

Christmas Rejects

Hidden Christmas, Pt.2

We are in the middle of a short, end-of-year Christmas series in which we are looking at passages of scripture that don't appear on the surface to be Christmas stories and yet have something to teach us about Christmas themes. We're calling it *Hidden Christmas*. We said last week it's kind of like the debate over the movie *Die Hard* – Christmas movie or not? If you were here – or watched on line – we opened up with a comparison of the Bruce Willis action thriller and Bing Crosby's classic, *White Christmas*.

Now, that was just a silly way to open the sermon, but God must be in it...because on Friday – two mornings ago – I opened my morning paper to find...a *full-page spread* proclaiming, “Die Hard is Definitely A Christmas Movie. Or Not.” You can't make that up! So we're looking at surprising Christmas stories in the Bible, last week and this week from the Gospel of Mark – which does not contain a proper narrative of the birth of Jesus, and yet contains many of the themes of Christmas.

Last week we looked at the fact that Christmas points back to a promise that took God thousands of years to get around to fulfilling and points *forward* to a

promise - peace on earth – that He hasn't gotten around to fulfilling yet. And we said that means Christmas tells us that, though God fulfills His promises, He almost *never* fulfills them according to our time schedules, and so we're constantly frustrated. Christmas teaches us about waiting and tells us God's timing and our timing are rarely the same thing. That's kind of unpleasant, but there it is.

This week we're going to look at another one that maybe, if anything, is even a little more unpleasant. Though again, I promise if you push it on through and hang on to the end you'll see it's a theme of enormous significance, encouragement, and fulfillment. But the second thing is the stable, the manger, no room at the inn, and a family having to run to get away from Herod. And as we're going to see today, that pattern did not end with Jesus' childhood, but was a staple of his life.

So the second theme is rejection. Christmas teaches us that the world will always by-and-large reject Christ and the people who follow Christ. Christmas means rejection. Christmas means being on the outside. Christmas means no room in the thinking of the leaders and the people of the world. And this passage is going to tell us something about that theme which we're going to explore.

This is **Mark 6:1-6**. I'm going to come back and read the follow up passage later. *“Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! 3 Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.*

4 Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.”

Not a Christmas story, I'll grant you. Not even an overlooked Christmas story. You know, one of my favorite *under*-appreciated Christmas texts is where Mary and Joseph take the baby Jesus to the temple to be dedicated and circumcised, and they see Simeon, the old saint. And Simeon sees the baby and the first thing he says is something that is very famous. It's called the *Nunc Dimittis*. It's used in many liturgical churches and it's the place where Simeon says, (**Luke 2:29-30**), *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation...”*

But we forget the second part of Simeon's statement when he says to Mary, (**v.34-35**), *“This child is destined to cause **the falling** and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign **that will be spoken against**, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

See, the fact that there was no room at the inn, the fact that the family had to flee for their lives to Egypt to get away from Herod, Simeon's prophetic warning, “This child will be a sign which is *spoken against*...” This is telling us that – with everything else; God with us, light coming into darkness, glad tidings of good news – but Christmas is also about the fact the world can't really *get* Jesus; the world can't understand Jesus. The world finds Jesus – the *true* Jesus - offensive.

And therefore, anyone who follows Jesus is going to experience rejection, just the way Jesus himself experienced rejection. Now, we're going to explore that theme through this passage, but first a word of caution. Because there are plenty of offensive Christians around - that have *nothing* to do with Jesus! You don't get to be a jerk to everybody and then say, “Well, Jesus said I would be rejected for following him.” No, Jesus didn't say to be a jerk. Being a witness and being obnoxious are not synonymous, I *promise* you. Dragging Jesus into your politics is not what Simeon was talking about.

Jesus wasn't a jerk. The closest description we have of the emotional life of Jesus is when he describes himself in Matthew chapter 11 as "gentle and humble in heart". And yet, the historical fact is that many people did find him offensive. You've already seen it, because we went right by it in verse 3. It says, (v.3) "And they took *offense* at him." The word for "offense" there - you don't have to be Greek scholars to figure this one out - the word offense is a translation of the Greek word *skandalizonto*. It meant they were "scandalized" by him. That's more than just annoyed, that's to be outraged, disgusted even.

Christmas tells us that there's an undeniable offensiveness about Jesus. You know, even if you took away the Bible, there are two historical facts that we would know about Jesus. One thing is this Palestinian Jew got himself killed. That's stated in secular Roman history. And the other thing we know is almost *immediately* after he died his followers began to worship him as divine.

And who were his initial followers? They were Jews - who were the last people on the face of the earth equipped to believe a human being could be divine. Pagan Romans or Greeks would have been understandable, but there is no other group of people, religion, culture, or worldview *more hostile* to the idea that a human being could be divine than Judaism.

So he's gentle and humble but people both killed him and worshipped him - some of them the *same* people. How do you account for that? I mean Mr. Rogers is just about nicest person you could imagine. Sometimes we think "gentle and humble" means Jesus was like Mr. Rogers. But who would kill Mister Rogers? And who would worship Mister Rogers? I mean, I love Mr. Rogers, but that's a bit much.

See 50 years ago, the great Anglican theologian, John Stott, wrote a book called *Basic Christianity*. And his thesis is that if you read the Bible, you'll see that no one ever responded to Jesus moderately. Every response to Jesus is extreme. Whenever people met Jesus and heard what he had to say, there are only three things they did: They either ran away from him in fear, murderously turned upon him and tried to kill him, or they fell down and surrendered everything to him. But no one ever "liked" Jesus. No one ever said, "I like him."

No one ever said, "He would be a wonderful example to base my life on." No one ever responded to him moderately. They only ever responded to him with extremity, which means he must have been an *outrageous* person, which means he must have been an offensive person, because only offensive people - an incredibly offensive person in this case - can get themselves killed and worshipped at the same time.

And the Biblical Jesus is *universally* offensive. What do I mean by that? What's interesting here is it's his *hometown* that finds him offensive. Now we're going to get back to that, but notice this: There are other places where he offends the elites. There is a place in **Matthew 15:12** when Jesus is teaching and it says, "Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?'" I think Jesus *knew*!

So He offends the elites. He offends the leaders. He offends the people who run the big city. Now – in our text - he comes into a small town, and he offends *them too*. He offends the high, and he offends the low. He offends the city mouse and the country mouse. He offends the leaders, and he offends the common people.

He offends every culture. He offends every class. He offends every kind of person - in different ways, of course, because they're different. Now why is it important to know that? It is so important, especially if you are a typical Austinite or if you are just a typical member of Western secular society. Here's what's going on.

Over the years I've talked to people who say, "You know, I can handle Christianity. I can handle Christ, except for a *couple* of things which I just can't

accept." I say, "Well, what are those?" Usually, here's what comes up: They say, "I cannot handle this idea that Jesus is the only way to the Father. I can't handle that place where the text says, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' I can't handle this idea that good people of other religions have to convert to Christianity. If you could just get rid of that..."

But here's the problem with that: In our modern Western culture, you read these texts about Jesus accepting the outsider, accepting the marginal, accepting the prostitute, and accepting the fallen people, just by grace. He just embraces them. He says, "Just trust in me, and I'll receive you." That just warms the cockles of our little Western hearts.

But when he says, "There's only one truth, and I'm the truth," we can't accept that. You say, "If you get rid of that, then I could accept Jesus." But go to *non-Western* cultures - go to traditional shame-and-honor cultures - they are not offended by this idea where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." They're not offended. They may not *agree* with it, but they're not offended by the *idea* that there's one truth. They believe in absolute moral values. No, they're offended by the very things that warm the cockles of the Western person's heart.

They're offended by Jesus Christ saying to people, "Yeah, you lived a lousy life, but okay. Just love me. Just trust in me, and I'll receive you." They're saying, "What moral laxity. What kind of religion is that?" We're offended by the narrowness of the gospel and they are offended by the breadth of the gospel. Do you see?

Do you see the incredible cultural arrogance of a person in America who says, "The only problem with Jesus Christ is the way he offends *my* culture. If you could just get rid of the way he offends *my* culture, then things would be okay." Who the heck do we think we are to elevate our culture over another and say, "If I could just fix that, then Jesus is fixed"? What about the ways he offends everybody else?

Jesus Christ will *always* offend people. Do you remember what offend means? Scandalize. What does scandalize mean? When you're scandalized, you haven't just disagreed with somebody; that person has violated the most basic ruling principles of your heart. Right? Jesus Christ will offend every culture because he violates the ruling dominate idea of every culture. In the West, the ruling dominant idea is individual choice – absolute individual freedom. I as an individual have to decide what's right and wrong for me.

Whereas over in traditional cultures, the ultimate is not individual choice. The ultimate is moral performance; being honorable to your tribe, and being true to your people. They make an idol out of the *collective*. In the Western culture, we make an idol out of the *individual*. And Jesus Christ is going to overturn all of that, because he says, "*I* am the way. *I* have to be the Lord. You have to worship me; *I'm* the salvation. Not *you*, and not your *tribe*."

So Christmas tells us about the reality of the offensiveness of Christ. If you don't have an offensive Jesus, you don't have a historical Jesus and you don't have a universal Jesus - a Jesus for *all* people. That's the reality. But *why* is he offensive? Let's look at this.

I just showed you that actually Jesus is offensive in incredibly diverse ways, because he'll offend *anybody*. Jesus steps on everybody's toes. This is why it's so dangerous to drag Jesus into your political party; he won't be pigeon-holed into any partisan platform – not then, not now, not ever. Whatever the ruling idea of your heart or whatever the ruling idea of your society, he always violates the ruling ideas, because *he* demands to be the ruling idea.

And therefore, he is going to offend everybody differently, so I couldn't possibly give you all the reasons Jesus is offensive here this morning. But what I want to do is show you a *particular* way people find him offensive that really fits in with Christmas. Look at what they say in **v. 3**, "*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?*" And *that's* why they took offense at him. What they're offended by is the ordinariness of Jesus.

William Lane, in his commentary on Mark, says this about the people of Jesus' hometown, "In spite of what they heard and saw they failed to penetrate the veil of ordinariness which characterized this one who had grown up in the village." (Lane, 201) Too mundane. Too commonplace. "Isn't this the carpenter?" "He's nobody special; he's just a carpenter, just an ordinary guy."

And then look at this: "Isn't this Mary's son...?" You should know, in that patriarchal society, nobody *ever* was called "Mary's son". You were always called by your father's name; you were never referred to by your mother's name. Most commentators say this almost certainly is a reference to the fact that he was born out of wedlock.

It's a way of saying, "You do not come from exceptional socioeconomic timber. You're just a carpenter. And you do not come from exceptional moral timber. You're just a bastard. You're just an ordinary Joe. We remember you." Some of the people probably said, "I remember when I used to babysit for Mary. I changed his...whatever they had then. I wiped his...nose. I know this guy. This can't be the Savior of the world. He's too ordinary."

See, Christmas is all about that too. Jesus was not born in the civic center. He was born in a stable. Look at the invitation list: just ordinary people, shepherds, no celebrities. And therefore, what we're learning here is not just the fact Jesus Christ *does* get rejected, Jesus Christ *offends* the world's sensibilities, but we're being told one of the key ways in which he does.

One of the keys ways Jesus, and Jesus' message, and Jesus' people, and following Jesus offends people and just does not fit in and that is, Christmas tells us God loves the ordinary. Social media doesn't love the ordinary, but God does. That God works through the ordinary. That God loves ordinary families. He loves ordinary people. He loves ordinary life. And frankly, what is Christmas all about? "God become flesh!" But do you know what that means? The infinite becomes ordinary.

Let me put it another way. We want the extraordinary to become extraordinary. We want the extraordinary to come down and be spectacular, but Christmas means the extraordinary has become ordinary. And that the Spirit of God, the cosmic power, the saving, salvific power of the universe comes and works in the most ordinary ways in your life, comes through the most ordinary means, comes through the most ordinary people, and even comes through the most ordinary message.

And the world says, “Can’t be. It ought to be fast, it ought to be dramatic, it ought to be spectacular.” And Christmas says, “Nope.” They’re offended because this guy is a carpenter. Now how does this work? Let me do some reflection with you. Let me show you a few ways in which people are very offended by the ordinariness of Christianity and Christ right now. Let me give you three.

First, people nowadays are offended by the ordinariness of the *gospel message* itself. What do I mean by that? Think of the gospel message. The gospel message is this: You are not saved and related to God on the basis of your moral performance, on the basis of your past, or on the basis of your record. You are related to the Father on the basis of *Jesus’* performance, *Jesus’* past, and *Jesus’* record. Jesus came into the world and lived the life you should have lived, and died the death you should have died...in your place.

And if you’re willing to transfer your trust from *your* performance, your past, and your record to *his* performance, his past, and his record, *at that moment*, in a stroke, you can have a relationship with God of perfect acceptance.

Now there is no parallel to this in the religious world. Every other religion sees salvation as an arduous process of seeking enlightenment. No other religion talks about a single stroke that even a 5-year-old child can do, but there are *paths* of enlightenment and *rituals* of purity. There’s nothing like this, and as a result, this offends people. Oh, it does. People say, “That’s *it*? That’s too easy. That can’t be it. Give me an Eightfold Path. Give me Five Pillars. Give me Ten Commandments. Give me something I can sink my teeth into.”

But *why* are they upset and offended by the easiness of it? There’s a story in the Old Testament, 2 Kings 5, about a man named Naaman. Naaman was this great general of Syria, and he had gotten leprosy. And he heard he could be healed through the prophet of the Lord, Elisha. So he comes to Israel, and he has a bucketload of money. And he has brought all of his weapons and soldiers with him. He figures if he’s going to earn his salvation, he’s ready. He’s probably, next to the king, the richest guy in Syria. He’s certainly the greatest warrior – a man of action.

And he shows up at the door, and all Elisha's servant comes out and says is, "If you want to be saved, just go wash in the Jordan River." He's *furious*, and he storms away. And his servants come after him – does anybody remember this story? **2 Kings 5:13**, "Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?" See, that's what he was expecting. Naaman was expecting Elisha to say, "Slay a monster. Rescue the captives. Bring me the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West..and you can be saved."

Why was he offended by what he was told, "Go wash in the Jordan River." Do you know why he was offended? Do you know why he said, "That's too easy"? Any idiot can do that. You don't have to be good or bad, strong or weak. Anybody can do it; it's too ordinary. He was looking for extraordinary, and it was ordinary. But why was he offended? He was offended *because of his pride*.

Did you know that it's not sin that separates us from God? Not anymore. Not after the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ has paid for every sin. No, what separates us from God now is pride. We're too proud to admit that we're ordinary sinners. We're too proud to bring our sins to the cross – not just once, years ago when we were kids, but *daily*.

I saved a Tweet from Pastor Tim Keller from a couple years ago – "If you want to become a Christian, all you need is nothing – but most people don't have that." That's very true.

The ordinariness of the gospel. Stable. Shepherds. Carpenter. Neighborhood kid. It's just too ordinary. It can't be. And there's a whole lot of people who will never become Christians because it's too simple, because it's too easy. The ordinariness offends the pride.

Secondly, it's not just that we're offended by the ordinariness of the gospel message; we're offended by the ordinariness of Christians. Now listen. Because of the nature of the gospel, *who* are Christians? Are Christians the most morally disciplined people? Are Christians the people who have really pulled themselves together, *really* have their character down, and are really living good lives? No.

So who is a Christian? Christians in general are people who have come to see that they are moral failures. The gospel is not for people who say, "I can do it." The gospel is for people who say, "I *can't* do it." And who are those people? These are people who have made bad decisions. These are people very often who've had really rough lives. These are people who very often start out in really terrible families.

And when they become Christians the *glory* of the gospel is they're children of God and they're accepted and they're loved even though they're still deeply flawed. And that's the person who may be trying to talk to you about Jesus. You have a brother, a sister, a son, or a parent, and they're trying to tell you about Jesus. And you look at them, and you say, "Uh...you're kind of a mess. You're just an ordinary person."

I want you to think about this for a second. Just because this person is filled with flaws - just an ordinary person - does this mean the gospel they're telling you about can't be true? Do you remember another OT story about a guy named Balaam - book of Numbers? Balaam was a guy who was doing the wrong thing, and God was trying to get through to him. He won't listen to God. One day he's riding on a donkey, and God, in desperation, finally gets through to him. He has *the donkey* start to prophecy.

That's right, *the donkey* turns around and starts telling Balaam the things God wants him to know. Think about it. The story is referred to as Ballam's ass! Sometimes God will use an ass to tell you the truth. Very often, Christians are asses. Why? The glory of the flaw in the persons who claim to be Christians - I am *not* making excuses for Christians who will not

grow. I am not making excuses for Christians who are being inconsistent. I don't want to do that.

But I do want you to see it this way: Other religions say, "The good are in, and the bad are out. The disciplined are in, and the undisciplined are out." The glory of the gospel is, because of the grace of Jesus Christ, the *humbled* are in, and the *proud* are out. And so even the ordinariness of Christians is a pointer to that. Think. Don't be offended by the ordinariness of Christians. The ordinariness of the gospel itself offends us. The ordinariness of Christians offends us. They're just carpenters. They're just Mary's son. So many Christians are Mary's son.

But then lastly, the ordinariness of the Christian experience offends people. Here I am looking at Christians yourselves. Let me look at you for a minute. Listen to me. One of the things that really, really offends us is that even though when we first give our lives to Christ sometimes there can be a great deal of joy, relief, release, and so on, but it won't be long before you realize there aren't going to be a lot of quick fixes in your life. And that God, unfortunately, is going to work through ordinary life. What's ordinary life? Irritations. Interruptions. Boredom.

Not talking about salvation – that’s instant and remember, that’s based on what God does – what Jesus *did* - not what you do. That’s what the theologians call justification. But this is talking about sanctification – becoming like Christ – and that is not quick at all. That will take the rest of your life. And the way you’re going to win or lose Christlikeness is in ordinary life.

Your schedule is interrupted, and at that point you can decide, “Am I going to live according to the principles of the world or the principles of the kingdom?” What’s the difference? The principle of the kingdom is this; “My life for yours.” What’s the principle of the world? “Your life for mine.” The principle of the world is I use you, and my happiness is the ultimate value. The principle of the kingdom is I serve you, and your happiness is the ultimate value.

And see, the Bible says he who loses his life will find his life. The one who serves other people will find all the love they could possibly want. And so in comes the interruption. In comes the irritation. In comes irritating people. Here comes ordinary life, and that’s where you’re going to lose or win Christlikeness, and beautiful character, and the glory of God. What does it mean that at Christmas God became human – the incarnation - the Word became flesh? It means the extraordinary became ordinary, and the extraordinary is working through ordinary things.

It’s the way you handle irritating people. It’s the way you handle interruptions. It’s the way you discipline your life. It’s whether you get yourself up in the morning and actually put in the time to pray. There’s *nothing* more mundane than that. Just try it. Try to pray and read the Bible for 30 minutes a day for six weeks straight. Even try it, and you’ll just be *overwhelmed* with the ordinariness of Christian experience. You’ll be overwhelmed with the mundane. You’ll be overwhelmed with how hard that is.

But if anybody gets through it, your life will never be the same. And here you are waiting for these inspirational lightening bolts from heaven, enlightenment. You’re waiting for quick fixes, dramatic things. Oh no. But we are offended by that. But why should it be anything otherwise? What’s our model? Edward Shillito –early 20th century English poet - has this famous passage in his poem, “Jesus of the Scars”, in which he says to Jesus:

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;

See? Born as baby. Manger. Crucifixion. Rejected by the elite. Rejected by his family. Rejected by his hometown. In the end, forsaken by his disciples. He *stumbled* to the throne. So will we.

Another British poet – albeit a few hundred years earlier - George Herbert says in his work

“Discipline”:

Though I fail, I weep:

Though I halt in pace,

Yet I creep

To the throne of grace.

We creep. Are you offended by the ordinariness? The ordinariness of Christians, the ordinariness of Christian experience? There’s a terrific passage in C.S. Lewis’ brilliant little book, *The Screwtape Letters*. You know the trouble with reading quotes from *The Screwtape Letters* is you always have to put it into context, because a straight reading can be very confusing. Because it’s a fictional account of a demon writing a letter of advice to his nephew who’s just starting out in the human tempting business. And so everything is upside down. The goal is *unhealthy* spirituality. Jesus is called “The Enemy”. Humans are “the patient.” So you have to keep that straight.

Well, here are some instructions on how to deal with a new convert, someone just entering the faith. This is Screwtape writing to his nephew, Wormwood: “When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbors. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like ‘the body of Christ’ and the actual faces in the next

pew...Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double-chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous.” (6)

The demon continues: “Work hard, then, on the disappointment or anticlimax which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a churchman. The Enemy...” - remember, that’s actually Christ – “...allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavor. It occurs when the boy who has been enchanted in the nursery by *Stories from the Odyssey* buckles down to really learning Greek.”

“It occurs when lovers have got married and begin the real task of learning to live together. In every department of life it marks the transition from dreaming aspiration to laborious doing. The Enemy takes this risk because He has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting little human vermin into what He calls His ‘free’ lovers and servants – ‘sons’ is the word He uses.”

“Desiring their freedom, He therefore refuses to carry them, by their mere affections and habits, to any of the goals which He sets before them: He leaves them to ‘do it on their own’. And there lies our opportunity. But also, remember, there lies our danger. If once they get through this initial dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt.”

Don't be overthrown by the ordinariness of Christian experience, by the ordinariness of Christians, or by the ordinariness of the gospel message. It's the ordinariness now that actually leads to the extra ordinariness of eternity. It's the ordinariness of Christmas – the first coming of Christ into the world – that leads to the extraordinary second coming of Jesus that we long for.

But in the meantime – in the great in between time – *how?* How are we going to do this? How are we going to handle this? How are we going to get out there and live the life we ought to live? Well, let me show you the very last part of the passage. I'll be really brief on it. The last part of the passage looks like a rabbit trail. Not terribly well connected, but trust me, it is. It says in **verses 7–13**, *“Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. 8 These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.*

10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.” 12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

Now you might say, “What does that have to do with what happened before?” Everything. What happened before is Jesus is rejected. And what happens *after* this passage is John the Baptist is executed. And this middle section is Jesus' way of telling us how to live in a climate of rejection. On the one hand, he gives us a couple of things.

First, “Go out by twos.” What does that mean? You're never going to handle the ordinariness of life, and you're never going to handle the rejection of the world, if you don't have deep relationships with other believers. Lone Christians will perish. I don't mean ultimately, but they will perish in their temporal living.

Secondly, live simply. Now, be careful. You shouldn't read this in some legalistic way that he's calling every Christian to a life of poverty. Be careful, that can ironically be a path to spiritual pride – “Look how extra-ordinary my lifestyle is!” Don't be legalistic, but read between the lines. He's sending his disciples out on a mission; “Travel light. Don't take money. Don't take bread. Stay wherever you can stay.”

What's the point he's making? The second thing we're taught here is if you believe what I've just said about God's love for the ordinary, love for the ordinary person, love for ordinary life, born in a manger, and all that, it means Christians are going to be people who no longer are taken in by glitz, by appearance, by external beauty, or by status.

Let's face it, that's going to put you more and more into conflict with the spirit of Austin. Now, we *used* to be known for a laid-back egalitarianism. And we're not quite Dallas – you still don't have to put on makeup to go to the grocery store – but more and more “new Austin” is about glitz and glamor. Art for art's sake is shifting to industry and celebrity. Shiny glass hi-rises everywhere. You've got to be elite to live in those things. Heck, you've got to be elite to live in some *shacks* I've seen recently.

I just noticed the other day they're building a *second* Porsche dealer on the South Side. When I was in college, there wasn't even an Audi dealer in town. So we're becoming a pretty elite place. But don't forget that in Austin there are an awful lot of people who are very ordinary looking and have very ordinary jobs. Their cars don't plug in! And the Bible says to associate with them; do not be snobs. Don't let materialism be your measuring stick of human value.

Jesus also says to go out there with a mixture of truth and love. On the one hand, they're supposed to serve everybody, but on the other hand, if someone rejects the gospel, they're supposed to shake off the dust. And this is a way of saying, on the one hand, serve people, and on the other hand, do not be afraid to tell the truth. Do not be afraid of rejection. Don't *seek* it; don't be afraid of it.

Now, where are you going to get the power to live like that, to live unsnobishly, to live in community, to live with a mixture of truth and love, not condemning, but also not fearing to speak up? The answer is in **v. 7**, “*Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out..*” Before he sent them out, he called them in. In these texts, there is always - *always* - a calling in and a sending out.

In verse 7, he called them in, and then he sent them out. And here's what I want you to see: When you look at Jesus Christ, look *past* the rejection by human beings. Look past the manger where he was rejected by the innkeeper. Look past the rejection by his friends. Look past the rejection by his hometown. Look past the rejection even by his family.

He had the *ultimate* rejection. Here's what the ultimate rejection is: It's in **Isaiah 53:2-5**, "*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and **rejected by mankind**...we considered him **punished by God**, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*"

He was stricken *by God*; he was stricken by Him. Jesus was rejected by the Father so we'd be *accepted* by the Father. Jesus came to be spoken *against* so that before the throne of Heaven we could be spoken *for*. Jesus was actually thrown out of the house. There was no room for him in the inn. There was no room for him in the house - why? - so we could dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus Christ got the ultimate rejection, the only rejection that will really kill you. And if you, therefore, have the ultimate acceptance, the acceptance of God, then you'll have the power and ability to live with the ordinariness of being a Christian. You'll have the power to have people look at you and say, "You're nothing special."

There's few things more frustrating as a Christian than to know God is working in your life and have people on the outside look in and say, "There's nothing special about you." Some of you are going to experience this with your families Christmas gatherings in just a couple of weeks. *You* know something has happened in your life, and *they* can't see it because of the ordinary way God works. How are you going to handle that kind of frustration? That kind of rejection? The answer is; you have to see that Jesus rejection was our acceptance. Reject rejection, and you'll be rejected. Accept rejection, and you'll be accepted. Creep to the throne.

Let's pray...