wording for what the Pharisees said about the crew that was at

Matthew's house. Other versions say they called them "sinners." The NLT says the Pharisees called them "scum." I think that's probably most accurate.

- As a side note, did you see who the Pharisees talked to about Jesus' choice of company? They didn't go to Jesus. They went to the disciples. Talk about a bunch of passive aggressive little men! They don't confront Jesus directly. Instead, they go to the disciples and say it loud enough for everyone to hear.
 - Can you just imagine how Matthew felt as the high and mighty of that day ridiculed the Son of God for just hanging with Matthew and his crew? All of the feelings of rejection and humiliation probably rushed over him. He probably wondered if Jesus would leave, influenced by the religious leaders.
 - And so, he waits, holding his breath to see what the response is going to be. He knew Jesus heard them. Everyone heard them. What would Jesus say or do?
- Jesus blows everyone away by basically saying, "THIS MAN is why I'm here! I didn't come to impress you! You don't even know the Scripture for Scripture says I want my people to show mercy, not just offer sacrifices. You just think you are righteous, but really you are the scum because you have deceived yourself into thinking you are better than anyone!"
- And, in that instant, the ugliness that Matthew felt for years and year began to fade. This man, Jesus – the best man he had ever met in his whole life - came for him and desired a relationship with him. WOW – CRAZY!
- Jesus's response to the Pharisees shows another reason why Jesus would ride the subway today. That is that Jesus cared more about people than positions.
- Here are the Pharisees. These were guys with big titles and big influence all around the town. When they spoke, you better listen because they had some kind of direct access to God.
 - Really? Because Jesus, the Son of God, didn't even seem to notice them. He walked along the street and didn't enter into conversations with them. The only time he seemed to talk to them was when they tried to question him or trick him or initiate a confrontation.
- That's because Jesus is never impressed with the outer things. Titles, bank accounts, positions, image mean nothing to him. There are people today who will fall all over themselves in the presence of someone of social standing, but look right past those in need.
- We throw around people's positions and degrees as if that ups the amount of respect they deserve. We are impressed with people who are wealthy. And, if we personally know someone like that, then people should be impressed with us. "I know this lawyer who is really rich, I mean, you should see his house..."
 - Who cares about all that stuff? Not Jesus. Being impressed with that stuff is nothing like Jesus.
 - Instead, he always sees the REAL YOU! Because he was able to cut through all of the positions and titles and status, that is probably why Jesus was so hated by those with the positions, titles and status. Jesus was ugly to the establishment because

He never noticed their positions. He only noticed their hearts and there was not much impressive to be found in their hearts.

- Jesus cares more about people than positions. He sees beyond status, whether it's a low status or a high one. The very first verse we read shows us that. Verse 9 says that Jesus saw a man. It doesn't say that Jesus saw a tax collector. Instead, he saw a man.
 - o A "tax collector" was the most hated man in the community. No one would ever call him by name or even see him as a human being. He was just a "tax collector." But, Matthew is careful to tell us that Jesus "saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth."
 - o Jesus saw Matthew as the man he had created and formed. He did not see Matthew in terms of his life decisions, but in terms of his life possibilities that Jesus could give to him.

- In the same way, Jesus sees you as He made you, not as the sum of your mistakes. Jesus looks past the labels. What have others labeled you? What label has your past and your past decisions put on you? What label have you put on yourself?
 - o You are not limited to those labels by Jesus! Jesus looks past all of that to the REAL YOU - the you He created, formed and destined you to be.
 - o He didn't plan your life to be stuck by labels to define you. He planned your life to be defined by hope, peace, joy, fullness and greatness. The greatest desire of Christ is to restore you to the life of greatness in him that he planned for you.

- How do we know that? Because that truth is found over and over in the pages of Scripture. The Lord delights most in taking people who no one saw anything in and calling them by name and restoring them to the life he designed and created for them.
 - o Isaiah 43:1 gives us an example when it says, *"But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine."*
 - o God called his people by name, not by title and not even because they deserved it. But, he called them because he loved them and wanted to restore them.
 - o If you remember, from the line of Jacob came the nation of Israel. The name "Jacob" literally means liar or deceiver. And, if we know the story of Jacob, that is exactly what he was. But, that wasn't ultimately what God made him for. God made him to be the father of the nation of Israel.
 - o So, God restored him from being liar Jacob and changed his name to Israel. Israel means "Prince of God."

- Listen, whatever label you have from your past, from others or even from yourself that you have been living with and it has been limiting you to know the life of greatness that God has for you, know that it is not of God! That is from the pit and the enemy!
 - o Maybe your labels have been failure, sinner, slacker, mentally ill, less than, not enough, unworthy, unfaithful, addict and the list could go on.

- But, Jesus is saying “That is not the label I have for you! The only label I have for you is prince of God and princess of God. You are my son. You are my daughter! That is the only way I see you. See yourself that way so you can be restored completely to be mine!”
- Through riding the subway to restore people, Jesus bypassed prestige to get to pain. Only people who are in pain need restoration. If you are living pain-free, you don’t restoration. You are already there, right?
 - So, we are in one of two places. We are either in pain, and in need of restoration. Or, we have been restored and we need to seek out those in pain, like Jesus did, to show them that restoration is possible.
- But, can we just be honest today? Most people tend to avoid those who are in trouble.
 - I mean, our lives are so busy and we have our own agendas with to-do lists that keep growing. There are things we have to get accomplished, people we need to see.
 - Engaging with troubled people and people in pain sucks up a bunch of time. They are just a drain to us. They are often mad at the world, bitter at life, and they will drain your joy if you hang around them.
 - So, rather than engage with people like that, we tend to avoid them. Isn’t that the truth? And, we all probably know someone like that. Someone who will suck the time from us complaining about their crisis filled life. Someone who when we see them at Shaw’s or Stop n Shop, we will act like we didn’t see them and deliberately walk in a different direction while we hope to high heaven they didn’t see us! Are you honest enough to say you have done that?
- But, Jesus didn’t do that. He engaged. He went straight to the pain and drew it out. He went to people who were hiding their pain and drew it out. Jesus loves us too much to let us live in pain whether we are airing that pain out to the world in ugly rants or hiding that pain in isolation and loneliness.
 - This is what he did with Matthew and another man, Zacchaeus, who was also a tax collector. We’re going to look at Zack’s story in a little bit. Jesus knew they were miserable and that they were not fulfilling their life purpose.
 - Others looked at the lives of Matthew and Zacchaeus and thought they must be happy with themselves. But, deep down they weren’t. How could they be? They had to be miserable. They were completely cut off from the community for their choice to be tax collectors which meant that they had no contact with friends or family and they were banned from temple worship.
 - Sure, they had plenty of money/possessions, but they were empty inside.
- Jesus saw that. Jesus always sees what we are trying so hard to hide. We might be hiding our misery through our anger. We might be hiding our pain through aggressive or confrontational behavior. We might be hiding our misery through humor or just by

secluding ourselves. But, we can never hide pain from Jesus. Matthew and Zacchaeus couldn't hide either.

- And, Jesus had no anger at their criminal behavior. He had no condemnation of their ill-gotten possessions/wealth.
 - He just saw their pain and reached out to them. Jesus bypassed all of the prestigious religious leaders to go right to these men in pain.
 - He sees your pain and wants to do the same.
- Remember the Zack story? It's all summed up in the little song that you learned if you've been around the church long enough and are at least as old as me. **Let's sing it together** with the hand motions!
- So, Zacchaeus was a short guy and he was also a tax collector. Jesus came to his town one day. The streets were crowded. No one was going to let him in to see Jesus. They hated him. They probably pushed the guy to the back on purpose.
 - So, Zacchaeus climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. But, something happened that he didn't expect. Jesus saw him. Jesus saw his pain. Jesus saw his misery.
 - And, Jesus just calls out to him as a friend.
- Now, when I learned that song in Sunday School and Jr. Church, we sang the line about Jesus calling out to Zack by saying it almost accusatory or chastising. "Zacchaeus! You come down!"
- But, I don't think that's how Jesus said it at all. I think it was more like "Hey Zack! What's up? Come down and sit with me. I want to go to your house! I want to know you and you know me."
 - Jesus was offering unconditional acceptance, just like he had with Matthew.
- He passes prestige to get to pain because the whole purpose of Jesus coming was to seek and save the lost. People in deep emotional pain are typically the most lost. Another way to put it is that they are sick.
- When the Pharisees questioned Jesus' choice to choose Matthew as a disciple and hang out with scummy sinners, Jesus said in verse 12, "*Healthy people don't need a doctor – sick people do.*"
 - Jesus understands that sometimes our own sin sickens us. Sometimes we are sick on the inside and we know it. Looking at our lives can even make us sick to our stomachs. We are so disappointed in how far we have gone. We don't feel like we deserve a 2nd chance.
- BUT JESUS CAME FOR YOU! You feel like your sin is just too ugly. Your pain is too deep. Your life is too far gone. You're the outcast and don't belong, how could Jesus want to be around you?
- But Jesus actually came specifically to take your ugly and put it on him. Don't let pain keep in you in ugly when Jesus wants to give you beauty! He wants you to let go of the pain and embrace the peace he has for you. Embrace the acceptance he is extending to you. Embrace the healing he has for you.

- Finally, as Jesus rides the subway looking for pain, he is able to heal it and accept those in pain because Jesus forgets your past and remembers your potential.
 - o One of the things that makes Jesus so ugly to the unbelieving world is that He just doesn't fit the mold of all other religions of the world. "god" to other religions is completely different:
 1. To the Egyptian, god is immortality.
 2. To the Hebrew, he is righteous law.
 3. To the Hindu, he is truth and bliss.
 4. To the Buddhist, god is the force of life in the universe.
 5. To the ancient Greek, he is wisdom.
 6. To the Muslim, god is authority.
 7. To the humanist, god is the power of human potential.
 8. To the scientist, he is natural law.

- But to the followers of the one true living God...1 John 4:8 says - God is love. And, 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that - Love keeps no record of wrongs.
 - o Every other person and religion in the world defines you by what you do and your past. Whether good or bad, that's all people can see of you.
 - o We determine people's future by their past. There is a saying that "The best way to predict the future is past patterns."
 - o So, once a cheater, always a cheater. Once a liar, always a liar. Once an addict, always an addict. Once a thief, you better hide your valuables when they are around.
 - o That's a very human viewpoint. But Jesus doesn't see it like that. He predicts your future by the seeds of greatness He planted in you before He formed you in your mother's womb.

- Others might always be thinking about where you've been. But, Jesus is always thinking about where you're going. And that's the lens through which God sees you today.
 - o He's not seeing you in a snapshot of your worst moment. He's looking down from heaven today into this room and he's looking at the REAL YOU. The "you" He created you to be.
 - o He still believes that you're going to become that glorious son/daughter very soon. That you are going to do the great things that he planned for you before time began!

- Just think of Matthew: This lying, conniving, terrible man – what good could ever come of him? Well, if you open your bible to the first page of the NT, your Bible might just say: "The Gospel according to SAINT MATTHEW."
 - o When he first met Jesus, he was "tax collector" Matthew. Today he's "Saint" Matthew!!! Jesus saw him as a saint! Tax collector Matthew went on to share

Jesus with all of his friends and then to share the gospel of Jesus to literally other parts of the world.

- If Jesus could do that kind of transformation for a man like Matthew, what could Jesus do in your life? What could he do in the life of others in our community who are in pain, who are riding the subway of life and they don't know it, but they need an encounter with Jesus. You could be that encounter. You could be the transformed Matthew that introduces people to Jesus.

- I have some friends who go to a church in Cincinnati, OH called the Vineyard Church. There are Vineyard churches all over the nation. They are usually very contemporary churches who emphasize community and outreach.
 - Each year, this church does a series of Matthew Parties. These are parties where they go into certain areas of the city, typically more high risk, inner city neighborhood and just have a party for the community.
 - Inspired by Matthew taking Jesus to meet his friends, friends who the elite called scum, this church wants to take Jesus to people who might be in the most pain, who might have the least position or prestige, but who might just be ready to meet with Jesus.

- We have the opportunity to do some Matthew parties. In fact, we are going to do one on August 27th but we're not calling it a Matthew Party, we're calling it a Community Cookout at Champagne Heights.
 - It is our opportunity to show some folk who may have been told they are nothing, they will never amount to anything, they will never get beyond where they are. But, we can say that those voices don't have the final say! Jesus does! Jesus knows their names! He sees men and women who were designed and created for greatness!
 - Jesus sees them for who they really are, not who society says they are. Jesus sees their pain and wants to turn their pain into peace and he wants them to stop focusing on their past and instead focus on the potential they have through Jesus Christ.
 - And, we have the opportunity to not just do something good, not to make ourselves feel good, but to share about a Jesus who is not afraid to enter into the pain of people in order to bring them to life. We can only share Jesus that way if we, too, are willing to enter into the pain of people in a tangible way. If we're willing to ride the subway with Jesus.

- This morning, if you are already on the subway, allow Jesus into you subway car.
 - He sees your pain, all you've been through. He sees your potential; all that He has in store for you and all the plans he has for you. He sees the REAL YOU. He got on the subway just for you.