

The Amazing Jesus His Amazing Candor of the Christ

Intro: Each month this year we've taken time to reflect upon the amazing character of Jesus. There are so many things about him that we need to admire and imitate. We've already talked about his amazing prayer life, his amazing compassion for people in their suffering, his amazing forbearance with his disciple's failings, his amazing patience with God's timing, and his amazing relationship with his family, and his amazing righteous indignation toward sin, his amazing meekness toward others, his amazing submissive to God, and his amazing moral purity.

In our final lesson on Jesus I want to think with you about another outstanding character trait of Jesus--his willingness to always speak needed truth.

I searched for the best word to describe what I want to illustrate about Jesus. I thought the word I might need to use is "frank." Turning to the dictionary I looked up the word "frank" and found this discussion of possible synonyms:

"*Frank* applies to a person, remark, etc. that is free or blunt in expressing the truth or an opinion, unhampered by conventional reticence; *candid* implies a basic honesty that makes deceit or evasion impossible, sometime to the embarrassment of the listener; *open* implies a lack of concealment and often connotes an ingenuous quality; *outspoken* suggests a lack of restraint or reserve in speech, especially when reticence might be preferable."

Thinking through those definitions I can see how Jesus demonstrated the best of all those qualities; but nothing of the worst. He always knew what people needed to hear and spoke it honestly and freely without reservation. He was sensitive to people's feelings, but spoke what they needed to hear in love, even when it might correct or cast them in a bad light. So let think about the amazing candor of the Christ.

Let's consider some examples:

Jesus' revelation to the rich young ruler

You no doubt remember the story of the wealthy young man who approached Jesus with a question:

And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)

The question seems eager and sincere enough on the surface; yet Jesus answers in a way that we do not expect:

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit

adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” (Mark 10:18-19)

It is as if Jesus knows something about the young man that we cannot discern in his words. His concepts of "goodness" are flawed. He can use that word to describe Jesus as a teacher and of some "good" deed that he might perform at the teacher's command. And beyond that, he doesn't seem to see that ultimate goodness can only be reserved for God, the one who he is talking to.

Still imperceptive to his own character flaws, he says:

And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” (Mark 10:20)

So what does Jesus do now? Here is a young man who is confident that his obedience measures up to God's standard. He must be challenged to see the shortsightedness of his personal assessment; and Mark's account is especially insightful into Jesus' response:

And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” (Mark 10:21-22a)

Mark wants us to see that Jesus looked upon the young man with real discernment. Looking into his heart he sees that there is a need for truth that will make him very uncomfortable, even disappointed. He will tell him that he must surrender his possession and follow him. It was only in this way that the young man could be made to see that, though he was willing to use a portion of his wealth for a good deed to enter the kingdom, he was not willing to surrender everything to Jesus, to make a total commitment of all that he had and was.

But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property. (Mark 10:22b)

It is regrettable that the young man reacted as he did; but his story gives us an amazing insight into the absolute honesty and candor of Jesus toward this young man. And Mark tells us why Jesus was so candid--he loved him! Because Jesus loved him, he told him not what he wanted to hear, but what he needed to hear.

Consider another example:

Jesus' correction of Martha

Jesus had been invited to be a guest at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Such an occasion prompted in Martha all the womanly instincts of being a good hostess, making sure that every need of Jesus was properly met. One imagines that she wanted everything to be just perfect for him; and she busied herself to accomplish just that. But there was a problem. Her sister Mary seemed absorbed in sitting at Jesus' feet and talking with him; and did nothing to help her with the obligations of hospitality. Finally Martha's dissatisfaction erupts not toward Mary her sister, but toward Jesus, the guest:

But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."

Martha's question implies that she feels she is in the right to ask this of Jesus; and that he surely cares about the unacceptable position her sister has put her in. Maybe he should tell her to help her sister.

But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42)

Somehow I cannot read that without imagining that Martha found the Lord's statement both humbling and embarrassing; yet she needed to see that there really was something more important than being the ideal hostess. The most important thing was to use this time to hear what the Lord had to say.

Yet again, Jesus was open and honest with Martha. He didn't tell her what she wanted to hear; but he told her what she needed to hear.

Once you start looking, you see these conversations in many places in the gospels:

Jesus' rebuke of Peter

Not long before his death, Jesus felt it necessary to give his disciples advance notice of the things that were about to take place. They had come to realize that he was the Christ; but they were still not clear about the nature of His kingdom or the sacrificial basis upon which it would be established.

From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. (Matthew 16:21)

It is not hard to imagine how such an announcement fell upon the ears of these loving disciples. Their time with Jesus had made them already come to love him and the thought of crucifixion was more than Peter could bear:

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." (Matthew 16:22)

No one could question the good intentions of Peter; but he was just flat out wrong in what he was saying. Jesus' answer not only made that clear, but even more powerfully showed Peter whose words he was conveying:

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:23)

Peter would have no doubt smarted at the sting of Jesus' words. "He called me the enemy; he made me a messenger of Satan." Yet it was exactly what Peter needed to hear. There could be no kingdom without a cross; and the sooner Peter learned that the better.

Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees

There is one chapter in the gospels in which it appears that Jesus spoke harshest words of his ministry--Matthew 23. At first glance you might even say that Jesus unleashed all his righteous indignation on the scribes and Pharisees who he called "hypocrites," "blind guides," "fools and blind men." Consider this sample of Jesus' stinging indictments:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (Matthew 23:13-15)

Strong stuff! And no doubt if the religious leaders heard what Jesus said they would have undoubtedly been resentful and angry.

But again we have to ask, "What prompted the Lord to speak that way?" And the answer is the same as before, because this was the truth that the Pharisees needed to hear about themselves. They needed to be shaken up, to be made aware of the real danger in which they found themselves. And Jesus risked everything to speak the truth to them!

I say "risked everything" because his rebukes were met with their calls for his crucifixion!

In all these cases and in not a few more, Jesus revealed his willingness to speak needed truth to everyone.

The Call to Imitate Jesus' Candor

I had some reservations about applying this message simply because it may give some people justification for being insensitive and harsh in talking to others. So let me first offer these cautions:

Jesus had a perfect perception of people; our perceptions are often quite flawed.

Jesus had a perfect understand of truth; we are still learning.

Jesus had life without sin; we all have our problems.

I say these things not to discourage you from being honest with others, but rather to do it with a spirit of humility and self-awareness.

All of us need the kind of love that tells people needed truth.

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, (Ephesians 4:15)

We can sometimes withhold the truth because we fear rejection; but that is a quite selfish way of living. You would rather someone be lost forever than to be though less of for telling the truth?

To really love someone means that we do not tell them what they want to hear, but rather what they need to hear.

The truth should never be used like a sledgehammer, but as a scalpel.

Surgery on a man's pride is a delicate operation. When you're operating on a person's ego you need a sensitive heart as well as a truthful tongue.

No one can separate Jesus' candor from his genuine concern for others. Whatever he said, he said out of love.

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.
(Colossians 4:6)

Conclusion: I hope that each of these lessons has challenged us to appreciate the wonderful character of our Savior and that they lead us first to praise and glorify Him for the perfection He demonstrated in His earthly life.

But I also hope that we have been personally challenged by thinking about Jesus to remember that our claim to discipleship means that we seek to be like Him in all these same areas.