Joining Jesus Outside the Camp

Mike Fast 12 September 2019



Where is Jesus? There are a number of different ways to answer that question. Jesus is seated at God's right hand (Colossians 3:3), Jesus is in every believer (Colossians 1:27) and, as part of the Godhead, Jesus is everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10). These are all helpful in building our knowledge and faith in God.

> If Jesus was physically walking around your city today, where would you find Him?

During Jesus' physical ministry here on earth, He was consistently in places that surprised the people around Him. The religious leaders and the sinners alike were often shocked over where Jesus chose to be. For example, in Luke 5:29-31 we read:

'Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."'

Jesus Sought The Outsiders

In light of these verses, I want us to consider a question, 'If Jesus was physically walking around your city today, where would you find Him?'

Would He be going shopping at the mall, passionately trying to find an amazing new outfit? Would He be vegging, or watching a movie at the theatres? Would He be relaxing at an exclusive private pool sipping a crisp, cold chardonnay?

To clarify what His priorities were, in Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables. Starting in verse 4, Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep, then the lost coin, and finally the prodigal son. In all three parables, Jesus' primary point is that God is a God who loves and searches for the lost.

As you read this article, if you are feeling isolated, lonely, lost or if you are struggling, I have good news for you. Jesus came for people exactly like you!

The Comfort of The Camp

While Jesus was found with the broken, poor and lost, I can easily find myself not wanting to go to those places. Earlier this year, God strongly challenged me from Hebrews 13:12-14:

'So also Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make his people holy by means of his own blood. So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore. For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.'

> Are you willing to bear disgrace with Me? Are you willing to bear My shame?'

Woah, these verses stopped me. What do they mean? Jesus challenged me, 'Mike. I am outside the camp. Are you willing to meet Me and join Me here? Are you willing to bear disgrace with Me? Are you willing to bear My shame?'

If Jesus was in your city today, I believe He would be outside the camp. But what exactly does it mean to be 'outside the camp'?

Camp History

Outside the camp refers back to the Old Testament's Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar and the only day of the year that the high priest would enter the holy of holies. As you can read in Leviticus 16, a young bull would be sacrificed as a sin offering for the priest, and a goat would be offered as a sin offering for the people.

Then a second goat would become the scapegoat. The priest would lay both his hands on the head of the goat, confess the sins and rebellion of the people and send the goat outside the camp, symbolically removing the sins away from the people.

Everything unholy was kept outside the camp, including the carcasses of the bull and the first goat. The scapegoat and even the men who released the scapegoat and carried the remains of the first animals both had to be cleansed before rejoining the camp.

> Jesus has left the comfort of the camp and is outside with the sick, the needy, the sinners and the destitute.

The camp was precious to the Israelites, as inside the camp was the tabernacle and later the temple. All things unclean were strictly kept outside the camp. To be outside the camp was to be separate from God – to be unclean (see Leviticus 13:45-46) and cut off both by the community and the covenant.

Nobody wanted to be outside the camp.

Now the Scriptures teach us that Jesus has left the comfort of the camp and is outside with the sick, the needy, the sinners and the destitute.

The Cost of Leaving The Camp

If we leave the comfort of the camp today, there will be a huge price to pay, just as there was for the people who originally received the letter of Hebrews. For this early church, the camp represented the safety and comfort of Judaism and the Law of God. The book of Hebrews was written to these Hebrew believers, some of whom were thinking of turning back to Judaism, as Judaism was a legal religion in Rome. The writer is saying that you must separate yourselves from Judaism to Christ. You must leave the comfort of the camp of Judaism, of your culture, of your history, and you must turn your back on it and be looked upon with disgrace by leaving the camp to be with Christ.

> When we know that this world is not our home, we gladly go outside the camp to be with Jesus and bear the disgrace He bore.

Practically this would mean insults and persecution (10:33), confiscation of their property (10:34) and staying in prison instead of renouncing Christ (11:35). When we know that this world is not our

home (13:14), we gladly go outside the camp to be with Jesus and bear the disgrace He bore. When we are outside the camp, we can joyfully accept the plundering of our property, because our property was back inside the camp, part of a city that will not last. When we are outside the camp, we can joyfully accept staying in prison. Why would we want to be released if the means to being released is to reject Christ and go back to a camp that will not endure! We are not going back that way! Jesus is not there, and the camp of earthly blessings and comforts will not endure! Christ died in disgrace outside the city, and these Hebrew believers needed to be willing to be disgraced by turning clearly from Judaism to Christ.

> Now He invites us to leave our camps.. to be disgraced in the eyes of our friends and peers so that we can meet with Jesus.

Embracing a New Culture

Are you and I willing to be disgraced? Are we willing to leave our comfort, our culture? I am from a Canadian culture and my culture is strongly comfortable, but it is in opposition to Christ. Am I willing to bear the disgrace with Christ and abandon my camp, my culture, my comfort?

Jesus loved you enough to be willing to do exactly that for you. He was willing to leave His camp (heaven) to be despised, rejected and scorned by men. He was willing to do it just because of how much He loves you. Jesus became our scapegoat. Spiritually, we laid our hands on Him and Jesus willingly took the sins and rebellion of every human heart upon Himself as He left the camp and died on Calvary. Praise God that Jesus is our scapegoat, that He left the comfort of His camp in heaven and took the punishment we deserved upon Himself.

Now He invites us to leave our camps, our comforts, our cultures, to go outside the camp, to be disgraced in the eyes of our friends and peers so that we can meet with Jesus.

Stretching Ourselves

A few years ago, I was at a pastors conference for a week in Harare, Zimbabwe. Most of the pastors there were leading churches in townships/locations/compounds across the major cities of sub-Saharan Africa; from Joburg, Lusaka, Harare, Lilongwe, Maputo, Windhoek, etc. At this conference, the focus was on planting churches to see the Great Commission fulfilled. These African pastors challenged each other to get out of their comfort zones (city townships) and go to the rural areas to share the Good News. These guys have almost nothing in their “comfort zone” from an earthly perspective, yet they were challenging each other to sacrifice for God’s glory.

In a similar way, Jesus went and called the sinners and the sick (Mark 2:17). Jesus was regularly accused of hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes: the unclean. Jesus was way outside the camp.

> He is out there with the hurting, the broken, the drug addicts, the homeless, the poor and the orphans.

Our question at the beginning of this article was if Jesus were in your city, where would He be? Jesus is in your city and I believe He is outside the camp. He is out there with the hurting, the broken, the drug addicts, the homeless, the poor and the orphans. Let us encourage one another to get outside the camp. Jesus is there and He wants to meet with us. As Christ's church, His bride, let us go and meet Him.