

Intro: C.S. Lewis sermon entitled: "The inner Ring"

"In all men's lives at certain periods, and in many men's lives at all periods between infancy and extreme old age, one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local ring and the terror of being left outside." (Lewis)

*This "ring" or "inner ring" is his brilliant mind was the desire to "be in" some elite group.

*This desire is comprehensive and can be all consuming...all feel its pull, some are completely consumed by the gravitational pull of the "inner ring."

*The inner ring is everywhere...battlefields, classrooms, locker rooms, local bar, workplaces, family settings, churches, playgrounds...they are the building blocks of culture.

*Culture: a way of life lived in common...these little "rings" become their own little cultures within a larger culture.

*All are pulled by the gravitational pull of an inner ring.

*Not all are sucked in...but all feel the pull.

*Even those who think they are beyond the pull of a certain "inner ring" are often merely in the pull of another one.

*For instance, the person who "snubs the snubbers"...he is proud to not be a part of the "cool crowd" and only wants to be part of the group that are "proud to not be included among the proud."

*Lewis said that the inner ring is not inherently bad, but it is sometimes unavoidable.

*A quartet by logistical necessity will exclude all but four people from its ranks.

*A basketball team will have 5 people who start the game and around 12 who can be on the team (that's about how long the bench is) and what works practically in a practice session.

*The reality of inner rings is not the problem...the problem is what the "pull of the ring" can do to our hearts.

*For some their entire lives are consumed with the desire to be on the right side of an invisible line.

*Social media has turned this disease into a pandemic...there are so many "inner rings" and so many ways to be in them...or to believe you are in them or out of them.

*On the other side of the invisible line...I will be "in"

*On this side...I am "out"

*I will do and become what I should not do or become in order to "in"

*I will cross any number of lines I should not cross...in order to finally cross that invisible line that will make me "in"

*Unless we pay attention it, this desire will become the engine that drives our very lives.

"The passion for the inner ring is most skillful at making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things." (Lewis)

*This desire is unfulfillable...it cannot be satisfied.

*He uses the phrase "The Danaides (da nay ah dees))

*Danaides (da nay ah dees): 50 daughters of a mythological king who killed their husbands on their wedding night.

-They were condemned by the gods to forever carry water in jars with holes in them.

*They are symbolic of the desire to have what is not to be had...indeed cannot be had.

*As long as you are ruled by the desire to be inside the invisible line you will never get what you want.

*You will live your lives carrying a leaky jar...never able to hold what you think you need to be whole.

"Until you conquer your fear of being an outsider, an outsider you will remain." (Lewis)

*The "magic" of wanting "in" will wear off the second you are "in".

*You find out that these people are no different than your old friends

-You are no different than you were before you were allowed "in"

-Being "in" does not mean as much as you dreamed it would, in fact it means nothing once you have it, not for long, not really.

"You were not looking for virtue or kindness or loyalty or humor or learning or wit or any of the things that can really be enjoyed. (good reasons for wanting "in a ring") You merely wanted to be "in" and that is a pleasure that cannot last." (Lewis)

*You are allowed "in" and you discover nothing has changed...you are now in search of a new "inner ring"

*Often the whole thing is an illusion we have created.

*"People are keeping me out, they don't want me in."

*Usually not true...to quote the brilliant statesman John Gardner, **"You come to understand that most people are neither for you nor against you; they are thinking about themselves.**

*This quest for the inner ring makes us daughters of "King Da nay us"

*We live trying to capture water in a pitcher full of holes...we will never achieve what it is we believe we must have to be complete or whole.

***"The quest of the Inner Ring will break your hearts unless you break it." (Lewis)**

*How to break it? The Gospel.

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36** Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37** and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" **38** Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." **39** So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. **40** A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." **41** Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" **42** Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. **43** Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: **44** "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." **45** Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

*By the time Simon came to get Jesus he was still praying, the language indicates he had been praying for some time.

*Why did Jesus, God in the flesh, need to pray?

*Well is that the right question to ask..."Did he **need** to pray"?

*I don't think it is the right question...or at least the right way to think about the question.

*I would assume he prayed because he wanted to, he liked it.

*Could it be that "need" is the wrong mental direction for us to go in thinking about this?

*I would say he "wanted to pray" "he was happy to pray" "he got to pray" rather than "need to pray"

*He was used to fellowship with God the Father...he would, no doubt, prefer it over fellowship with Peter and the boys.

*After all...he had been enjoying this fellowship since eternity past.

*So, the question for all us might be..."Do we need to pray" or "Do we get to pray?"

*I understand in a sense we "need to"...in order to maintain spiritual health, good relationship.

*But I think the distinction is worth nothing...because it takes us in a certain direction in our attitude about prayer and relationship with God.

*Do I need to talk to my wife...yes, I do.

*But is that how she would want me to think about it, feel about talking with her?

*No, I can assure you its not.

*I think it was necessary for Jesus to get up and pray in order for him to be sustained.

*But I think he prayed because he really wanted to...he enjoyed fellowship with the Father.

36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" 38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

*Huge crowds were looking for Jesus, he was "going viral"

*A wave of popular support was building that he could ride comfortably into wide spread fame.

*But he was interested in the quality of response from people, not the quantity of people responding.

*Last week I said the gospel is not an infomercial on how to be healed.

*It is announcement...the announcement of what God has done in Christ Jesus.

*It is invitation...the invitation of God into eternal life with him...a different kind of life not just a different length of life...a life that begins in this life and doesn't end at death.

*So very excitedly and no doubt assuming Jesus would be just as excited....Simon exclaims breathlessly..."**Everyone is looking for you!**"

*"**Your famous!**" "**I'm an insider!**"

*The Lord's response..."**Let's go somewhere else.**"

*Peter had to be dismayed..."Go somewhere else...you are hit here!"

*Remember his purpose was to "proclaim, announce...preach" the good news not to heal.

*Healing was a demonstration of his authority...a demonstration of his authority to make a proclamation of the gospel.

"Lets go elsewhere (Jesus said) so I can announce the good news...that is why I have come."

39 So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

*The king traveled about announcing and demonstrating his authority.

40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." 41 Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

*The word leprosy was used at that time to designate a wide variety of serious skin diseases, not just the disease we know as leprosy (medically referred to as "Hansen's disease").

*Whatever the type of skin disorder was actually at work, it caused people much suffering...as much social as physical.

*The law required the leper keep his distance from others...furthermore they were to cry "unclean, unclean" if anyone came near them.

*Then the capstone of their misery was they must live alone, outside the camp. (Lev. 13:45-46)

*Why would God have such a law in the OT?

*Partly to protect his people from passing on various diseases.

*Contrary to popular belief...he didn't love the lepers less...but they had a disease...some of them were contagious.

*Here in the narrative we see what God really felt about lepers...and it was not contempt.

*Look at what the leper did...I don't think I am reading into this when I see two things:

1. A desperate man...this part is obvious.
2. An approachable Savior...this part seems clear as well.

*There was something in the persona of Jesus that made this leper think he could break the ceremonial law and approach him.

*Instead of keeping his distance from Jesus(as the law required) he came directly to him and fell to his knees.

*What did he experience?

"Filled with compassion...Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

*He could have healed this man with a word...why the touch?

*Because he was "filled with compassion."

*No telling how long since another person had touched this leper...he needed a "touch"

*Here in a touch Jesus showed the place of ceremonial law vs. the law of love.

*In an upside down religious world ruled by ritual and regulation...he set it right side up with a touch.

*Ceremonial law would have prohibited a touch...the law of love required it.

*His touch demonstrated the law of love for God was expressed in love for others...

*This love for others was the reality to which all the ceremonial law pointed and the reality that had been forgotten and replaced by mere ceremony.

*This man was believed by most to be cursed by God...and his curse was visible for all to see...he wore his curse on his skin.

*So he called out not just "heal me" but "make me clean."

*Jesus, replied **"Be clean."**

*Not because the disease made the man "dirty" or "less valuable to God than the healthy"

*But because the man needed to be cleansed of sin not just healed of disease.

*In fact the man would eventually die of something else, or maybe the leprosy returned, who knows?

*But if he had trusted Christ...he would not die in his sins whatever it was that eventually took his physical life.

*Not all men bear the disease of leprosy...but all bear the disease of sin.

***This is an example of a "Theodicy"**

*A theodicy is a defense of God's existence, goodness, and power in the face of evil and suffering.

*Here we see one of the 7 biblical motifs that deal with theodicy...it is often expressed as a question...

*"God if you are there, if you are good, if you are powerful...why don't you do something about all this suffering?"

*The answer given here is **"Jesus...filled with compassion, touched the suffering man."**

*There is mystery, there is insight beyond our current eyesight...but this is the most personal and powerful statement of God regarding the issue of human suffering.

*Don't see only the fact that the man received physical healing as the key to understanding suffering in this narrative.

*Remember...This leper would someday die physically so clearly the healing did not matter most.

*And if you see it that way, you will be dismayed when God does not eliminate all suffering in your life or in the world right here right now.

*What the healing pointed to was the gospel...relationship with God through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus.

*That's why Jesus said "Be clean" not just "Be healed"

*Jesus is the very goodness of God revealed...walking around, touching the untouchable.

***Perspective:** Sometimes my sweet wife has been my counterbalance.

*She has "lovingly interpreted" my overly direct remarks to our children. ("what dad meant was...")

*She has mediated for me in social situations..."The reason why Terry is not here is..."

*Bottom line, she is a nicer, kinder person than I am...she really is my "better half."

*Here is the point...Jesus is not a nicer, kinder person than God the Father.

-God is Father, Son, Spirit...yes, we cannot hold him in our brains.

*But we must not turn the Trinity into what it is not...

*He is not three Gods in a kind of eternal marriage.

*God is one...When you see Jesus you see God.

*Jesus said "**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father....**" John 14:9

*Can't get much clearer than that.

*What that in mind, let's read it again...

"Filled with compassion Jesus (God) reached out and touched the man."

*Filled with compassion...he touched an untouchable.

*This doesn't answer every question in every way about God and our suffering...but it certainly sets a foundation for trusting God with the answers we don't currently have.

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

*Why the strong warning?

*Probably because the man didn't fully understand the proclamation behind the demonstration.

*If he understood this was the King and the healing was simply a validation of his authority...it is likely he would have obeyed the King when the King commanded him to keep this to himself.

*His direct, immediate...disobedience showed he didn't really get it.

*He likely didn't go and tell people of the King who had come to set them free to relationship with God...he went and told them about a miracle worker who had removed his suffering.

*This was no small thing to the man...but it missed the point.

*The result was that Jesus couldn't just enter a town anymore...he had to stay out in the wastelands or come into a town by stealth.

*People's ears were closed to their largest need, relationship with God...because they were so tuned to their physical needs.

*I get this...it is hard to not be consumed by the physical needs...but that is why we must listen to the gospel message...over and over.

*Our greatest need and opportunity is relationship with God through Jesus...we must not let appreciation or comprehension of that reality slip away because of the distractions of our physical desires and needs.

*The physical is not unimportant...but neither is it all-important.

CONCLUSION:

*To belong is an important part of what it means to be a spiritual being.

*To attempt to deny this or live disregarding this is to live upside down from reality.

*The perversion of this real need...belonging...is the drive to be inside some inner circle for no reason other than I feel I am currently on the outside...or because I believe it will make me whole, significant, important.

*God has lived eternally in living fellowship within the trinity.

*When Jesus was asked to summarize what matters most...his response was...loving relationship.

"Love God with all of your being and love others with supreme love" (like you love yourself)

*Ultimate reality, what has always been there...is loving relationship...a divine, eternal inner ring.

*Our sin coupled with the fact that we are made in God's image helps us understand why we want in a "ring" but for broken reasons.

*In the biblical narrative today here's what we experienced:

1. Jesus was part of the ultimate inner ring: Jesus getting up early to be in fellowship with God the Father.

-Why?

*Because he loved him...ultimate reality...is loving relationship.

*It wasn't because "christian duty required it"...it was because he loved to talk with the Father.

*Loving relationship with God and others (prayer, fellowship, QT, worship) are not something we must do, like some "rule"... "love others...check!"

*Loving relationships describes the very nature of reality itself.

*The inner ring was relationship with God...Jesus was completely and utterly accepted, loved, whole...he was as "in" as you could be.

2. He felt no pull from lesser rings: Then Jesus left the rush of the crowds.

-He had his chance for fame, power, influence, prestige

-But he didn't want it...he said **"Well, time to go"**

*Why?

*Because he was not broken like we are...he felt no pull of the "inner ring"

*He was already a member of the ultimate "inner ring"...God the Father, Son, Spirit.

3. He invited others into his inner ring: Then Jesus went to the ultimate outsider...the man with no access to any "inner ring"

*A Leper...outcaste of God and society.

*I want you to think about a time when you have been on the outside...felt it acutely.

*Maybe it was this week at school, or work, or home...some time in the past.

*Think about how it feels or felt.

*Think deeply about this man who...people stayed away from, wouldn't look at...who suffered all by himself.

*He couldn't even entertain thoughts of stepping over the invisible line into an inner ring...he was beyond hope.

*Now hear the words again about this human wretch...

"Jesus filled with compassion, reached out his hand and touched the man...and said "be clean."

*The coolest man in the region (most currently popular)...who truly didn't trust, want or need popularity...with compassion, touched the man, and declared him clean.

*What is happening here?

*The man without an "inner ring" and no hope of being in one...has been invited into the ultimate inner ring.

*The only Ring that really matters and the one that is open to "All who will."

*Here's what is really interesting:

-The fact that lepers and outcastes and sinners of all shapes could get in this inner ring is precisely what made it so unattractive to those people who ruled the "rings of human culture."

*It's why Paul said

1Cor. 1:26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

*Its not because God doesn't love the wise, the influential, the noble born...or that none were in the church...he said "not many" he didn't say "none."

*The point here is that...they are the ones who are "in" the human "inner rings"...and what makes an inner ring so important to them is that not just anyone can get in.

*And they are in.

*But the Kingdom of God has an open invitation to join him...it why it often takes human desperation and the realization of the emptiness of our drive to enter some "inner ring" in order to become to open to the invitation and opportunity of the gospel.

Lewis: Human inner rings "exist for exclusion...there'd be no fun if there were no outsiders. The invisible line would have no meaning unless most people were on the wrong side of it. Exclusion is no accident; it is the essence."

*But eventually all who live to exclude and to not be excluded become empty, sucked dry by the pursuit of what they cannot hope to obtain.

*They stay daughters of "danaus" (da nay us) forever...trying to hold in their broken jars what cannot possible be held.

*Or they can become sons and daughters of the King...inside the only inner ring that gives life.

John 7:38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

*The opposite of leaky jars that you have to go outside and try to fill...here is living water flowing from inside of a person.

*Here's how the Prophet Jeremiah addresses this reality:

Jer. 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

*Two points here:

1. God's people turned their backs on life giving water. (Life in relationship with God)
2. Turned their hopes to broken cisterns, wells...that cannot hold water...life on their own apart from God.

APPLICATION:

*We will struggle all our lives with the gravitational pull of "inner rings"

*Good or bad ones...the desire to be in a family, a church, a relationship, a club...is not bad.

*The problem is when we turn from the "living water" found in relationship with the Lord Jesus...and go scratching in the ground digging leaky wells that will always run dry.

*One of the ways people cope with the pull of the inner ring is to "try not to care"

*Sometimes these people are successful...they no longer care.

*This doesn't mean they have become full or people with joy or purpose...it means they have become empty.

*The inner ring does not pull them because there is no "mass" for the gravity to affect...they have become "hollow, empty shells."

*Do not believe that become "uncaring, cynical, aloof, alone" is a solution to the pull of our brokenness and the disappointments of our lives...it is not.

*The solution is to care about what matters most...the glory of God in the gospel of Christ.

*If you believe you are free from the pull of the "inner ring" and your heart is hard towards others...you have traded one bad for another.

***One application this morning: Lets enjoy and celebrate repentance..."turn back"...**

***Repent is...two parts of one thing.**

1. Turn away from broken wells, wells that don't hold water...what are they, how are you attempting to make them work in your life?

2. Turn to Jesus again this morning...relationship with God is the one "inner ring" that the sheer fact of wanting to be in will make your heart into something better.

*Repentance is a gift...it is a gift that we must keep opening over and over

Rom. 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

* Let's celebrate this gift together...I'll verbalize a prayer for us all.

SMALL GROUP NOTES

Jan. 25, 2015

Mark 1:35-45

Intro:

1. Discuss a time when you have felt the pull to be in an "inner ring."

2. Discuss a time when you were included and how it felt when you realized you were "in." How did it feel after you had been "in" for a while?
3. Discuss a time when you were excluded?
4. Why do we feel this pull? What is right about it? What is wrong about it?

Read:

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36** Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37** and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" **38** Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." **39** So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. **40** A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." **41** Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" **42** Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. **43** Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: **44** "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." **45** Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Discuss:

1. Is it mere semantics to ask "Did Jesus have to pray" or "Did Jesus want to pray?"
-Why or why not?
2. What does the fact that the Trinity is Ultimate Reality (The source of all that exists) have to do with human purpose and meaning?
-See sermon notes
3. The fact that we were made by a personal God, who has lived eternally in divine relationship means relationships are at the core of who we are.
-How has this impacted our desire to be in "inner rings?"
4. How has the fact that we are broken by sin impacted this desire to be in "inner rings?"
5. Jesus felt no pull from the "inner rings" of social and religious society around him. Using non-theological terms (i.e.=he was sinless) describe why this was so in practical, personal language.
-For instance: "He didn't have my insecurities."
6. Jesus invited touched a leper.
-Why was this significant in what it communicated to the leper?
-Why was this significant in what it communicated about his perspective on the ceremonial law vs. the "law of love"?
7. Why do you think the question of why there is evil and suffering has always been mankind's biggest question?

8. A theodicy is a defense of God's existence, power and goodness in the face of human suffering. How does this narrative of Jesus touching this leper provide one way of answering the question of evil and suffering?

Apply:

1. Attempting to escape the pull of the "inner ring" by not caring is not going to be enough. We must move towards the pull of the ultimate "inner ring"...relationship with God.
2. Repentance is a gift from God that must be "opened" over and over in our lives. We must continually turn from "broken wells that don't hold water" and turn towards "Jesus, the source of living water."
3. Take some time now to celebrate the gift of repentance.



The Gospel of Mark

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and in many men's lives at all
periods between infancy and
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the man.**

"Be clean"

A Theodicy

"If God exists and he is good and he is powerful...why do I suffer?"

"Filled with compassion...Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man."

**"Anyone who has seen me has seen
the Father...."**

John 14:9

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