

A Call to the Outsider

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Eric, and I am one of the guys here on staff. It's great to be here with you today. I want to start off by sharing with you a scene from one of my favorite movies.

I'm sure many of you have seen it. It's called The Fellowship of the Ring. Anyone seen it? Yes? Okay. So in The Fellowship of the Ring, there's this scene, sort of close to the start.

They're in Rivendell, the home of Elrond. It's okay if you don't know what these words mean. But they have this meeting. They have a gathering because they have a problem.

There's a ring, a ring of power. And this ring is so powerful that whoever has it will be able to rule the world, but it always draws that person towards darkness, and it is dangerous.

And they know that it is dangerous, and they know that this ring needs to be destroyed. And they know that the job of destroying this one ring is far bigger than any one of them individually can accomplish.

[1 : 04] And so they form this group of nine that will go to destroy the ring. They call this group the Fellowship of the Ring. And they form this Fellowship of the Ring to accomplish a mission that they have that is far too big for any one of them to accomplish on their own.

And I think when we look at the church, a lot of times we feel like, oh, you know, like, God saved us, and then he didn't want us to be bored, so he gave us something to do to keep us from being bored for the rest of our lives.

And that's, you know, missions and evangelism and telling other people about him. But I think when you look at the story of the Bible, it's actually the other way around. It's a lot more like in the Fellowship of the Ring, that there is a mission that God has that is huge.

It's too huge for any one of us to accomplish on our own. And so to accomplish his mission, God forms us as his people to go out and accomplish his mission in the world.

He forms us as a fellowship to go out and accomplish his mission in the world and sends us out, just like the Fellowship of the Ring is sent out to destroy the ring.

[2 : 16] He sends us out into the world to tell others about him and to share about how amazing he is. We call this mission, life on mission. And last week, we started a sermon series on this idea of mission, looking at it from the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah, we saw last week that God sends out his call to the thirsty, to those who are looking for something to satisfy them. God says, if you are looking for something to satisfy, come to me.

All who are thirsty, come to the waters and drink and find satisfaction. And God calls us, if we are Christians here today, God calls us to go out to those in the world who are thirsty and to offer them satisfaction in him.

And today we're going to continue talking about mission. And we're going to look at it from another perspective, another group that God wants us to call out to. And this group is the outsiders.

And so we're going to look at it, three points. Number one, a call to missional holiness. Number two, the mission of God. And number three, a call to the outsiders.

[3 : 27] We're going to start out with the call to missional holiness. If we look at the first couple of verses of chapter 56, it says, Keep justice and do righteousness, and soon my salvation will come and my deliverance be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil. Keep justice, do righteousness, keep the Sabbath, don't do any evil.

I think for a lot of us, when we look at commands like this, there's this part of us inside that sort of bristles at this. Because we, you know, we like God, we like Jesus, we like this message of love that

he has.

But the idea of him telling us what to do in the 21st century can feel a little regressive to some of us. It can feel a little oppressive to some of us.

Like, who is God to come in and tell me how to live my life? Maybe we feel like John Lennon when he said, you know, Jesus was all right, but his disciples were thick and ordinary.

[4 : 37] It's them twisting it that ruins it for me. Basically, you know, this message that God wants us to love one another, that's great, I like that. This whole stuff about having to obey him and live our life by a standard that he sets for us, not so much.

If we could just get back to that pure message that Jesus had of loving one another without having to obey, then everything would be great. But right here it says that he wants us to keep justice, do righteousness, keep the Sabbath, and keep our hands from doing evil.

And I think for a lot of us, we don't like God trying to tell us what to do with our lives. But there's a problem with our way of thinking on a couple levels.

First off, this command isn't just about obedience. It is about obedience in terms of not doing things that are wrong. But it's much more than that.

When we see this phrase, do righteousness, in the Old Testament, this idea of righteousness and this idea of justice, it's not just an idea of avoiding what's wrong and punishing people who do wrong.

[5 : 47] It's also an idea of identifying things that are wrong in the world and setting them right. It's what we would think of maybe more as social justice, a pursuit of what is good and what is right, not just avoiding the bad, but pursuing actively the good, chasing after loving one another.

And although we have this tendency to split the world into my private life where I can do whatever I want and the public world where there's neighbors and stuff like that, God doesn't dichotomize life in that way.

For God, we are one person. We're not a separate person when the door is closed and when the door is open and everyone's around. We are one person. And the choices and decisions that we make in our private lives are going to impact the way that we act in public.

And so this call that God wants us to keep our hands from doing evil, to keep justice, to do righteousness, it is a call to obedience, but it's a call to obedience for the sake of love because we cannot truly love our neighbors as God wants us to if we are not living our lives according to the standard that God calls us to.

I'll give you a couple examples to illustrate what I'm talking about. So, we look at the world and we see issues like sex trafficking. And we're like, that's a bad thing. I don't think anyone in here would say, like, that's a good thing.

[7 : 19] And we say, we need to do things to stop sex trafficking. Maybe we can have a documentary screening like we did here last week to raise awareness and get people aware of what's happening in this world of sex trafficking.

And we need to have rallies to call for the stop of it and to call for legislation to make it stop. And we can fight for all these things and they're good things to fight for, but if we go to these rallies and we host these documentary screenings and then we go home and watch pornography, we're actually helping spread sex trafficking because the sex trafficking industry is spread and fueled by the pornography industry.

And what we do in our actions in public, saying we're against it, and what we do in our actions in private, doing actions that push for it to be spread, they're opposite.

We can't truly fight for this justice and try to love the victims of sex trafficking like God wants us to if we're not willing to live our lives according to God's standard when it comes to what we're doing in the privacy of our own bedrooms.

And so God's call to us to missional holiness is this holistic call for us to live all of our lives as people who are in pursuit of him, avoiding the wrong, pursuing the right.

[8 : 43] And not just as a legalistic, okay, I've done this, now I'm better than you. No, not at all.

That's not the spirit of this at all. The spirit of this is, God gave this command to the nation of Israel.

And he said, if you will follow me, if you will live life the way that I'm calling you to live life, the nations around you will see that.

And they will see this beautiful way of life. He actually says that if you live according to the standard that I set for you, he says this back in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, somewhere back there.

He says, if you live according to the standard that I set for you, there will be no poor in your land. They will be provided for, they will be taken care of, you won't have people starving on the streets, and the nations around you will see that and see that it is beautiful.

I want you to follow me because when you follow me, the life that you will live is a beautiful life. And the people around you will see that beautiful life, and they will want that beautiful life, and they will be drawn to me.

[9 : 51] That's the heart of God when he gives this command to the Israelites in Isaiah chapter 56. And it's a call that applies to us today as well.

God wants us to keep justice, to do righteousness, to keep the Sabbath and avoid evil, not so that we can check off a list and say, I've done all these things. But because when we do these things, this holiness of our lives actually serves as a way of making the people around us see how good and beautiful the God we follow is.

Because it's a different way of life. It's a pursuing of the good. And it's something that people around us will see as beautiful. Yes, avoiding the things that are evil, but also actively pursuing the things that are right, identifying what's wrong with the world, and actively trying to set those things right.

There's a little story that I have that I think illustrates this. Back in the 1930s and 40s, there was a mayor in New York City called LaGuardia. You've probably heard of the airport named after him.

I don't know if he was a Christian or not, but this story sort of illustrates this idea of identifying what's wrong with the world and seeking to set it right. Mayor LaGuardia, he was a very good mayor.

[11 : 16] He fought against corruption. He would join the police on their raids to try and break up the mob. He would ride around the city on fire trucks. He would take orphanages to baseball games.

When the newspaper went on strike, he went on the radio and read out the comics to the kids so that they could still have the comics. He was loved and respected around the city. And this one night, in January of 1935, he walked into the courtroom, and he told the judge on duty, you can have the night off.

Don't think you can get away with that today. But in 1935, apparently you could. And he told the judge, you take the night off. I'll sit in and hear the cases tonight. So after a couple minutes on the bench, this tattered old lady comes up to him.

She's on trial for stealing a loaf of bread. And she says, please, sir, my daughter's husband left her. My daughter is sick.

My two grandchildren are starving. I was just trying to provide a way for my family to eat. Yes, I tried to steal the bread, but I was doing it because I care about my family, and I don't want my grandchildren to starve.

[12 : 28] The baker who had been robbed was sitting there, and he refused to drop the charges. He said, you know, this is a bad neighborhood. This is one of the poorest neighborhoods in New York City. If we let her get away with trying to rob me, then everyone else is going to try to rob me, and I'm going to be out of business, and I'm going to need to rob people too.

You need to hold her to the standard of justice, Mayor LaGuardia. And the mayor said, you know, this man is right. The requirements of justice say that you have to face a punishment.

You either have to pay a \$10 fine or spend 10 days in jail. And as he said this, he pulled out his wallet and grabbed a \$10 bill and dropped it into his hat in front of him and said, here is the \$10 fine, which I now remit.

And additionally, I'm going to charge a \$0.50 fine to every single person in this courtroom for living in a city in which this woman has to steal bread to feed her family.

Mr. Bailiff, please collect the fines. So they sent around the bailiff to collect the fines, and they handed the woman \$47.50 with which she could go out and provide for her family, including \$0.50 from the shopkeeper who she had tried to rob.

[13 : 52] And the courtroom stood up and gave Mayor LaGuardia a standing ovation because they said, this, what you have just done, this pursuit of justice, not just in punishing her for doing what was wrong, but trying to fix the situation that required her to do that in the first place, that is beautiful.

It's not just about holding people accountable for the wrong things that they do, but also looking at why did they do that, what are the social conditions that led them to do that, and how can we actively work to change those social conditions so that they don't have to do that in the future.

That is the lifestyle that God is calling us to in this passage. Keep justice, do righteousness, keep the Sabbath, avoid evil.

And when we live this way, this lifestyle is beautiful to the world around us. You know, we sort of probably also look at this passage and say, what's the Sabbath doing in there?

But in reality, the idea of keeping the Sabbath encapsulates the rest of these ideas of keeping justice, doing righteousness, avoiding evil.

[15 : 09] Because when we have the type of trust in God where we are able to take one day a week and rest and count on Him to provide, that's going to spill into other areas of our lives as well.

And again, this idea of keeping the Sabbath, I'm not going to go too much into it because Bernard spoke on it two weeks ago and you can go back and listen to his sermon if you want to learn more about Sabbath. But this idea of keeping the Sabbath, it's not just a command for the sake of keeping commands.

Again, it's a command to love our neighbors. Why is that? Because bosses who check email at 3 a.m. and send out emails to their employees at 3 a.m.

expect their employees to also be on their email at 3 a.m. bosses who never rest expect the employees who work for them to never rest. Bosses or parents or managers who have the confidence in God to take one day per week to just rest, to just rely on God to provide, are going to allow the people who work for them to also take that one day a week to rest, to rely on God to provide.

And it's going to be a way for us to serve and love our neighbors, another way for us to show the people around us the beauty of the God that we worship and serve. And so God calls us to live this missional holiness lifestyle, a way of taking what He has created in the world and showing people a beautiful way to live life.

[16 : 52] And not just a beautiful way to live life, but a beautiful way to live life that points them back to the beautiful one who gave us that way to live. He wants us to live as a people who are known for missional holiness.

But who does He want us to take this message to? Who does He want us to reach out to? That brings us to point number two, the mission of God. In verse three, He says, let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, the Lord will surely separate me from His people.

And let not the eunuch say, behold, I am a dry tree. He specifically says right here, he wants this message to go out to foreigners and to eunuchs, which to us may seem strange, but to the ancient Israelites, these two groups of people were known for being outsiders.

Historically, if you look at each of the groups, we'll start with the foreigners. They were excluded from the Jewish community. Yes, God wanted them eventually to be included.

He wanted Israel to live in such a way that their lifestyle would draw the foreigners to come and join. But they were excluded. There is a Jewish prayer that's prayed even to this day by the men when they wake up.

[18 : 17] And it says, God, I thank you that you did not make me a foreigner, a slave, or a woman. The women have their own version that basically says, God, I thank you that you did not make me a foreigner, a slave, and that you've given me the joys of being a woman or something like that.

But there's a standard Jewish prayer to this day that says, God, I thank you for not making me a foreigner. The foreigners are excluded. The foreigners are looked down upon.

Even if you jump ahead to the book of Acts, you'll see a story about the apostle Paul being arrested because the Jews thought that he had brought foreigners into the temple.

Foreigners are excluded. Foreigners are not allowed in to God's house. Foreigners, that's most of us here today, I'm guessing. by the Jewish standards of this day when these words were spoken, were second-class citizens, outsiders, not seen as people on the same level as the Jews.

But God says, that's going to change. He says, to the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

[19 : 44] Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. He says, you foreigners who have been excluded, you are going to be welcomed into my house.

You who have been looked down upon, you are going to be welcomed. And he says, this may not really click with us, the significance of this, but he says, their sacrifices will be accepted.

Now why is that so significant? Because as humans, we have this problem of sin that separates us from God. And in the Old Testament under the temple system, the only way to have your sins forgiven and taken away was by going to the temple and making a sacrifice to God of an animal.

And when the animal was sacrificed, you would be forgiven for your sins. Which means that if your sacrifices are not accepted, you don't get forgiveness, you don't get acceptance by God.

God's saying that he will accept their sacrifices, our sacrifices, I guess, since most of us are foreigners, is God saying, I will accept you. I will bring you in as part of my people.

[21 : 04] I'm not going to look down on you. I'm not going to see you as a separate group. I'm accepting you. I'm welcoming you. Come. He also speaks here to the eunuchs.

Now eunuchs, again, are a group that in ancient Israel were outsiders. Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verse 1, bans eunuchs from coming to worship in the temple.

And there was a historian around the time of Jesus named Josephus who wrote down just a brief statement about the way that eunuchs were seen in his day.

He says, let those that have made themselves eunuchs be had in detestation. This is a big word you don't hear very much. And avoid any conversation with them who have deprived themselves of their manhood.

Let such be driven away as if they had killed their children since before the children were born they lost the means of having them. He says, if someone is a eunuch, you should avoid talking to them.

[22 : 10] You should treat them like you would treat someone who has killed their own children.

Quite a harsh statement against people who are eunuchs. And the even worse part is that not only did they have this shame to carry around during their lifetime, but as eunuchs, obviously, they were not able to reproduce.

Which means that there was no chance of their memory living on. There was no chance of there being future generations to carry on their name, to rewrite their story. They lived their one life in shame and disgrace and when they died, that was it.

And God says, that is not going to be the story for the eunuchs anymore. He says, to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. He says, I'm going to give them a name better than children. I'm going to welcome them into my house.

They're not going to be banned. They're not going to be excluded. They're not going to be outsiders. They're going to be welcomed. And he says, they will not be cut off.

[23 : 39] I don't know if you noticed this, but this passage right here has some amazing promises to those in the church who live as singles and commit themselves to celibacy or to those in the church who are married and unable to have kids.

Because God's telling us that our standing as his people is not dependent on our ability to reproduce. It's dependent on our relationship with him. And so the fact that we don't have kids doesn't make us second-rate Christians.

No, we are all the people of God. We are all a family of God. And God has a unique place in his family for us where we are able to serve in ways that people with kids can't serve.

And God welcomes us as his people. God is excited to have us in his family if we are single or if we are married with no kids. That's just a side note.

But God welcomes the foreigners. God welcomes the eunuchs. God welcomes the outsiders. He says, the people that society has rejected, I want them.

[24 : 48] The people that historically have not been able to stand before me, I want them to come. I'm not out just for the worthy.

I'm not out just for those that everyone looks at and thinks they're great. I'm out for those who are outsiders. Which brings us to point number three, a call to the outsider.

Because if God is interested in reaching out to the outsiders, that means that God is interested in us reaching out to the outsiders.

My question for us today is who are the outsiders in our world. It's really tempting to just give a list.

There are certain groups that the church generally looks down upon today that we could roll them off of our minds of people who are ostracized by the church, people who have a hard time fitting in if

they show up at church.

I was really tempted to list off a couple of these groups, but I received some good wisdom from some friends who said, Eric, remember, if you do that, you make it seem like some group is worse than another group.

[26 : 09] And that's not true. The reality of the situation is that all of us are outsiders before God. All of us have chosen sin that separates us from God in our lives.

All of us. sin and there's no one group that's a little better or a little worse, a little more severe or a little less severe sin. The fact is, sin is sin.

Sin makes us guilty. Sin separates us from God. And in God's eyes, all of us are born as outsiders. And if we're honest, we can all see glimpses of this even just in the way that we live our lives on a social level.

Right? If we're in middle school or high school, we feel like we need to have the best social networks, profiles, so the people around us can look to us and say, like, that's a cool guy.

If we're new in a job or new in a social group, we try and find the influencers there and get on their good side so everyone else will like us. Maybe if we feel like friends aren't including us in stuff, we'll get really passive-aggressive.

[27 : 23] You know, you're a jerk! I hate you! Is something wrong? No! You're my best friend! Or maybe we'll drop hints about it, like, you know, you really, you really sound like you're going to have a great birthday party.

You know the one thing that would make it better? If I was there. Too bad I can't be. Didn't get an invitation. Right? We know from the way that our social interactions go that all of us at times feel like outsiders and feel like there are things that we need to do to be accepted and to be on the inside. And the thing is, all of that social pressure and feeling of being an outsider is merely a shadow of the fact and the reality that in the relationship that we have with God, we are alienated and we are outsiders.

it's not just a figment of our imagination, it is the reality of the situation. That all of us have rebelled against God.

But the good news is that God wants us as his people. God calls to each of us. You know, the Bible tells us in Isaiah 53 it says that each of us like sheep have gone astray and we've chased after our own desires rather than God.

[28 : 56] And yet Jesus comes and listen from Isaiah 53 about the things that he said, just three chapters in front of the one that we're looking at today, the things that Jesus went through so that we no longer have to be outsiders.

in chapter 53 verse 3 it tells us that he was despised and rejected by men so that we can be accepted by God.

In 53 5 it says that he was wounded for our transgressions and pierced for our iniquities so that we don't have to be. In 53 9 it says they made his grave with the wicked although he had done no violence because we had and someone had to pay the price for us to be accepted.

You know we talked earlier about this idea of missional holiness Jesus is the ultimate example of what it looks like to live this life of missional holiness.

Not only perfectly obeying every one of God's laws his entire life but also at the end of his life laying down his life to set right what was wrong in our relationship with God.

[30 : 12] When we want an example of what it looks like to live with this missional holiness Jesus is our perfect example. He did what was perfectly right but didn't settle for that as if it was enough.

No, he also pursued setting to right what was wrong in the world so that God can welcome in us the outsiders into his family.

God if you're here today and you're not a Christian my encouragement to you is that God is calling to you today.

You've spent long enough being an outsider from his family and he wants you to come to him today. He wants to welcome you in.

Despite your sin Jesus has come and paid the price so that you can be accepted by God and you no longer need to be an outsider. Will you come running to him?

[31 : 16] If you're here today and you're a Christian God is also calling you. See you were once an outsider but now you have been welcomed in to God's family and now God wants you to go out and reach out to the outsiders in your world.

So who are the outsiders in your world? Maybe a good first step question to ask yourself is just who are the non-Christians that I interact with on a regular basis? Maybe co-workers maybe friends maybe people from your club or your sports team the people that you just see on a regular basis. But then let's take it one step further. Who are the people that you see on a regular basis but you don't really see? Maybe it's the janitor at your office.

They come in and they take out the trash every day. You see that same face every day and you still don't know that person's name even though you've seen them every day for five years. Maybe it's the person after church standing at the table by themselves just waiting for someone to say hi and welcome them.

I don't know who it is in your life. But God has placed people in each of our lives so that we can connect with them. And when we look at people like janitors and say you know I'm on a different level socially than them.

[32 : 41] They're an outsider I'm in. I can't interact with them. what we're saying is God's desire to welcome the outsider doesn't matter to me. I care more about my social status than I do about loving my neighbor.

But the truth is that God reached out to us when we were outsiders and he wants us to reach out to the outsiders around us. One more step further in this idea of reaching out to the outsiders.

Who are the people in your life that you feel are beyond salvation? Who are the people that you look at and you say oh them?

Yeah I don't think God would really be interested in them. Because the truth is that those are the people that God is calling us to reach out to today.

Jesus died to welcome the outsider there's no group that's more or less worthy of his love. All of us are unworthy and all of us are welcomed freely only as a gift of grace.

[33 : 53] And when we put ourselves in God's shoes and say this person is unworthy of hearing the gospel what we do is we say I'm better than you.

I'm more deserving than you. But let me ask a question. who is the worst sinner? The prostitute who comes and sells her body because that is the only way she knows of to provide for her family.

Or the Christian who looks at her and based on her profession decides that she's not worthy of hearing the gospel. who is the worst sinner in that situation?

Jesus calls us to reach out to the outsider. He did it. He set the perfect example of it in his life. And now he calls us to do it as well.

And he gives us a promise that as we go we don't need to be afraid because the success of our going is not dependent on the expertise of our presentation but on the faithfulness of God.

[34 : 59] When we share the gospel with others we're not going as experts who have all the answers. We're going as outsiders who have been welcomed in and are offering someone else another outsider, another chance to be welcomed in in the same way that we have.

And in chapter 56 verse 8 God promises I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered. He says I'm going to take care of this. People will come when you share the gospel. My family will grow. Outsiders will be welcomed in as long as you are willing to go and share with them. And so if you are a Christian here today God calls you reach out to the outsiders in your life. Don't ignore them. Don't overlook them because you think you're better than them. But go to them. Share with them. Show them the beauty of Jesus.

He has promised to take care of the results. But he calls us to live on mission as a group that he has formed for the accomplishment of this mission.

[36 : 09] He says go. Live lives of missional holiness. Reach out to the outsiders because I love them and I want them and I want them to come to me.

I want you to be my hands and feet. Welcome them into the family. Will we do that? Let's pray. Father we thank you for your love for us.

We thank you that you are good and you are faithful and that you give us grace that we don't deserve that when we are outsiders you called to us and you welcomed us into your family.

God I pray that we would be a people who live lives of obedience to you not just for the sake of keeping the rules but as a way of showing the world around us how beautiful of a God you are and of inviting them in to join your family.

God I pray for those who are here today who don't know you that they would come running to you that they would find a place of welcome and a place where they don't need to be an outsider

anymore in you.

[37 : 20] I pray for those who are here today that know you that we would live lives of faith telling those around us about you and how great you are trusting you to be faithful with the results.

God we love you. In Jesus name. Amen.