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THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: A RESPONSE TO THE SUPREME COURT RULING ON GAY MARRIAGE AS A RIGHT

Lord, we thank you that you have created the church. We know the word church is a word that comes from *ecclesia*, which means called out ones. We're called out from darkness into light, that we are to be different and not to be blending in. So we take those words seriously, Lord, as we understand what it means to be the church, what it means to be disciples. That you called people out. You called the disciples away from their fishing nets to be followers of you. You call us away from things in our lives to be something different. Lord, we want to be those disciples. It's not easy sometimes to know exactly how to respond in certain situations when we are called to be those disciples of yours. But we ask, Lord, that you would teach us what that means in very practical terms. Give us hearts that follow after you, give us discipleship hearts. And I pray that you would empower us to disciple others so that we can all come to a fuller understanding of what it means to walk in your ways, to live for you, and to serve you.

We recognize, Lord, that that requires humility on our part and also courage. Both are very difficult to balance as we're trying to maneuver through our world system and yet still shine for you. So we ask, Lord, that you would give us your grace and understanding of who you are so that we may shine brightly among those that we come in contact with. That people might see something different in us because we are your church, we are your disciples, and we follow you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

When we look at God's word every week we do so to find relevant truths that will help us understand how to apply God's word in our lives. The scriptures are relevant. Most of the time I'm giving a general principle that says we need to be disciples or we need to serve the Lord in a particular way, and then we apply that in our lives. But today I want to take a break from our study in Numbers for one week and I want to talk about some of the current events that are going on in our country.

I'm going to take two stories that appeared in the news recently and I want to talk about them with you and I want to help you understand how to process them. I want you to understand how to think rightly about the things that are going on in our world and apply God's word and your role as a disciple in the midst of that.

The first one I want to talk about is the Supreme Court decision that took place two days ago that legalized or made it a right for same-sex marriage. I want us to know how to think about that.

It's important for young people especially. I would suggest as you're formulating your thinking about gay rights and so on you need to understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and how to apply that to your life. This isn't just for young people; this is for all of us because we know people who are gay. We know people – we work with them, we have family members who have maybe invited us to come to a wedding.

How do we handle those kinds of situations? What do we do when we're placed in that challenging situation of keeping our identity as a Christian yet living in a world where there are things going on that are not right. In particular how do we handle this difficult situation as we see it take place in the news this week that gives some authority now and some more credence to the whole statement of same-sex marriage. So I want to talk about that just for a little bit.

I think it has to start in our lives with an understanding of our authority in life. Because this isn't really a decision for us that has to do with marriage or how we define marriage. It's not so much a decision that has to do with family; it's a decision that has to do with God's word and the authority of God's word. It really, for us, is a decision that we have to make of what's going to be the authority in our lives. When I say authority I mean how are we going to make a decision about what is right and what is wrong. Because if we are going to make that decision based upon a Supreme Court ruling, we may find ourselves in error.

It was many years ago that the Supreme Court made another ruling, a ruling that allowed for every woman to be able to receive an abortion. That determined for many people a celebration. There was celebration in the streets on that day as there was on Friday. There was celebration. You saw it on Facebook. You saw that workplaces were closing down in celebration of what was happening.

How are you going to handle those kinds of things if the Supreme Court is making a decision about what is right and wrong in our lives? We're going to have some challenges because sometimes the Supreme Court is wrong in the decisions they make.

The fact that every woman is allowed to get an abortion, has the right to an abortion now doesn't confuse the fact that there is a right and a wrong about murdering children. It's still wrong. Abortion is still wrong. The same thing is true when we come to this issue of gay rights.

We have to ask the question, "What is our authority?" Because if our authority is the Supreme Court then we're going to be wavering along based on that. But there are some people who say, "Yeah, I know the Supreme Court isn't my authority," but they rely on popular opinion.

This is a big one for the gay agenda who's tried to influence so many different avenues to communicate to us that same-sex relationships are okay. You see it in the movies. You watch a movie today, many movies or shows will have characters in them that are homosexual and it's okay. It's communicated to us in a way that popular opinion says this is part of society. This is something we ought to all accept because this is how if you're not up with the times then you're

missing out. That you need to leave your preconceived ideas that you have about such things and get with it because this is what's happening. So popular opinion becomes your authority. Be careful about that. It can be very dangerous when popular opinion becomes your authority.

There are some, though, whose authority becomes some sense of feeling about "oh I just have so much compassion" because you and I know people who are gay. We know people who are in that lifestyle. When we say, "Wow, I just like that person. This just can't be wrong because I know that person and they're a nice person." So we find ourselves in this predicament about how to know how to determine right and wrong.

I want to suggest as disciples of Jesus Christ we determine what's right and wrong by God's word. The scriptures sometimes put us in a rather challenging place because the scriptures tell us what is right and wrong and sometimes right and wrong doesn't fit into the societal context. But we're not trying to find out what is politically correct; we're trying to decide what is biblically correct because the Bible gives us our instructions to put faith in practice. The Bible gives us what we need to understand how to live in our lives. So if you're going to be evaluating this discussion, we're going to talk about truth first and then we're going to talk about compassion and how we relate in this environment.

When we talk about truth we have to go to God's word and understand what the Bible says about these things. Do you believe that? So you have to ask yourself a very important question, "Do I believe that the Bible is my authority in life?"

If you look at Facebook posts from many Christians you see that maybe they don't believe that because the way they're posting now seems to indicate that, well, that isn't the most important thing. It's more important that we just love everybody. That we all have this right to love. That's what this is. A right to love. That you can choose to love whomever you want now and now the Supreme Court has justified that.

God has some things to say about homosexuality. The Bible says that homosexuality is wrong. So when you come to understanding the truth that is behind this whole thing we have to come to an understanding of what the Bible says and we have to decide are you really going to allow God to decide through His word that He's communicated to us to decide for you what's right and wrong? That's the decision we make first. Once we make that decision then we have to maneuver through the challenging situations that we find ourselves in.

But we have to go back to that question. Is the Bible that important to you? Or is it just some book that was written long ago that isn't relevant for today.

See, I think as disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to understand God's word. It is our authority. That is why you're going to find that in Calvary Chapel we are emphasizing God's word. When you go to a small group, when you come to teaching on Sunday morning, when you are doing inductive Bible studies that we provide for you, we are emphasizing the Bible, that the Bible is really important for us to understand. That is really the question that needs to be asked here. Because if you start with God's word then you're going to come to some important conclusions.

But then we have a problem. I want to challenge a specific tenant that's presented in the gay agenda and I want you to understand what the Bible has to say about this. Because here's what's said in the gay agenda: People are born with this tendency to be attracted to a same-sex relationship. And because they're born with that tendency then it must be okay. They're born with that tendency. You can't judge them. If that's how they were created, how they were made, and then you're trying to get them to conform to something else, that would be wrong. That's really the tenant that they're trying to proclaim.

I want to help you understand that theologically so that you can understand how to address that at least in your heart. I'm not asking you to go and argue with your gay friends. I'm suggesting that we need to at least know in our hearts what that means.

Because I want you to know the Bible would agree. God would agree with that tenant that some people are born with the propensity toward same-sex attractions. It's not just that. There are some people that are born with a propensity toward anger. There are some people that are born with a propensity to lie. You see, those things come from the heart. Whether they're desires or emotions, they come from the heart.

God has told us that inside of each one of us we are born with what God calls a sin nature. Now a sin nature is a propensity to sin. That's for all of us. That's not just someone who's caught in a gay lifestyle. It's every one of us has a propensity to be selfish and sinful. That comes out in different ways. For some it might come out in dishonesty. Another it might come out in selfishness. Another it might come out in anger. But there's a propensity inside of us that comes because of the fall of Adam.

We all have this sin nature and this sin nature is a magnetic pull toward sin. So you would expect that people would have a tendency or desire to violate God's word in various ways. Someone who's caught up with same-sex attractions is someone who's gravitating in their heart toward something that God says is wrong. You might expect that you would see that if you understand the sin nature.

So please don't think that that truth is not consistent with the way God teaches. It's just interpreted differently by someone who's a humanist who just looks at the human person and someone who's a disciple of Christ who understands God's theology and how God made people and how they then fell and how He redeems them.

So the reality is that when you and I get saved, when we ask Jesus Christ to come into our lives He deals specifically with that sin nature. He gives us the Holy Spirit inside so that we can now start to fly. Even though the sin nature may be pulling us down, the same way an airplane is able to fly the Holy Spirit enables us to be able to overcome the magnetic pull of sin that exists in our lives.

But there's a wrestling that takes place. We all wrestle with things inside of our hearts. All of us wrestle. There's not one sin that's worse than another. Someone who has a same-sex attraction is no worse than the person who has an attraction to, who's living in sin with someone else.

They're having sex before they get married in a heterosexual relationship. That's sin. It's wrong. We don't want to identify one sin as worse than another.

Each one of us struggles with sin in our lives and those sins need to be addressed in our hearts. God wants us to be able to address those in some particular ways. That's why He sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us so that we could understand and live for Him in a powerful way.

Now one of the things that makes this so difficult for us as we come to the gay rights issue is that we as Christians are painted into this box as if we somehow lack compassion because we believe a particular way. It's the same thing that happened with Roe v. Wade that because we believe in the right to life that we are painted as we don't value women. That women do have rights and because they have rights therefore Christians are anti-women or something like that. We get painted into this picture that somehow we are not compassionate toward people who are in those kind of attractions that they have.

It makes it very difficult for us to know how to respond in that dilemma because we're pushed into this corner that makes us look like bigots. That somehow we are intolerant of other people. When really we aren't intolerant of other people. We want to believe in truth and we want to believe in compassion. Now both of those are important.

So when you're invited to go to a wedding of someone that you value, a friend or a family member who is gay and getting married in that relationship, how do you handle that? I think every one of us has to decide what we're going to do in that situation. I can imagine a reason where I might say, "I'm not going to go there because I'm going to make a stand for righteousness that I don't believe that person is moving in the right direction." But I think I could also make a case that "I think I'm going to go to that event even though I don't believe what that person is doing and I'm going to demonstrate my support for them as a person even though I think that their actions are wrong." I think you can make a decision to do either of those.

The idea is going to be a balance of both truth (what I know to be right) and relationship, because even Jesus when He was trying to relate to people on earth He ate with sinners. He had relationships with people who were involved in sin. But His goal wasn't just to say, "Okay your sin is fine;" His goal was to call them out of that sin to a new life.

When He met a woman who was caught in sexual immorality He says to her, "*Leave your sin.* I'm not going to judge you. *Leave your sin.* Let's go forward here," He says to the woman caught in adultery. Now I think we can have that same kind of response, but we need to be able to balance this.

It disheartens me when Christians start doing gay bashing or they start clobbering sin of any kind in a way that I think lacks the grace. We're calling people to a new relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the most important thing that we're doing is to help them understand. Because with that relationship with Jesus Christ there is power. There is power to overcome all kinds of things. No matter what it might be God has given us what we need in order to move forward.

If you open your Bibles with me to 1 John 2:15-17, I want to talk to you and help you understand about the world system. We live in a world system. My heart was heavy this week partly because of this and the reason it's heavy is not because I'm surprised that non-Christians would make bad decisions. That's not why I'm heavy. I'm heavy because this makes a statement about our culture. I love the United States, I love our culture a lot and it just reminds me again that I'm not part of this culture.

So in 1 John 2:15-17 we have these words: *Do not love the world or anything in the world.* Now that's a contrast to what God says in John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world.* That says, *Do not love the world.* That's because the word *world* is used in two different ways in those two different passages.

In John 3:16 where it says *for God so loved the world*, He's speaking of the people represented in the world and He gave Jesus Christ to die for them in John 3:16. In 1 John 2 we're talking about a world system, a system that is corrupt that we live in. There are all kinds of bad things going on in the world system. We can expect that you're going to see bad things happening in the world system and it's described in this passage.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

Now there's a world system that exists around us and you can imagine as you're living in the world system you're going to hear things that are anti-godly. You're going to hear humanists. Humanists believe that man is at the center and outside of that we keep developing new ideas. Man is the one who is at the center of all of that. Where as a Christian I believe that God is at the center and He is the one who determines authority and He's the one who moves us forward in our lives. There's a big difference between those.

You will find in your classrooms, students, that teachers will talk in terms of humanism and they'll talk about evolution as opposed to Creation. They'll talk about things that have to do with sin as if they're socially acceptable and they're not that bad, where God talks about things clearly as sin or not sins. So you can expect that the world system is going to contain some of those things.

You and I are faced with those challenges every day when we're told things about life that are not true by the world systems. You can expect that to take place. Lies are present. We live in a world, but we're not of the world. That's how Jesus described it. We live in the world, but we're not of the world.

So we have to live in that world every day. How are we going to live in that world? What are we going to do? How are we going to handle the challenges that we face?

It's not an easy place to live. It's not an easy place to maneuver as we're trying to shine the light brightly for Jesus Christ. But that is what we're trying to do. We want people to understand that

we're different. We don't just fit in with everybody else. We're salty. There's a statement that we make that we are different than others. That doesn't mean you have to be pointing out people's sin all the time, but it means that you shine your light in a way that attracts people to that.

It will likely lead you to conversations that you might have about this subject. Or just watch Facebook over the last few days. People are changing their profile pictures now so that the couples are coming out and you can see who they are. Any Christian who says anything negative about what has happened is either unfriended or comments are thrown up on their Facebook posts to condemn what they're doing.

It's a challenging place to live. It's a challenging place to speak about who God is in the midst of that. It's not easy to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It's not easy to follow the Lord and what He would have us do.

It's important for us to maintain that balance of truth and to understand what that truth is, but also to have that compassion and love and care for people. We don't abandon truth because we're compassionate. But we don't abandon compassion because we're truthful. Either one of those, if we drop one of them we become in error and it creates a significant problem for us because then we're not representing God honestly. We're not representing Jesus Christ with integrity. So we have to be careful of all these things.

But you have to understand when you become a disciple of Jesus Christ it's really important to understand you are leaving something to come to something else. There's a cost to becoming a disciple.

Jesus described that cost of being a disciple in the book of Matthew and I'm going to read some verses to you from the Sermon on the Mount. He starts with compassion. He says this: *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* He starts with compassion. I really like that. *So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

He's going to be talking about discipleship here and what His discipleship. But then right away, here's where right from that compassion side He jumps right into this other benefit or this other responsibility of being a disciple. So one of the benefits of being a disciple is you have the compassionate Father who's caring for you. Next verse, right after the compassion part. *Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. That's an interesting statement. Just let's all live together in peace. *I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn –* and I want you to see and experience the pain that can happen when you come to know Jesus Christ, when there are challenges that you have to make because you're a disciple of Jesus. When you're a disciple of Jesus it's hard. *I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."*

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Wow. Discipleship is not easy. There's a cost involved, a painful cost. And some of those relationships that you enjoy and you like and you find pleasure in, when they start robbing you of your discipleship responsibilities or your discipleship opportunities then we need to set limits on those. Because the most important thing is that we're sold out for Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean that we wear a badge that says "I'm a Christian" or a Christian t-shirt or bumper sticker. What it means is that we have something inside of us that drives us to be something different. We are not like everyone else.

It's going to be hard sometimes when you make that choice. You need to choose. That's a choice you can't just because you grew up in a Christian home say, "Well I'm a Christian." We're talking about a discipleship, which means following Jesus Christ, and it is not easy. It is painful to follow Jesus Christ.

Which brings me to a second story that's in the news that just really disheartens me, or makes me hurt, I guess. On June 17th there was the mass shooting taking place in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina. It's painful for me because I'm part of that church. Those are my brothers and sisters that were hurt, killed, families still hurting in that situation. But I am proud of the response that I see coming out of there. With many of the people their immediate response was forgiveness. Discipleship comes right down to our hearts.

I'm going to show you a two-minute video. It's a news clip, that's all it is, off of the news of what happened in that situation. I want you to hear the hearts of the disciples. People who have said Jesus Christ is more important to me than revenge because it does something to our hearts. Let's watch this two-minute video together.

[Start of Video]

[Reporter] In shackles and wearing prison stripes, gunman Dyllan Roof walks into his first court appearance with little fanfare or emotion. His image broadcast via video feed from the detention center to a North Charleston courtroom. On the other side of the screen, off camera, relatives of the innocent victims.

[Judge] Before we go into the bond process I would like to ask are there any members or is there a representative of any of the family that would be here that wish to make a statement before this court before I post or set the bond.

[Reporter] Through tears some of them spoke.

[Woman] I forgive you. You took something precious away from me. I will never talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you. And hand resting on your soul.

[Man] Your name, ma'am.

[Felicia] Felicia Sanders.

[Reporter] One of them, Felicia Sanders, a survivor of this slaughter who lost her son in the attack seems to speak for them all.

[Felicia] We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I've known. Every fiber in my body hurts and I will never be the same.

[Reporter] Roof listens expressionless. Staring down, he says nothing.

[Man] Your honor, I've met with Mr. Roof. I think he understands the proceedings.

[Reporter] Law enforcement sources say he confessed to killing nine people, all shot multiple times. In a bizarre twist the chief magistrate asked the court to give sympathy to Roof's family.

[Judge] We must find it in our heart at some point in time not only to help those that are victims, but to also help his family as well.

[Reporter] In their first statement since the massacre, Roof's family says they are devastated and saddened. "Words cannot express our shock, grief, and disbelief as to what happened that night." They go on to say, "The Roof family extends their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims."

[church choir singing]

[Reporter] Forgiveness also a focal point at a prayer vigil on Friday. Quite a remarkable response from a city still healing.

[End of Video]

I'm proud to be associated with them. I'm proud of them. I'm proud to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. But it doesn't come without pain.

It is hard for us to know how to relate lovingly, with truth to someone who's caught up in a gay lifestyle. It's hard for us to know how to respond with forgiveness to people who have been hurt or when we've been hurt ourselves. But we do so because we are disciples, we are called out ones, we are different than other people.

I challenge you today to ask some important questions about your own heart. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you someone who's following Him whole-heartedly? It's a call for me to rededicate my heart to the Lord and to serve Him with everything that I am.