**The World’s Gone Mad – Week 3 – Mad at Them**

**Scripture: Colossians 4:5-6, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Philippians 2:14-16**

**Message Big Idea:** God restores his dream for the world when we embody grace.

**Intro: Us vs. Them**

*(I posed this question of classic rivalries on Facebook and there are a bunch of answers you could choose from if you like. Click* [*HERE*](https://www.facebook.com/isimkins1/posts/776582730846)*)*

I thought we’d start today, not with a game but with a battle. That sounds fun, right? We just sang a bunch of songs about love and grace and God and all of that – why not go to war? What could go wrong? So, here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to put some classic rivalries on the screen and we’ll see just how divided we are here in this room. Ok, let’s start with a classic.

*(Side-by-side images on the screen at the same time)*

*(Image: cats vs. dogs)*

Alright, show of hands - who says cats are better? Ok, keep them up. Everyone else, look around the room for a moment. See the people with their hands up? Pray for these people. And who says dogs are better? Ah – my people! Who says either and all you can think of is endless sneezing?

Ok, next one.

*(Image: tea vs. coffee)*

Who says tea is better? Alright, and who prefers something that actually tastes good? Just kidding!

Last one.

*(Image: Apple vs. PC)*

Now this is one that seems to get everyone hot under the collar. Who are the die-hard Apple people in the room? Ok, duly noted. And who prefers to actually *have* money? There you are!

\*Alternative rivalries:

* Cubs/Sox
* Marvel/DC
* Batman/Superman
* Hotdog/Hamburger
* Giordano’s/Lou Malnati’s
* Star Wars/Star Trek
* Canon/Nikon
* Coke/Pepsi
* Sweet/Salty
* Magic/Bird

There’s something innate in all of us that wants to take sides. And, it’s one thing to have an “us vs. them” mentality when it comes to animals and beverages, but what about when the topics are a little more substantial and our feelings a little more intense. How do we feel when we hear people talk about:

Bring this list back in the conclusion…

* Democrat vs. Republicans, or
* Progressive vs. Conservative, or
* Pro-Life vs. Pro-Choice.
* Vaccinate vs. Not Vaccinate
* Black Lives Matters vs. Blue Lives Matter
* That’s just the tip of the iceberg, there are questions of sexuality and theology, etc.

There’s a different weightiness when we hear those words, isn’t there? My point is this – we’re always being pulled and temped to create categories of “us vs. them,” to freak out, to be outraged all the time - but is that really how we’re called to live?

**Series Recap**

We’re in week three of our series “The World’s Gone Mad” because, honestly, doesn’t it sometimes feel like everywhere you turn people are mad at someone or something? It seems like anger is in the air.

In fact, in January 2016, which was even *before* our most recent election, mind you, NBC News and Esquire magazine conducted a survey of 3,000 Americans and found that *half* of all Americans say they are angrier today then they were a year ago. Isn’t that wild? Can anyone here relate?

So, during this series, we’re looking at three places we tend to direct our anger.

In week 1, we talked about “Angry at Me.” Sometimes our anger is directed internally, at ourselves. We’re mad at ourselves for mistakes, things we have done, or we’re mad at ourselves for missed opportunities, things we’ve not done. We learned that God’s grace is bigger than anything we have done or not done and we can let go of our anger towards ourselves when we embrace that grace.

Last week, we talked about “Angry at Us.” We learned that God’s dream for us as a community of Christ-followers is unity and that in order to be truly unified, we need to extend grace to one another.

Today we’re talking about “Angry at Them.” When we look at our world, there are a lot of things that make us mad. As Christ-followers, too often we’ve just joined in on the arguments. We’ve complained and posted and retweeted our way right into the middle of the fray, often isolating ourselves in our own echo chambers and alienating those on the “other side” of our position. Maybe it’s time to take a step back and think about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this age of outrage?

As Andy Stanley wisely challenges all of us:

**“Never make a point at the expense of making a difference.”**

**Us and Them**

**Brief moment of ownership to a time you blew it.**

But, here’s the point: it’s really easy to focus on making points instead of a difference, to make it about “us versus them” – especially when we’re angry. If someone cuts us off in traffic, we can easily assume that person is a monster instead of someone who is simply late to work. When someone posts something inflammatory online, we can begin to believe that they’re the *enemy* instead of someone who’s trying to work out their own convictions like the rest of us. Whether it’s about politics, religion, or what kind of pop you like, the temptation to draw lines, create teams, and perpetuate unhelpful distinctions is constant.

This is not how we are to be in the world. God has not called us to a life of division. Quite the opposite, in fact. Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it:

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:The old has gone, the new is here!**(That includes all of our old ways of living in the world, too) **All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors,**(some translations say “representatives”) **as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:17-20**

Our relationship with the world always comes down to the mission. Always. Before we jump into the fray trying to prove our point among all the arguments, we need to remember that our mission is not to win arguments; our mission is to help people find their way back to God. We have been given the task of reconciling people to God. We are his ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). And anything in our words or actions toward those in the world that jeopardizes our mission should cause us pause.

Too often we’ve just joined in on the arguments. ~~We’ve complained and posted and retweeted our way right into the middle of the fray, often isolating ourselves in our own echo chambers and alienating those on the other side.~~

Maybe it’s time to take a step back and think about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this age of outrage?

**Word: Colossians 4:5-6**

So how do we do that? We’ll turn to Paul’s wisdom where he speaks directly to this in Colossians. Let’s read a bit from Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

**Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. -Colossians 4:5-6**

Paul here is essentially addressing the general principles of Christian conduct. When it comes to our connection with the world, Paul wants the church to be making every opportunity to reflect God to it. I love the way N.T. Wright talks about this passage:

**"Blameless life lays the foundation for gracious witness, as Christians make the most of every opportunity." – N.T. Wright**

And this idea of “making the most of every opportunity” is a lot more intense than it sounds. The phrase literally means, “to buy up” suggesting an intensive activity that recognizes that time is limited. For example, do you remember when Hostess announced that their factories were stopping production? Do you remember that crazed rush to “buy up” every Twinkie in sight? It was bonkers. That’s a little bit like what Paul is talking about here.

The question I want us to wrestle with is this: What if we saw the opportunity to help people find their way back to God in the same way? With the same intensity? There are opportunities are before us every single day. How do we make the most of them instead of trying to avoid them? or sabotaging them?

But Paul doesn’t merely say to make the most of every opportunity. He tells us to make sure our conversations are “full of grace” as well. How many of us can admit that we have, at times, certainly seized the opportunity for a conversation but may have been lacking in the grace department? I know I’ve been there plenty of times myself. What would that look like if our prayer was, “God, help me to be full to the brim with grace in every conversation I had today?” I think Facebook would be a whole lot quieter, for one.

The other characteristic Paul says our conversations should have is one of saltiness. That one seems strange, because in our context, if someone is “being salty” what does that usually mean? It typically means they’re being snarky, right? The fine people over at Urban Dictionary say this about the word salty:

**Can be used to describe someone who is "angry, agitated, or upset," as well as someone who is "mean, annoying, and repulsive."**

So, why would Paul suggest that Christ-followers be salty? Well, in Rabbinic literature, 'salt' is often used to refer to 'wisdom.' In fact, scholars assert that the language here implies something that is not dull or flat but is interesting and well chosen" not dissimiliar to what salt often does for our food. It’s not about being witty but instead, thinking about the flavor of our conversations. This “saltiness” is not about having the right comeback answer but about a posture. Again, N.T Wright hits the nail on the head:

**“Each questioner is an individual and must be respected and loved as such. If the ‘answer’ is heard or felt as an oracular pronouncement or a rebuke for ignorance, the argument may be won but the person lost.” – N.T. Wright**

I wonder if that is part of the reason why Jesus says thing like:

 **“You are the salt of the earth.” – Matthew 5:13**

Being a Christ-follower isn’t about winning arguments are dominating conversations, we’re to make the most of every opportunity to bring a different flavor to the world.

**Challenge: Embody Grace**

Might not need all of this. So instead of just joining in on the madness of being outraged about everything, of drawing lines of “us vs. them”, what if we took a different approach? I read an article in a magazine this week that said, “Hello, it’s 2019. Everyone freaks out over everything.” That’s sort of what it feels like, right? But is this really the way that we as Christ-followers should be?

Ed Stetzer, a professor, author and pastor addresses it like this: Can we tighten up this quote.

**"I don't know that Christians can solve all the outrage issues. I think the culture has just turned up the volume to eleven and it's just going all-in on the outrage. So what I would say is we need to show a counter-culture message. The Gospel’s always been counter-cultural. It's always shown a different way. When the world's running this way, the scriptures teach a different way. Jesus calls us to a better way. So, I think the better way is not to join in and turn up the outrage volume but instead to enter in on a mission."**

Did you catch that?

*(Highlight)* ***“Jesus calls us to a better way.”*** So what is this mission, this “better way” that we’re invited in to? What if, instead of joining the trend and going all-in on outrage we chose to live counter to our culture by embodying grace?

Here is what I mean by that.

* To embody grace means to see and hear people through the lens of care, compassion and genuine love.
* To embody grace means to not add fuel to the fight, but be part of a different way.
* To embody grace means to be Jesus to a world that is in desperate need of him.

So how do we do that? How do we not just *receive* grace, but *embody* it? I want to take a look at four steps that we can all take to be people who embody grace rather than embracing the outrage.

Now before we do that, I want to recognize that most likely we are one of two people when it comes to outrage.

* Maybe you’re a person who loves a good argument. It doesn't really matter the conversation, you just love a good fight!
* Or maybe you’re the one who wants to run and get into a fetal position at the thought of any type of argument.

Whether you like a good argument or they make you physically nauseous, keep that in mind as we walk through these steps. Get this down to three…

**Step #1 – Remember your identity**

Your identity first and foremost is in Christ! Your identity is not wrapped up in whatever the argument of the hour is. How you respond to a political comment, a sports trivia question, or even a moral dilemma does not define who you *are*. God does. And maybe you are here today and you don’t know who God says you are, or maybe you’ve just plain forgotten. So let me remind us of who God says we are and what he thinks of us. God says that…

* **We are CHOSEN (Ephesians 1:11)**
* **We are his CHILDREN (Galatians 3:26)**
* **We are a new CREATION (II Corinthians 5:17)**
* **We are FORGIVEN (Ephesians 1:7)**
* **We are LOVED (Romans 8:39)**
* **We are ACCEPTED (John 15:15)**
* **We are his MASTERPIECE (Ephesians 2:10)**

Our identity is never wrapped up in anything except for the truth of these words. This is who and whose we are and nothing else defines you more than that.

You don’t have to win an argument to prove yourself.

So the first step that you can take in being a person who embodies grace is to **remember your identity**. Don’t ever lose sight of what God thinks of you and how he identifies you. The next step is to

**Step #2 – Find an affirmation**

Now, I know that arguments are happening all the time, and it would be impossible to ignore it all. So, as we’re having these conversations, I want to challenge all of us to give specific effort in finding an affirmation about the person’s view or opinion.

For example, I can’t stand peanut butter. I think it’s disgusting and you could never convince me otherwise. The reason is I just can’t handle the texture. If the texture isn’t right, I can’t get my mind past it.

As weird as that may sound, you can understand the texture thing a little, right? But from my stance, I get why most of the world actually likes it. No amount of debating on Facebook is going to get me to change my mind on that. But my boys love it, so I appreciate how it provides nutrition for them. Even in my disgust, I can recognize that.

Find an affirmation. Find common ground you can agree on. Maybe even affirming the person is all you can do. Perhaps it means saying something like this:

*“Regardless of what we may agree/disagree on, I think you are a great person and you have a lot to offer.”*

When you feel outrage bubbling beneath the surface or you’re inclined to draw “us vs. them lines” ask yourself, “What encouraging or supportive thing can I say about this person right now?

The writer of Proverbs puts it well:

**“A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.” – Proverbs 15:1**

Ok, on to the third step.

**Step #3 – Ask right questions**

This is where we want to do our best to take the posture of learning. This doesn't mean we have to agree with the points the other person is making, but when we take the posture of learning it communicates that we actually care and are open to their perspectives.

Getting really upset and blowing up about something doesn't take much work. But asking questions and actually listening does take work and it’s not always easy. What if we set out to understand and even learn about *why* that person said rather than jumping to outrage?

I think some really good questions to start with are:

* **What brought you to this conclusion?**
* *(Add)* **What brings you the most joy because of this belief/stance?**
* *(Add)* **How does this belief/stance help you?**

There are obviously a lot more questions we could ask, but these are a few that help us better understand the other person and why they believe what they believe or feel the way they feel. And the last step is this:

**Step #4 – Respond Don’t need this as it’s own step. Incorporate material below in #3**

As you engage, make sure that you respond with gentleness and respect. This is exactly the challenge the Apostle Peter talks about this when he says,

**“…Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for that hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” - 1 Peter 3:15**

Again, I want to go back and remind us of our goal, to *(add)* ***“Never make a point at the expense of making a difference.”*** If there is not gentleness and respect, all we are doing is making a point and engaging in an argument that isn't beneficial for anyone. A point that is ultimately not helping people find their way back to God.

And if they don't inquire of your opinions don’t offer any! Don’t give in to the sometimes-overwhelming urge to share everything that is in your heart about every matter. Learn to be okay with letting it go.

**Conclusion:**

You can probably already tell that these steps are easier said than done, but can you imagine what our lives would look like if we truly began to embody grace? To not only embrace grace or extend grace, but to *~~exemplify and~~ embody* it in every aspect of our lives, even the heated moments?

As we wrap up, I want to take you to another passage in the New Testament from the author that we looked at earlier, the Apostle Paul. He said,

**“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life….” - Philippians 2:14-16**

Paul’s firm belief was that as we embody grace in this age of outrage we would look differently from the world around us. And he’s right!

* We should look differently.
* We should stand out.
* We should shine like stars in the sky.

That’s my hope for all of us - that we wouldn’t make points at the expense of making a difference in the world around us. God didn't put Aaron Ulysses Koehler on this planet to make a point; he put him here to make a difference. Let’s shine like the stars that God created us to be.

**Communion Idea:**

There is only one person who has ever perfectly embodied grace. Jesus. And because he so perfectly embodied grace, grace was then offered to us through his sacrifice on the cross.

**“For it by grace you have been saved…” – Ephesians 2:8**

Think about it. God could certainly look at us and be outraged by the things that he sees that we do. But he didn't and doesn't respond with outrage, he responds with grace. And because he chose to respond with grace we can come to this communion table to not only receive his grace, but also to offer that same grace to those around us.

Pray.