INTERACTING WITH THE SERMON

SYNOPSIS OF THE SERMON

This weekend, Pastor Rich Nathan spoke about building the beloved community by avoiding “food fights,” those violent, defensive conflicts that we get into that destroy our relationships. This was a continuation of last week’s sermon, where we looked at how to handle conflict correctly. This week, however, by continuing to look at Paul’s discussion on food in Romans 14, Pastor Rich showed us how to avoid unnecessary conflict altogether.

Starting in Romans 14:13, Pastor Rich highlighted Paul’s basic relational tips for avoiding conflict with one another - don’t judge, don’t hurt, and don’t announce. If we want to avoid getting into food fights, we need to follow these three basic relational ideas. If we don’t judge, we will stop bringing a superior attitude to our relationships. If we are dedicated to not hurting anyone, we will first look at our own actions and ourselves as the foundation for creating healthy relationships. If we don’t feel the need to announce our opinions in every situation, we will avoid getting into vicious arguments about secondary issues. If we want to build relationships fit for the beloved community, we won’t judge, hurt, or announce.

Pastor Rich went on to explain, however, that the relationships that characterize the beloved community are not built on people following relational rules, although certain rules (like the ones just stated) are certainly good to follow. Such relationships are not built on relational principles; they are built on theological principles. They are built on people having a proper understanding of themselves in relationship with Jesus Christ. Throughout this series Pastor Rich has been showing us that Paul didn’t give people lists of rules or guidelines to follow to live life right. He told them to truly understand and then live out the implications of the gospel. In learning how to avoid food fights, we are to simply live out the implications of the gospel.

First, Pastor Rich told us to imitate the example of Christ, specifically by giving up your rights. The world tells people to approach conflict in an aggressive, entitled fashion. Pastor Rich used the example of a struggling marriage that is in counseling and both parties are determined to show the counselor how the other is in the wrong. The way of Christ, however, as shown in John 12:23-26, is to die to yourself so that you can produce fruit in others. Pastor Rich illustrated this through the story of Abraham’s selfless generosity to Lot in Genesis 13:5-7, where we see (in Pastor Rich’s words) that it “requires way more strength to take a punch than to deliver one.” If we want to build the beloved community, we will engage our relationships dedicated to follow the example of Christ by giving up our rights and being willing to take a punch or two from the world.

Second, Pastor Rich told us to live under the rule of Christ. Pastor Rich showed up that in the context of religious diets around the world, only those that live under the rule of Christ are free to eat anything. Pastor Rich says that this is the case because “God wants the beloved community to have no walls between people... he wants us to have free and open fellowship with one another.” Living under the rule of Christ means being dedicated to breaking down walls that divide people.
Finally, Pastor Rich closed on a more personal note. Through the lens of misusing food, he discussed the devastating effects of trying to put something other than Christ first in our lives. When Christ is first in our lives, we can have righteousness, peace, and joy. But too often we put something else first in our lives, like food, and the effects are devastating. Not only do we not get all of the things Christ promises us, but we become slaves to the thing we have misprioritized. Only through putting Christ first in our lives can we have the righteousness, peace, and joy that we are looking for in our lives.

In 5 minutes or less, briefly give a synopsis of this week’s sermon. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend’s message did you find to be most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain.

GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED
These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.
• What are one or two things from this weekend’s sermon that really stood out to you?
• How well do you do in Paul’s practical relationship guidelines? Do you judge? Do you hurt? Do you announce?
• How do you feel about the implications of imitating Christ and giving up your rights for the sake of building relationships fit for the beloved community? How tightly do you cling to your rights in your relationships with your parents, spouse, coworkers, etc.?

SCRIPTURE STUDY
Study Goal: We cannot build the beloved community unless we imitate the example of Christ. There simply is no other way to build the kind of relationships that our hearts desire. Yet despite this knowledge, our lives are full of stories where we “tried to do the right thing” or “had the best of intentions,” yet someone got hurt, a bridge was burned, and the beloved community was broken. Therefore it is not enough for us to recognize that we need to imitate to example of Christ. We must also know that we need God’s help through the Holy Spirit to imitate Christ’s example. Not only must we be whole-heartedly devoted to Christ-likeness, but we must also be whole-heartedly devoted to doing the hard work of transformation in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be like Christ.

“For I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.” Romans 7:18-19

Context: In Psalm 73 we are given a privileged look at how heart change happens. The Psalm is attributed to Asaph, the leader of one of the Levitical choirs appointed by David (1 Chronicles 6:31-32, 39; 16:1-6).

Read Psalm 73

1Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. 2But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. 3For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4They
have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, “How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?” This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

- (vv. 1-3) What causes Asaph’s struggle of faith? What truth about God and what perceived “reality” are at odds? (a. The idea that God is good to Israel/those who are pure in heart (v.1) is at odds for Asaph with the arrogance and prosperity of the wicked (v. 3)).

- (vv. 4-12) What are some of the specific behaviors and characteristics of the lives of the wicked that are frustrating to Asaph? (a. No struggles, sickness, burdens, or ills, they are carefree, they increase in wealth, people flock to them, (vv. 4-5, 10, 12), they are proud, violent, evil hearted and minded, they act like they own everything, and they question God (vv. 6-11)).

- (vv. 13-16) How do all of these realizations make Asaph feel? (a. His own faithfulness has been in vain (v. 13), he has been victimized (v. 14), and it has paralyzed his understanding (v. 15-16)).

- How do you relate with Asaph’s faith crisis to this point in the Psalm? How frustrating is it for you to see the wicked prosper when you are faithful? How does this frustration impact your understanding of God? (Encourage honesty here. Asaph’s own heart change wouldn’t come if he weren’t first honest with his own frustrations. God needs honest hearts if he is going to transform them)

- (v. 17) In verse 17 Asaph does something that changes the entire direction of the Psalm. What is it? (a. Entered the sanctuary of God. It would be helpful to note that in the Old Testament, the sanctuary of the temple is where the very presence of God dwelt. So really, what Asaph did was enter God’s presence. This is most important moment of the entire Psalm.)

- (vv 17b-20) What is the first thing that happened when Asaph entered God’s presence? (a. God revealed to him the answers to his frustrations with the wicked.)
• (vv 21-26) Asaph now turns to addressing God. What has he learned about his heart and about God through his faith crisis and seeking the presence of God? (a. When his heart was bitter, he was **senseless and ignorant** (vv. 21-22), God is with him, He is the strength of his heart, God gives him counsel, he has no one but God (vv. 23-26)).

• (vv. 27-28) To end, Asaph recaps what he has learned. Based on the text, what seems to be most important to him now? At the beginning he was very concerned with the lives of the wicked. Does he seem to be so concerned with that anymore? What is he concerned about?

• Asaph learns valuable lessons about three things: The wicked, his own heart, and God. What was the impetus for all of this change? (a. Entering the presence of God in verse 17. Before this moment, the whole Psalm revolves around Asaph’s problems, after this moment the whole Psalm is Asaph recounting how his knowledge, heart, and relationship with God has changed).

• How does all of this apply to our own lives? What challenges of faith are you going through? Do you try and make sense of those challenges like vv. 1-16 Asaph or do you simply enter the presence of God? (Also, note that Asaph doesn’t specifically enter the presence of God to get answers. It just says he entered the presence of God, and as a byproduct of being in God’s presence, he gains knowledge about the wicked, knowledge about his heart, and grows in relationship with God. Simply being in God’s presence lead to all of this change).

• We can enter the presence of God just like Asaph did. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can “enter the sanctuary of God.” How often do you spend time entering God’s presence, with no agenda other than wanting to be with God?

• Note: To close the discussion, try and tie this back in with growing the beloved community. We learned from Pastor Rich that in order to build the beloved community we need to imitate the example of Christ. But Paul shows us in Romans 7:18-19 that we simply cannot just “act differently.” We are unable to imitate the example of Christ on our own. We **must** have God’s help. God must change our hearts like He changed Asaph’s heart. And the only way for that to happen is if we enter into the presence of God. We must enter into the presence of the Holy Spirit and let him change our hearts. If we do not do this work, we cannot imitate the example of Christ, and we cannot build the beloved community.

**MINISTRY APPLICATION**

*Below you’ll see some options for ministry time with your group. We always encourage you to reserve time in your group to pray for one another and wait on the Holy Spirit.*

• Sit and wait on the presence of God. Admit that we simply are unable to imitate the example of Christ by our own power. Ask God to find out any offensive way in us and to begin to change it right
now by the power of the Holy Spirit. Be ready and willing for the Holy Spirit to lovingly convict us of patterns of sin that destroy the beloved community.

• Pastor Rich spoke heavily in his sermon about the potential for food to become misprioritized in our lives. Open ministry time up for people to get prayer for food-related issues, specifically that people would be freed from the lies that society communicates to us about body image.

• Part of building the beloved community is being dedicated to breaking down barriers that separate people. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you people that you are currently separated from that God wants to bring into your beloved community, and also ask that he give you practical ways to begin that work.

• Sometimes we find it difficult to build the beloved community because we have been hurt, judged, or announced at by those that should be building the beloved community. Use ministry time to give people an avenue to express hurt they have received from Christian brothers or sisters and to begin the process of healing and forgiveness.