**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.

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**Intro: Us vs. Them**

*(Series Graphic)* 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’s the worst that could happen? 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. Are you ready? 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? Nice!

Ok, next one.

*(Image: Tea vs. Coffee)*

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

Alright, 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!

\**I (Ian) 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)*.* Some 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

*(“Us” vs. “Them”)* 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:

* Democrat vs. Republican, or
* Progressive vs. Conservative, or
* Pro-Life vs. Pro-Choice, or
* Vaccinate vs. Not Vaccinate, or
* Black Lives Matters vs. Blue Lives Matter.

Obviously, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. We could go on with questions about sexuality, theology, and so on. There’s a different weightiness when we hear those words, isn’t there? My point is this – we’re always being pushed and pulled and temped to create categories of “Us vs. Them.”

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* 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 NBC News and Esquire magazine conducted a survey of 3,000 Americans and found that *half* of us say we are angrier today than we 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 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 *(add)* **Embrace 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 *(add)* **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.” 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?

**Us and Them**

Listen, I get it. There’s a lot going on in our world that can make us mad. I’ve blown it multiple times. But lately I’ve been challenged by these wise words from pastor and author Andy Stanley:

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

It’s really easy to focus on making points instead of making 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 beverage you like, the temptation to draw linesand 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, we need to remember that our mission is not to win arguments; our mission is to help people find their way back to God. And we are his ambassadors. Anything in our words or actions toward those in the world that jeopardizes our mission should cause us pause. “Never make a point at the expense of making a difference.”

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? Let’s turn again to Paul’s wisdom where he speaks directly to this in Colossians. Paul writes:

**“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 is addressing general principles of Christian conduct in this passage. When it comes to our connection with the world, Paul instructs the church, you and me, to make the most of every opportunity we have to reflect God to others. 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.

*(Colossians 4:5-6)* 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 before us every single day. How do we make the most of them instead of sabotaging them?

And 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 will admit that we have, at times, been lacking in the grace department? I know I’ve been there plenty of times myself. What would it look like if our prayer was, “God, help me to be full to the brim with grace in every conversation I have 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” 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 Paul uses implies something that is not dull or flat but is interesting and well chosen, not dissimilar to what salt 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**

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

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

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

**Challenge: Embody Grace**

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?

Ed Stetzer, a professor, author and pastor writes:

**"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." –Ed Stetzer**

To enter in on a mission. To care less about making a point, and more about making a difference. As Stetzer says, *(Highlight)* ***“Jesus calls us to a better way.”***

So what is this “better way” that we’re invited in to? I’d like to suggest that rather than joining the trend and going all-in on outrage, we choose to live counter to our culture by *(Embody Grace)* 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 three steps that we can all take to be people who embody grace rather than perpetuating the outrage.

**Step #1 – Remember Your Identity**

When you find yourself in a situation or a conversation that has the potential to spark outrage, the first step is to remember your identity. Your identity is first and foremost in Christ! Your identity is not wrapped up in winning an argument. Your identity is not found in any hot button issue. Your identity is in Christ, in what God says about you. And just in case you need a reminder about that… God says: *(add list)*

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

As followers of Jesus, our identity is found in the truth of these words. This is who and whose we are! So let me remind you again. You are a person who walks freely in the grace of God and when you remember that it becomes the first step in helping you embody grace to others.

Rooted in your identity in Christ, you can move on to…

**Step #2 – Find an Affirmation**

We will all find ourselves in conversations, face-to-face or online, that have the potential to explode in anger. Instead of jumping in with our point and counterpoint, I want to challenge all of us to embody grace by finding an affirmation about the other person’s view or opinion.

I think this is what the writer of Proverbs is getting at when he says: *(add)*

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

My point is if I’m willing to lay down the need to “win” an argument, if I am willing to let go of the desire to prove a point, I can always find something to affirm in the other person’s perspective.

Find an affirmation. Find common ground you can agree on. Maybe even affirming the person is all you can do. That might sound something like: *“Regardless of what we may agree/disagree on, I appreciate how much thought you have put into this issue.”*

A gentle answer deflects anger. It helps us embody grace in this age of outrage.

Finally, a third step…

**Step #3 – Ask Good Questions**

Take a posture of learning. What if we set out to understand and learn about *why* a person holds a certain belief or perspective rather than jumping to outrage?

Again, remember… You don’t need to win an argument. Asking good questions demonstrates an openness to learn, a willingness to understand even if we’ll never agree. Most important, it demonstrates a desire to know and respect another human being.

Here are some really good questions. Ask: *(add)*

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

These questions give you the opportunity to better understand the other person and why they believe what they believe or feel the way they feel.

If, after listening to the other person, they ask you questions in return, *(1 Peter 3:15)* respond as the Apostle Peter talks about with “gentleness and respect.” However, if the other person doesn’t ask for your opinion or seek to understand your perspective, it’s OK to not respond. It’s OK to let it go. Remember, you don’t need to win an argument. You don’t need to prove a point.

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

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.

**Conclusion**

In this age of outrage, our world is in desperate need of people who will embody grace. As followers of Jesus, we are not only called to embrace the grace of God and extend that grace to one another, we are called to embody grace to a broken and bruised world.

Jesus calls us to a better way. A way the Apostle Paul describes like this:

**“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**

When we embody grace in this age of outrage, we will look different than the world around us. We will shine like stars in what can often be a very dark place.

And ultimately, in the end, we won’t have settled for merely making a point. No, we will have made a difference.

**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.