

Summary: Hurt by judgment? Jesus didn't come to condemn you—he came to invite you into real love and freedom.

Main Ideas:

Religion often makes people judgmental

Judgment doesn't push people toward God—it pushes them away.

Jesus didn't change people through condemnation—He changed them through relationship.

Jesus accepts the people religion rejects.

Jesus identifies with the exact kind of people others spend their lives avoiding.

At the root of judgmentalism is a feeling of superiority.

Sin is breaking the law of love.

God hates sin because he loves you.

Jesus didn't come to judge you. He came to restore you.

It's always better to be judged for who you accept than for who you reject.

Invitation:

Every day this week, write down and /or recite... I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifice.

Then ask, "What does that look like for me today?"

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever felt judged by someone because of your appearance, beliefs, or background? What impact did that have on you?
2. Read Matthew 9:9–13 together. What stands out or surprises you about Jesus' interaction with Matthew?
3. Why do you think Jesus chose someone like Matthew to be one of his closest followers?
4. This week, how can you intentionally choose mercy over judgment in one specific relationship, situation, or conversation?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

WE: Ever felt judged? Feels good right?

Judgment hurts. Maybe you've felt it from a stranger or, harder still, from someone you love.

Let's go a little closer to home... Ever been judged by a church or religious person?

- Heard some real horror stories.

People look down on you b/c they belong to the "good ones" and somehow you just don't measure up...

- Don't look, act, talk, or vote like they think you're supposed to.

And what's so sad... is if you asked some regular non-church people what comes to mind when they hear the word "Christian," a majority would say something along the lines of "judgmental."

Why are the people who claim to know Jesus the best the people who are best known for judging other people?

- Short answer? Religion
- Religion often makes people judgmental

Now when I say "religion," I'm not talking about faith in Jesus or believing in God.

I'm talking about a system (written or unwritten) that says: "Follow the rules, look the part, earn your spot, and maybe, eventually, you'll be good enough for God."

That kind of religion divides people into insiders and outsiders.

- Us Vs. Them
- We're in... you're out.

It builds fences instead of tables and confuses rule-following for the full life Jesus invites us to experience.

And when people confuse that with Jesus, no wonder they walk away or never explore who he is in the first place.

Judgment doesn't push people toward God—it pushes them away.

Self-righteous judgment might be what people hear from their religious relatives or churchy friends, but it's never the voice of Jesus.

Jesus never said 'clean up first.' He said, 'Come, follow me.'

- An invitation that is free to all who are willing to accept.

And the same things people reject about "Christianity," ... Jesus also rejected.

- Especially judgmentalism

Jesus didn't change people through condemnation—He changed them through relationship.

So, instead of judging from a distance, what does Jesus actually do when he stands face-to-face with someone religion has already given up on?

- Let's find out

GOD: Around 60 AD, a man named Matthew wrote down what he saw and experienced as one of Jesus' main followers... and in it, he recorded how he first met Jesus.

When Matthew met Jesus, Jesus was starting to have some run-ins with the Jewish religious leaders.

He's been forgiving sins

- Accepting people like Simon. (Last week)
- Healing the "untouchables" of society; lepers no one wanted to get close to

- He even healed the servant of a leader of the occupying Roman forces

But with Matthew, he takes it a step further... and redefines what everyone, including Matthew, believed about God.

Matthew 9:9a (NLT) *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth.*

For us, we're like... "Why stop there? Get on with the story."

But for the 1st-century readers... this sentence is packed with cultural/historical/personal tension.

- They instinctively knew something was about to go down.

Matthew is a tax collector... This is where everyone boos and hisses.

Tax collectors:

- Jews who collected taxes from their own people on behalf of their Roman oppressors.
- They got rich by extorting their own people—charging more than required and pocketing the extra.
- HATED. Weren't allowed in synagogues or to participate in religion at all.
- They had sold out... cut off from their community and even their God, all to get rich under Rome.

So Jesus sees this traitor doing his traitorous things... and everyone there and everyone first reading this is probably thinking of their own corrupt tax collector down the road...

- And they are thinking... "All right; this is it! Jesus is going to let him have it.
- He's either going to condemn him and the Roman oppressors or at least tell him to repent and stop his evil ways."

Instead of rebuking him, Jesus does something nobody saw coming... not the crowd, not the disciples... definitely not Matthew.

Matthew 9:9b (NLT) *"Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.*

WHAT!? - This traitor is being called to be one of Jesus' main guys?

- What that means... at only one moment in history did God himself become human and show the world who he really is.
- It is THE most important few years in the history of humanity.
- Jesus could only choose so many people to help lead his movement.
- And he chooses this traitor.

This moment destroys the idea that we have to be "good enough" for God.

You can't earn God's love by being religious.

- But you can accept his love and his invitation to follow him.

Think about it... What had Matthew done to deserve this invitation? Nothing.

Pay attention to what Jesus DIDN'T say here...

- Jesus didn't say clean up, repent, and then you can try this out.
- Didn't make Matthew swear to switch allegiances first
- Didn't air the many (legitimate) grievances the people had against him
- Or make him promise to give back all the extra money he took to make things right

Matthew hadn't even offered to DO or CHANGE anything at all... he was just working his day job.

But... Jesus accepts the people religion rejects.

Let's pause here for a second... because it's the Bible, and it's easy to just nod along without really feeling the depth of what's going on here.

- How comfortable are you with the fact that Jesus accepted and chose Matthew without ever pointing out his sin or telling him to change his lifestyle first?

Now, just when we think Jesus has proven his point... he takes it even further.

And this is where the story either gets better... or worse... depending on how comfortable you are with Jesus' relentless inclusivity.

Matthew 9:10 (NLT) *Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors (now there's more of them!) and other disreputable sinners.*

Because Jesus accepted Matthew, Matthew couldn't keep him to himself.

- He threw a dinner party... invited Jesus and every outsider he knew.

Disreputable Sinners: People religion had pushed out.

- Maybe because of their work.
- Maybe because of their reputation.
- Maybe they just stopped pretending.
- But everyone agreed... they didn't belong.

In that culture, to eat with someone was to say, "You belong with me." "These are my people"

- For Jesus, eating with "sinners" wasn't just a casual act; it was a public statement.
- "I'm not embarrassed by you. I **WANT** to be seen with you."

Jesus identifies with the exact kind of people others spend their lives avoiding.

The other disciples might be a little uncomfortable, but if Jesus is good with it they are too.

So, laughter fills the room. Jesus' acceptance/love is on full display.

- But not everyone is celebrating

For some reason... Jesus' acceptance always offends someone... and the goody-goody religious crowd is over it.

Matthew 9:11 (NLT) *When the Pharisees saw this, they asked the disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?”*

Well, that’s subtle!

Pharisees: Religious elite.

- In their devotion to God, they became the ultimate rule followers
- Even added rules to the originals just to make sure they didn’t break the originals.

But unfortunately, they fell into the trap we warned about at the beginning... *Religion often makes people judgmental*

In their minds, they were obviously the ones close to God.

- So if a teacher like Jesus was going to be with anyone, it should be them.

They’re shocked by who Jesus is identifying with—and they’re furious... Why?

At the root of judgmentalism is a feeling of superiority.

- They did the religious stuff, so they should be rewarded.
- They’ve sacrificed, so they have earned and deserve God’s blessing and favor

So when they see people who aren’t trying as hard as they are... being accepted and treated with honor, it makes them angry... it’s unfair!

This attitude turns their religion bitter. ‘If I had to work this hard to be accepted, then everyone else should too.’

- Ever meet a bitter and angry religious person?
- That’s why.

But as we’ll see over and over in this series... God’s love isn’t for the worthy.

- It’s not something you earn. It’s something God already decided to give you.

Next part... one of my favorites...

Think back on that time you were judged... You wish you had had a comeback? Jesus has you covered...

The Pharisees had said this loud enough for others to hear... including Jesus.

And it never works out well for you when you call Jesus’ friends “scum.”

Matthew 9:12-13 (NLT) *When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor- sick people do.” Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”*

“Go and learn”- Incredibly insulting.

- What a teacher would say to a young student.

These men who prided themselves on their knowledge of the Jewish scriptures are being told to go relearn what they thought they were experts on.

Quotes one of the Jewish prophets to them... basically says: You've memorized the words... but you've missed the meaning.

The Pharisees believed their rule-keeping made them righteous and better than everyone else.

But Jesus saw through their masks and knew their judgmental hearts were far from God.

So Jesus was telling and showing them... God doesn't care about how religious you are or the sacrifices you make to convince yourself and others that you are special to God.

- God cares about how you treat the people he made.
- Are you merciful, empathizing, helping, forgiving, loving, accepting?

They weren't.

- They were actually doing the very opposite!
- They condemned the people Jesus loved, and they were also condemning him!

See. Jesus didn't come to make us "better rule-followers."

- He came to restore what religion couldn't—our relationship with God.

And he says... I didn't come for those who think they have it all together... I came for the sinners.

Ugh Sin... our favorite word, right?

- Hold on, give me a second.
- You're safe...

Sin is breaking the law of love. "What I want is more important than you."

Not a mistake... don't make mistakes on purpose.

Two options

- Admit it OR compare yourself to others to feel better.
- "Yeah sure, I've done some stuff... but I'm not as bad as THEM."

That's what religion tricks us into believing: If you're good enough, you win. If you mess up too much, you lose.

But that's not how Jesus works.

- It's not about keeping score
- It's about love and forgiveness... And we all need it

Listen... God hates sin b/c it kills/destroys/separates.

- God hates sin because he loves you.

Sin is like chains put on us by an invading and occupying force.

- We are enslaved POWs and can't do anything to break free.

So Jesus invaded... showed the power of true love... let evil/sin do its worst and then rose again defeating their power...

- Showing that he actually has the authority/power to end sin and its ultimate outcome death.

Jesus didn't come to judge or make bad people behave better.

- He came to forgive, restore, and free every sinner who says yes to his love.

And then the transformation begins-

We don't follow Jesus to get better at following rules.

- We follow Jesus because his love transforms how we think, how we live, and how we love.

That's what changed Matthew from a hated tax collector to a trusted member of Jesus' inner circle and biographer of his life.

Again... Jesus didn't come to judge you. He came to restore you.

YOU: And Jesus' invitation to Matthew is the same for you—He loves you as you are and wants to transform you from the inside out.

- To experience His never-ending, never-giving-up love.
- To live a life of real peace, deep purpose, and unshakable love.

When you accept his forgiveness and love, you find the freedom to live and love without the weight of judgment.

Not JF- Have you been judged by a religious person or organization?

If you've ever felt judged by a Christian... they weren't following Jesus. They were following religion.

Maybe you've judged yourself—thought your past, your choices, your story were just too far gone for God to love you.

You are not rejected. You are exactly the person Jesus came for.

Explore who Jesus is. Ask questions. Dig.

- If he's real, he can handle any question/doubt you have.
- He is patient and gentle.

Others of us might realize... we've been playing the Pharisee role.

And it's so easy to fall into the same trap of the Pharisees, thinking that our own life choices make us "better" or closer to God.

Take a moment and be honest.

- Have you caught yourself assuming someone was "too far" for God—or maybe not spiritual "enough"?

- What fueled that thought?
- Jesus calls us to quit judging and start loving.

This week for all of us... let's take Jesus at his word and do what he said... do what Jesus told the Pharisees to do...

Every day this week, write down and /or recite... I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifice.

Then ask, "What does that look like for me today?"

WE: Imagine a community known more for what—and who—it embraces than what it excludes.

Imagine being a people marked not by judgment, but mercy.

That's who Jesus is forming us to be.

You haven't earned God's love by being religious.

And you haven't lost it by not being religious enough.

Jesus doesn't invite you to accept a religion.

He invites you to accept him—and each other—as we follow him together.

That's what changes a person.

- A community.
- Even a nation.

And in the end... it's always better to be judged for who you accept than for who you reject.