



Broken: Good News for Tough Times

All-Inclusive Grace

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Romans 9:1-5
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The Scripture

We've got some rags to riches stories to hear, but remember those aren't always happy endings. Like when someone wins the lottery and loses everything else... like their dignity, their morals, and their common sense. I think our friend Paul that we've been studying had been a little like that. Remember, the Israelites were a people with no land or power. They were a people left out. A people who didn't belong. We hear about their enslavement, homelessness, and struggles throughout the Hebrew Bible. Paul had been a lowly Jew given Roman citizenship. I think he got a little drunk on the power for a while. Once he saw the light, he wept for his Israelite siblings who continued to be drunk on power. That the story we hear today. Paul writes to the church in Rome... the center of that power. It's like writing to the all the Christians in Washington DC. He said to them...

Romans 9:1-5

"I'm speaking the truth in Christ—I'm not lying, as my conscience assures me with the Holy Spirit: have great sadness and constant pain in my heart. I wish I could be cursed, cut off from Christ if it helped my brothers and sisters, who are my flesh-and-blood relatives. They are Israelites. The adoption as God's children, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises belong to them. The Jewish ancestors are theirs, and the Christ descended from those ancestors."

Paul's Background

Paul had been a believer in exclusivity. Keeping people out. He held the coats of those who stoned Christians to death, but now he's starting to realize... He sees his own people lording power over others, cooperating with the unjust ways of the Roman government... his people, a people once left out, now working to leave others out... his people... the people who were chosen and given all of the spiritual advantages.

We Understand

Reading it I heard my own voice... those are my words too. I wonder if you can hear yourself saying this... "I have great sadness and constant pain in my heart. I wish I could be cursed, cut off from Christ if it helped my brothers and sisters, who are my flesh-and-blood relatives. They are Christians..."

I have constant pain in my heart over Christians working to leave others out and lording power over others and even using a powerful government to do so.

Christians working to dismantle public education and replace it with programs that benefit the wealthy and leave out the poor.

Christians working to dismantle protections for trans* people in the name of “religious freedom,” which hurts trans women of color the most.

Christians working to dismantle environmental protections that disproportionately affect communities of color, but doom us all.

Paul knew the stories of when his people had been the ones left out. Now his people were doing the leaving out. I know the stories of when my people were left out too... and now in our time, we experience Paul’s sadness as Christians work to leave out Muslims, Jews, anyone who isn’t a Christian. Not to mention the poor, the sick, people of color... the list goes on...

Christians... wearing the name of Christ, but oh how far they have strayed from Christ’s message of drawing the circle of grace wider, not narrower, wider... Don’t they remember the stories Jesus told? I can think of three of Jesus’ parables I’d like to tell them right now.

Three Parables

The first one is the parable of the Good Samaritan? Samaritans... those dirty gentiles that no self-respecting Jew would ever come near. And Jesus says a Jewish man is lying on the side of the road, left for dead by some robbers. A temple leader goes by and does nothing. A temple musician goes by and does nothing. Then a dirty, no good Samaritan comes by and carries the Jewish guy to a hospital and pays for his healthcare. How are we to treat people of other religions and races, then?

Another one I’d like to tell them is the parable of the lost sheep. It’s not the safe, sound and secure sheep who can fend for himself for whom the shepherd goes above and beyond... it’s for the lost sheep, for the left out sheep, that the good shepherd leaves the other 99 behind. How are we to treat those who are struggling or on the margins?

The last one I’d tell them is the parable of the valuable coins. A man went away and left his valuable coins in the care of 3 different servants. When he returned, two of the servants had gone out and done business with the coins... they invested and traded and multiplied their boss’ money. But one servant was afraid of his boss and worried he might lose the coin, so he dug a hole and buried the coin underground, doing nothing with it. When the boss saw what his three servants had done, he was pleased with the two that had gone out and done business with his money and trusted them with more, but when the servant who buried the coin said, “see I did nothing with your coin to make sure I didn’t lose it!” The boss said, “Give me that coin. I’m giving it to somebody who’ll do something with it.”

What could the valuable coins represent in Jesus’ story? The most valuable thing we’ve got is the word of God. The teachings. The big ideas of love and grace. God wants people who will do business with these holy ideas, not use Jesus’ name to do exclude whomever they want. God needs people who won’t just walk around proud to call themselves Christians... God needs people who will take the currency of the kin-dom and invest it somewhere.

God's Cosmic Goal

God has a cosmic goal of healing and wholeness for all of creation. It's not a goal just for white, straight, Christian men. It's not just for the wealthy. It's not a goal just for Americans. It's not even just for humans. God's intention for wholeness is cosmic.

We work to categorize who God favors, chooses, and uses... but God's grace defies any definitions or labels we can come up with. God is not bound by our rules. God will use anyone and anything to accomplish the work of love in the world... even you.

You're In

Who has tried to write you out of God's cosmic story? Who has told you that you aren't a part of it? Maybe because you don't know all the religious lingo... Because you were born into the wrong family, the wrong religion... you were born black, you were born gay, you were born poor.

Who are those people kidding? God's got big work that needs to get done. Creation is not whole. We do not understand how deeply interconnected we are. We do not treat each other and creation with respect. There is so much to do, and God doesn't care who gets it done. God would absolutely LOVE for it to be you... you, just as you are. With the family you have... the body you have... the religion you have... the resources you have... you.

Just like Paul saw in his day... God will find somebody to do the work. It may not turn out to be the people we thought it would be. Remember, Jesus didn't care if you were a fisherman, a tax collector, a Jew, a gentile, a woman, or a child. Jesus wanted to know if you wanted to live the life of giving and receiving grace, of making the broken whole. If that's you, let me tell you some good news... the stories of exclusion you've been told aren't true, God's story of inclusion is cosmic, and you're in. God is at work, bringing wholeness back to all of creation, and *you* are included. Thanks be to God.