

RUNNING INTO TROUBLE
Micah 6:6-8; Luke 19:1-10

(Read Luke 19:1-10)

Intro: Grace has been extended to me so many times I lose count.

I've told you this one before, but since its about my dad and today is Father's Day, I tell it again. (Tell about me talking too much in Sunday School and getting in trouble with my older sisters)

Another time I was misleading in my seminary class requirements and had to confess to my professor. (Explain)

On the other hand, I've been stingy when it comes to me extending grace. Oh, I'm not saying that if someone comes to me and confesses something I'm reluctant to grant mercy – I'm pretty quick to do that. What I'm talking about is when I see someone who is walking in rebellion in some way, then I've been very hasty to condemn. (Tell about the guy at OSR and Al Sovine's question to me)

I often talk about how we live in a broken world, filled with broken people. A couple weeks ago I made reference to the fact that we live in Post-Christian world. This means that where, up until perhaps 50 years ago, the church, and because of that, to some extent, the Bible, were the ones who dictated societal parameters. America was considered a "Christian" nation, and, indeed, arguably, it was that indeed. Now, in a cascade of rulings "against" the church, starting with prohibiting prayer in school in 1962 and prohibiting Bible reading in school in 1963, followed by Roe v. Wade in 1973, legalizing abortion, down to the legalization of gay marriage just a couple years ago, what was once sin according the scripture AND the law of the land, has now become accepted practice, and to speak against it, actually, even have an opposing opinion to it, is practically illegal. Being a Christian these days isn't the "simple" thing it once was. It means knowing what you believe, saying what you believe and believing what you say. It also means it's even more important that we need to stand for and speak biblical truth – but with a lot more grace than we often have before.

It is what is needed for revival, which, in the words of my current series is **Living the Gospel and Restoring the World**. You see . . .

Following Jesus is about restoring the broken

- It's seeing brokenness and seeking ways to address it. Instead of avoiding the hurting people of the world, we need to embrace them with the love Jesus showed them. The old way of thinking on this would have been to avoid trouble – like walking to the other side of the street or being unwelcoming to people who have chosen a way of living contrary to what the Bible teaches.
- This is not what Jesus did. He ran into trouble all the time by loving instead of condemning. Like him, we need to be provoked enough by brokenness to do something about it. This does not mean we ignore sin, in fact it's quite the opposite, it means seeing the darkness of it a showing up with whatever light we can bring to it and expose it. This is because . . .

God's love extends to ALL people.

- This means that Christ Followers never run from areas that typically offend "Christians" – they run to them – we run INTO trouble. Remember from our study of Jude last year? He admonished his readers to *Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.* Jude 22-23.
- Look at the quote on your bulletin cover by Michael Metzger, "*When confronted with the corruption of our world—Christians ought to be provoked to engage, not offended and withdrawn.*" Let's go for it ABC!
- Let's walk our talk. That's not new advice – Micah's admonition that we heard earlier has always been God's desire for his people. . .

God always has required what is right and fair between people

- It's easy to drift into doing religion and, like the people who were sarcastically questioning the prophet, their "faith" had become stale, if not downright lifeless. F. B. Meyer says text in Micah is describing "The impotence of a religion that is only external." And the God reminds his people, through his prophet, that you cannot buy God's mercy – you receive it with a true and living faith. It's not just when its comfortable or convenient, its continuous.
- God's prescription is a simple triplet, *To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* Micah 6:8b.

- To do justice is to do what is right and fair.
- To love mercy is another word for kindness. In fact, it is rendered in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as ἀγαπᾶν, which you might recognize as the kind of love God has for us, and what he requires of his people. It has no conditions. It just loves.
- And the third is only possible if you are doing the first two, to walk humbly with our God. This means to walk in joy and delight in God’s way. Every day, all day, no matter who we meet.
- This could very possibly mean that . . .

We need a new and unique mind-set

- At our leadership retreat back in March, our Church Board watched a video of a talk by Andy Stanley that talked about being uniquely different. So we did some ABC self-examination and looked at how we are uniquely different as a ministry. And we are. True, in most ways we are like many other churches across our community and across the country. But in some other ways, especially considering how we are a relatively small congregation, we are indeed uniquely different. For one thing, we are healthy. In a society where many churches are dwindling, we are growing slow and steady in numbers and in Jesus. We also effectively do, what our motto has been for some years, “The Heart, Hands, and Feet of Jesus”. We care for people. We love them with the love of the Lord. We are also a sending church. People all over the world have come from or through ABC. For a little congregation, I think we have an inordinate number of people like this.
- But we need to grow into a different mindset from much of those who call themselves Christian. Instead of building walls and retreating into a fortress mentality, where we shield ourselves from the evils of a sinful world, we will run into trouble like a firefighter into a burning building to save a terrified occupant. That is a mindset we need.
- To do that, in means we need to engage and not condemn. The temptation is to rip faces off and ask questions later. Let’s get to know that person who is down and out and hasn’t had a shower for a while. Let’s show that person who is struggling with, or, has outright given in to their struggle with their sexual identity, the love of Jesus. Let’s seek to understand the person who is in bondage to drugs or sex or alcohol. There is some wound there somewhere that brought that on. Condemnation will only cause the wound to fester more, ἀγάπη brings healing. Will it happen fast? Almost certainly not. But that’s not for us to determine.
- Our job is to dispense grace not judgement. Even if we had the right to judge, which we don’t, people who are wounded need no more judgment because the light of their own judgment upon themselves is blinding in it’s intensity.
- And in case this new and unique mindset is making you squirm a bit, know that what is requires is the courage to do it rather than the comfort of avoiding it. One person has said that *we can no longer be comfortable with being comfortable*.
- That’s why we need to choose faithfulness rather than reputation. Who cares what others think – it’s what our heavenly Father thinks after all. He’s the one who said of his Son on two different occasions, his baptism and his Transfiguration, “This is my Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” And we are only following his Son’s example with our uniquely different ministry. If he was pleased with Jesus, we know he will be pleased with us too. And we know, by the scripture I read as I began this talk that. . .

Jesus ministered to people as he found them

- This might be a familiar account to you. In fact, I’ve preached from it in the not too distant past. But let me very briefly unpack it.
 - Zacchaeus was from a hated class of people. Tax collectors not only colluded with the hated Roman conquerors, they often took advantage of the power that gave them to fleece their own countrymen. They were so hated they were not even considered Jews – they were shunned.
 - Not only that, he was also short. Short and hated – can it be worse than that? Maybe. F. B. Meyer wrote that Zacchaeus’s dishonest acquisition may have added to his wealth but it subtracted from his peace of mind. I would agree. He had a guilty conscience. As I said a bit ago, the light of his own judgment upon himself was blinding in its intensity.
 - So, one of the reasons he had to see Jesus enough to climb a tree to do it was that he was profoundly dissatisfied with his life and he wanted more than riches could provide.

- So there he sat on a limb above the crown and Jesus looked up.
- Jesus looked up because he's God, and God is always in search of people who have reached the end of what they can do for themselves. Jesus was always doing that. He hung out with the drunks, prostitutes, and lepers. The more the religious elite didn't like them, the more Jesus loved on them. You see, Jesus's mission runs counter to expected and accepted social norms. But that's what it takes to seek and save the lost. You run into trouble to save the lost.
- Paul did this too. Just one example of this is his ministry on Mars Hill in Athens. When you read about it in Acts 17:16-34, you will see that Paul was deeply distressed by the number of idols he saw in the city. But instead of railing against the stupidity of worshipping something you or some other person have made (which makes is really stupid, by the way), Paul reasoned with the people there, even using the words of an inscription on a statue as his entry point into engaging with the lost. It was courageous. He was called a babler. But he did it anyway.
- Let's minister to people as we find them. Speak into their lives. Love on them. Let God do his work in their hearts.

Conclusion: I've gone on long enough. I hope you've seen my point here this morning. Instead of confronting society with angry rhetoric or retreating from it in fear, let's infiltrate it with the kind of love that says, come down from your perch, I want to visit with you in your home today. It's like this, **running into trouble means allowing the Holy Spirit to work rather than trying to "make it happen"**.

It's best to simply show up. Let restoration thinking flood our actions and responses as we encounter a deeply broken world. This is what God requires. Amen.