Faith that Sees Through Culture

Lesson 5: Who are they?

# Getting going

1. Last time as we closed we discussed, what are some areas of your life where, over time, you have become increasingly aware of sin? Areas where, perhaps, when you first thought about Jesus, you don’t think you were much of a sinner, but after years you realized that you were really quite sinful? After a little break, have you had any further insight on that question?
2. Quick, what is the best ice cream? The best baseball team? And the best natural elements in the world for organic life?
3. “Dad, they won’t let me play.” One look at my son’s face told me he was crushed. Why do you think it feels so awful to be excluded, and why is it so exhilarating to be included?

# Getting into the Word

1. God has stated very clearly that he loves all. The promise of the gospel is universal and inclusive. Review the passages below. For whom has Jesus died? What benefits are they receiving?

* “16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)
* “23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23–24)
* “6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6, 8, 10)
* “19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.” (2 Corinthians 5:19)
* “3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people.” (1 Timothy 2:2–6)
* “11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.” (Titus 2:11)

1. The idea that the Christian faith is so inclusive and universal is hard for many people to accept. Many of those reasons come right out of the Bible. Look at each of these groups of passages and explain the reason people question the inclusive/universal nature of Christianity.

Group 1

* “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)
* “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:1)

Group 2

* “16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16–17)
* “28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” (Romans 3:28)
* “36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” (John 3:36)

Group 3

* “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God”

Group 4

* “but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.” (Mark 3:29)
* “So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:4–5)

1. What reasons do people give you for rejecting the inclusive claims of Jesus?
2. Christians have both these inclusive and exclusive claims: Jesus died for all people and all people are given the benefits of Jesus. The only person who receives these benefits is the one who gets them from Jesus and wants to keep them. These two claims are very difficult. Espinosa argues that they are not contradictorybut complementary (pg 139ff). What do you think he means by this?

Here is an example. Consider a park. If I say, “The park is open to everyone. No one may enter the park.” Those two statements are contradictory. The one excludes the other.

If I say, “The park is open to everyone. Individuals in the park have to stay” those two statements complement each other.

1. Look at the following passages. Point out how these passages bring together both the exclusive and inclusive nature of the Christian faith in a complementary way.

* “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)
* “25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”
* ““Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Mark 8:34–37)

1. To summarize, Espinosa says this is the lens: “We do not make assumptions about people’s spiritual status based on whether they attend public worship services, live an upright life, or exhibit any other external sign. These assumptions are cast aside. Instead we want to know if people feel a personal need for God’s help, knowing that they cannot save themselves.” (pg 151) In your own words, what is the lens that we need to put on as we look at other people?
2. As we wrap up, what are some benefits of wearing this lens as we look at other people?

# Going forward in faith

1. Many people have a very difficult time with the exclusivity of Christianity. Consider this example. A husband and wife were both Christian. They had different confessions of faith, different church bodies, and different denominations. The wife was disappointed, even upset that she couldn’t have communion at the husband’s church. She complained, or at least expressed her disappointment, to her husband’s pastor. Then they wanted their baby baptized. They went to the wife’s church. There the husband wasn’t allowed to even attend the baptism. They were both frustrated by this exclusivity. I would point out that we are way more exclusive on a daily basis about much smaller things. Consider the USPS. They promise to bring mail everywhere. But at a previous house we had one of these passthrough driveways. For some reason, the mailperson wouldn’t walk up the driveway. So if we had people over and they parked in the driveway or we didn’t get the snow shoveled soon enough, the mailperson wouldn’t deliver the mail. I’m sure you can give many examples of how the post office wouldn’t serve you or someone else. I can also give you example after example of club you can’t be part of or activity you can’t do because of who you are. In light of the fact that the world is really quite exclusive, how can better come to grips with inclusive-exclusivity of Christianity?
2. One of my favorite biblical examples of the inclusive-exclusivity of Christianity is Rahab. Despite her nationality (Canaanite), her life (she was a prostitute), and her home (Jericho), she was welcomed into God’s kingdom. Sheer grace. Amazing. The mark of her desire to be part of that kingdom was a rope hung from her window. It marked her as a person in need of God’s help, God’s intervention. She reminds us that we need to carry around a rope (maybe not physical) that marks us as people in need of God’s help. What is your “rope”?
3. What’s a passage from this Scripture that impacted you?
4. How are you going to respond to this message?
5. Who is one person you’d like to share this with?