

## JESUS AIN'T A GOOD GUY

Numbers 21:4-9.

(Prayer)

God has reached his limit with the children of Israel who are grumbling and complaining after He delivered them from bondage. Snakes have invaded their camp and are biting people. Many are dying. Moses is convinced this is God's judgment. But in his mercy, God creates a way for them to be saved from the snake's venom. Never forget that God is a holy sovereign judge but he is also rich in mercy.

In the Garden of Eden, the serpent told Eve "Surely you won't die". This is the lie we have all believed from the beginning. "It won't happen to me" As a chaplain, I deal with death everyday at the hospital. We also save lives everyday at the hospital, but we do not offer eternal life. Everything we do is a stall. It is real and it is certain. One day our lives will be over. As the old Hank Williams song goes "no matter

how I struggle and strive, I'll never get out of this world alive.”

Luke 18:9-30

Two prayers are given as examples to the disciples: one that exalts a man and one that humbles a man. I like that Luke has put these three stories together because they have a common thread. Humility and confession are necessary to follow Christ.

Jesus loves the little children and offers them as an object lesson about the kingdom of God. He says we can only enter it as a child.

Is this because children are innocent? Not really. Anyone who spends time with kids knows they are little sinners in training: they can lie and be conniving and selfish. I heard a mom say one time “When I have a headache, I do what it says on the aspirin bottle. Take two and keep away from children”

What Jesus is referring to, however, is the FAITH of a little child, the TRUST of a little child.

Little children aren't interested in status or power. Some kids will run up to anyone on the street and offer them a big hug. Other kids aren't impressed with someone who is the CEO of a big company or a leader with political power. They are not obsessed with money and things. How many times have we bought a big toy for little kids and they act like they have more fun playing with the box?

But little children will usually believe what they hear and what they are told. They are totally dependent on someone else to provide for them, to care for them, and to teach them. This is how we must enter the kingdom of God.

One commentator, Daniel Akin says this is the context for when the rich young ruler approaches Jesus.

The rich young ruler finds out that his question is not a simple question and the answer will be very hard. He has probably heard of Jesus and may have heard him preach and teach, though apparently not enough. He has an existential question and wants some direction. He thinks

he has found a good guy to ask. But Jesus ain't a good guy.

Who do you go to for advice? What question do you ask?

The right person makes a difference. So does asking the right question.

This man asks Jesus "GOOD TEACHER, What must I DO to INHERIT eternal life?"

The Legend of Jesus has already begun and Jesus must quash it. Jesus ain't a good guy.

The Q'uran- Jesus is an anointed prophet

In the book Kosher Jesus- A Jewish patriot murdered by Rome for his struggle on behalf of his people

Enlightened Jesus- a buddha, a very Zen kind of guy.

We have to resist the temptation to create a "good guy" Jesus that is palatable to us.

## **Ricky Bobby the Nascar Racer in *Talladega Nights***

Ricky Bobby prays “Dear lord baby Jesus, We thank you so much for this bountiful harvest of Domino’s, KFC and the always delicious Taco Bell. I just want to take time to say thank you for my family, my two beautiful, handsome, striking sons, Walker and Texas Ranger, or T.R. as we call him, and of course, my red-hot smoking wife, Carley who is a stone-cold fox. Dear tiny Jesus in your golden-fleece diapers, with your tiny, little, fat, balled-up fists pawing at the air  
....”

Ricky’s wife, Carley, just has to interrupt: “Hey, um, you know, sweetie, Jesus did grow up. You don’t always have to call him, ‘baby.’ It’s a bit odd and off-putting to pray to a baby.”

And Ricky says: “Well, I like the Christmas Jesus best and I’m saying grace. When you say grace, you can say it to grownup Jesus or teenage Jesus or bearded Jesus, or whoever you want.”

If we ask Ricky Bobby about Jesus, we get a certain answer. Ricky only likes Baby Jesus for some reason. Maybe I am more like Ricky Bobby than I want to admit. Sometimes Baby Jesus is easier to embrace. As my pastors have reminded me of the words of Paul David Tripp: I am tempted to settle for too little.

Many people in our culture who are not believers think Jesus is a good guy: he teaches us to turn the other cheek instead of seeking revenge. He teaches us to live a simple lifestyle and disavow materialism. He pushes the Golden Rule: to treat others the way we want to be treated. He teaches us to be moral and keep the ten commandments and be a good guy like he is.

But Jesus ain't a good guy.

In this context, how can Jesus be a mere teacher AND be good? Jesus asks the rich young ruler to choose his words carefully. He has already asked the wrong person an even wrong-er question. Jesus says "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

This obviously religious person makes an unwitting theological statement and Jesus asks him about it. Either he is trying to flatter Jesus and curry favor of some kind or he is confessing a belief that Jesus is indeed God. He also asks what can he DO. His whole life and culture has been wrapped up in action and performance—even his religion. Notice that Jesus says “you know the commandments”, but he lists them out of order and is not corrected. Interestingly enough, he mentions the relational commandments. Commandments that have to do with the way we treat other people. This would-be disciple says he has kept them perfectly.

This is the part where I kind of get disappointed. “Tell him Jesus! Tell him if he has lusted after a woman in his mind, he has committed adultery. Tell him if he hates his brother in his heart, it’s the same as murder!” “He’s not perfect!”

Jesus doesn’t do this.

In Mark’s telling, it says “then Jesus loved him”. Remember that Jesus looked him in the eyes—

the windows of his soul—and saw one created in His image. Brothers and sisters, we will never look into the eyes of a person God doesn't love. That person does not exist. God loves the world. As my pastor Rodney says, God loves me just as I am, but praise the Lord, He loves me too much to leave me there.

Jesus ain't a good guy. My lord and savior is pure love. He commands the rich young ruler to enter the kingdom as a little child, to sell his possessions, give them to the poor, and follow Him. He promises him heavenly treasure! We find out later that Jesus isn't asking him to do something his other disciples haven't already done. He asks him to follow in faith.

What is heavenly treasure?

There is a joke about a very rich person who was near death. He desperately wanted to be able to take some of his wealth with him to heaven and was eventually given special permission by God to bring one suitcase. Overjoyed, the businessman gathered his largest suitcase, filled it with pure gold bars and

placed it beside his bed.

Shortly afterwards the man died and showed up at the Pearly Gates where he was greeted by St. Peter. Peter said “you have special permission to bring in one case, but I must check its contents before letting it through.”

So St. Peter opened the suitcase to inspect the worldly items that the businessman found too precious to leave behind. St. Peter exclaimed: “You brought pavement?”

When the religious leader of the day asked Jesus what he thought was the greatest commandment in the law he paraphrased the Torah in Matthew 22:36-40.

In our text, to the rich young ruler, Jesus says, Love God and others with everything you have.

However, the rich young ruler was sad because he had many possessions. Mark’s telling said he “went away grieving”. He had a chance to work side by side with the Lord, to enter the

kingdom of heaven, inherit heavenly treasure and eternal life. Now we don't even know his name. I pray that he eventually believed and surrendered his life to Christ. The scripture says he believed Jesus was a good guy. But Jesus ain't no good guy. He says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

Ouch. Who can be saved? Jesus says with God all things are possible.

Once upon a time I had a coworker named Bull. We worked together as supervision officers for Drug Court. We helped people with addictions navigate their probation and provide them with support resources like bus tokens, employment help, education, outpatient treatment, and recovery groups including Celebrate Recovery. We are both believers and would compare sermon notes and have good discussions. He has a great sense of humor. Even though he is much older than I, we get along well. He was excellent at his job. I was promoted to manager after he turned down the promotion, but he was always available for good counsel. He had been

a tremendous athlete in his youth and ran many marathons. He had a black belt in martial arts. By the time I knew him, he was sidelined with a chronic neck injury. I saw him almost every work day for 10 years. Our company was acquired by a bigger company and we worked in separate cities for a couple of years, but he would call me on occasion and our conversations became deeper and more revealing about our fears and our weaknesses. I would complain that I didn't know what God's plan for me was. I didn't want to work at this place forever. I wanted to return to faith based ministry but I felt the weight of surviving a divorce and the church hurt that went with it. He told me I was a good listener and an encouraging person. He encouraged me to research chaplaincy to see if it was a ministry I was interested in because he thought it would match my gifts. We lost touch for a few months and one night the owner of our company called me to tell me he died. I was driving and had to park my car so I could sob and grieve. Apparently, everyone on his campus knew he was having a heart valve replaced but I was not

in the loop. The surgery was not successful. I discovered in my grief he had been a father figure to me which explained why I experienced such a surprising amount of grief. I learned that grief for a friend is one of the deepest kinds. And regret over not keeping in touch is still with me today. Part of Bull's legacy is that I took his advice and have followed God's call to be a hospital chaplain.

We knew a rich guy named Mac. He was vituperate and emotionally abusive. He bragged about his money. He could be generous to people in his life sometimes, but he was a very angry individual. He mocked Christians and was very cynical because of negative experiences in his childhood. He gave us a hard time about our church life. He was driving home from work one day and experienced the signs of a heart attack. So he drove himself to the Emergency Room and was rushed to surgery. He survived.

When Bull died, the first person I thought of was Mac. How in the world could God take Bull and

spare Mac? I was angry with God. Mac and I went to Bull's funeral together.

A few years ago, Mac called me. He was visiting Charleston and wanted to drive to Sumter for a visit. Kate and I went to dinner with him and his wife. I was worried about what would happen, but I was eager to catch up on news from our old circle of acquaintances in Oklahoma. He is retired now and has had several health issues. At dinner he was different: calm, happy, and relaxed. We were enjoying our conversations. He said "you'll be interested in this, since you are a chaplain now. My granddaughter invited me to see her Christmas program at church. You know my history with church, I was not that interested, but we went to support our granddaughter. It was amazing! I loved the program and the people were friendly. We have been going with our family every Sunday."

Kate was there. She saw my face. You could have knocked me over with a feather.

But get this: he said to me “for the first time in my life, someone explained to me the true meaning of grace. I never really understood it before.” I believe Mac, in his seventies now, is my brother in Christ and has been gloriously saved. One of my heavenly treasures that I look forward to is seeing my savior face to face and spending eternity with Bull and Mac.

What is impossible with Jason is possible with God! Brothers and sisters, never give up on someone’s soul! Pray for unbelievers! Continue in love and grace! We walk by faith and not by sight!

Now look at our text: Peter says “Look, Jesus, we have left our homes to follow you!”

This hits me kind of sideways. He uses this moment of lament to get Jesus’ attention.

It reminds me of the time I was chastised by my Dad for spilling some of my supper on the floor. I was about 10 years old. I think we were eating beans and cornbread. Every Thursday my dad got to come home early from work and he

would cook beans in the crockpot. One of my favorite meals. I liked to crumble up my cornbread and put it in the beans. But “many a slip twixt the cup and lip”. It slipped off my spoon and fell on the floor. My dad looks at me incredulously and says very annoyed and very stern “Hold your head over your plate so you don’t spill on the floor”. And as family lore goes, Daddy’s girl, my little four year old sister, says sweetly “Daddy, I always hold my head over my plate”. Conniving!

Remember that Peter was originally called Simon, and Peter (or Cephas) was a nickname that meant “little rock”. This was because when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was, Peter blurted out “You are the messiah, son of the living God!” Jesus said he would build his church on this “rock” that was revealed to Peter from heaven.

But Peter thought the kingdom would be here and now and he would be part of a political revolution to free Israel from Roman rule. Jesus was constantly tempted to be an earthly king: A “good guy” with riches and power who wouldn’t

be crucified. But the Kingdom of God is a heavenly kingdom with heavenly treasure.

When he told Peter that he would be crucified and killed by the religious leaders and that he would rise from the dead, Peter didn't believe him! He said "this will never happen to you, Jesus!" Jesus ain't a good guy! He is our savior, our redeemer, our deliverer!

Jesus said "Get behind me Satan! You don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of men!"

Peter later told Jesus HE would die for HIM. Jesus loved him and said "actually Peter, before the rooster crows tomorrow, you will deny ever knowing me. Not once, but three times". Jesus was arrested and the disciples scattered. And in dramatic fashion, a servant girl recognizes Peter as he is trying to monitor Jesus' trial. He cusses her out and says for the third time he doesn't know Jesus, and the rooster crows and Peter realized that Christ's prophecy about him was true. Luke says Peter ran away weeping bitterly.

No ordinary rabbi would teach the things Jesus did or make the claims that he did, much less perform the miracles that those who knew him best say he did.

Christ is a King with a heavenly kingdom! We can bow now or we can bow later, but the bible says one day, EVERY knee shall bow and EVERY tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Jesus ain't a good guy! Are we asking the right questions? Are we asking the right person? If the question is "What is the way?" he says I AM the way! When Pilate says "what is truth?" Jesus says I AM the Truth! If the question is how shall I inherit eternal life? He says I AM the Life and no man comes to the Father but by ME! FOLLOW ME!

C. S. Lewis, speaking in 1942 (and published in *Mere Christianity* in 1952)

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral

teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. (*Mere Christianity*, 55-56)

We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects — Hatred — Terror — Adoration.

Now, as a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal

of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing. They are not artistic enough to be legends. From an imaginative point of view they are clumsy, they don't work up to things properly. Most of the life of Jesus is totally unknown to us, as is the life of anyone else who lived at that time, and no people building up a legend would allow that to be so."

So, you might be asking yourself, why the weird story about the snakes?

The snakes are a picture of Jesus.

John 3:12-19

As children of Adam, we all have the venom of sin and the burden of certain death. But Jesus, by the love and mercy of God, is our 'odus. Ek-'odus (Exodus) is Greek for "the way out". Just as those children of Israel were delivered from the plague of snakes by their faith, we who believe will be delivered from the sting of death and will enter the Kingdom of God to inherit eternal life. As my pastor Clay has taught me, only Jesus can meet this deepest need in my life. We must look to Jesus.

He says God loves the world! The original word for world here is kosmos where we get the word cosmos. It refers to all of the created world. God loves the world and everything in it. He clothes the lilies of the field with splendor and feeds the birds of the air. When Jesus calmed a storm that was rocking the boat, the disciples asked “Who is this man that even the winds and the waves obey him?” Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecy with his triumphal entry to Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowds of men and women and children shouting “Hosanna”. The religious leaders say “Jesus silence your disciples!” If Jesus were a good guy, he would say “All right now, y’all settle down cuz we are offending these good people”. He would climb off the donkey and fade into obscurity. But Jesus ain’t a good guy. He tells the religious leaders that if they silence them, the ROCKS WILL CRY OUT! They say they are sons of Abraham and Christ says God can turn rocks into sons of Abraham! He said before Abraham “I AM” and dared to claim that He was in the beginning, He was with God, and He was God.

Just as the snake was lifted up on a pole, my savior was lifted up on a cross. He followed God's call and died for me and he died for you. He said "tetelestai" meaning "It is finished"! He took on the sting of death and the weight of all our sins so that we might be saved. Jesus' cousin John the Baptist said "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

Brothers and sisters this is our shield of faith sealed by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:16

Saul of Tarsus was a good guy. He was a Pharisee among Pharisees and kept the law much like the rich young ruler. He was intent on snuffing out the Christian heretics who claimed Jesus was still alive. On the road to Damascus, he was blinded by the glory of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. And he was never the same and became Paul the missionary. We have been studying his letters and he is constantly reminding the churches that he is in recovery from being just a "good guy". We can't settle for that nonsense. Paul, like my friend Mac, learned the deep meaning of love, grace, and

mercy and humbled himself to enter the kingdom as a little child with trusting faith.

2 Cor. 5:14-21

How then shall we live?

Am I asking the right question? Am I being fitted for a kingdom and surrendering to God just like a little child placing my faith and trust in Christ? Or am I exalting myself because I want to be a good guy like the legend of Jesus?

What happened to Peter? The bible said after Christ was crucified, a despondent disillusioned Peter returned to fishing. A gloriously resurrected Christ restores Peter and asks him "Do you love me?" Peter says he does.

Poetically, Jesus asks Peter three times. Peter assures him that he does. Jesus commands him "Feed my lambs". Peter leaves his fishing career and preaches the resurrection so boldly he had to convince people he wasn't drunk. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on him and over 3,000 people believed.

Peter also made good on his promise to die for Jesus. Because of his preaching, he was

sentenced by Nero to crucifixion in Rome. The Early Church fathers wrote that he asked to be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his savior.

Jesus ain't a good guy. I hope I have demonstrated to you that he is so much more. He is worthy of our worship and worthy of our faith. What step of faith do you need to take now? Maybe you need to take the first step of obedience and commit your life to Christ and be baptized. Maybe you need to surrender your hurts, habits, and hang-ups, and pick up a blue chip on Friday night at Celebrate Recovery. Maybe you need to sell some stuff and give the money as an offering or pay your debts. Maybe you need to be more trusting of God and be an ambassador of sacred reconciliation. My prayer is that today we will be flooded with God's love, mercy, and grace. Oh Lord have mercy on us sinners and increase our faith!