

Making Lemonade out of Lemons

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ... As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

What happens when you bite into a lemon? You pucker up. Lemons are good. A little lemon on fish is wonderful. Lemon tea is refreshing. But lemons by themselves are not so fun to eat. They are sour. But you can take something as sour as lemons, add a bit of sugar and water and make a pitcher of refreshing lemonade. But this involves more than lemonade. Someone who takes a bad situation and somehow makes good out of it is said to have made lemons into lemonade.

As we heard last week, God chose Abraham and his descendants to be his people. But what happened? So many of them rejected the message of Jesus Christ. What does God do with this unpleasant, bad situation? He makes lemonade out of lemons. He uses their rejection to share Christ with the rest of the world.

I. How God turns rejection into reconciliation.

We know Paul made at least three missionary journeys recorded for us in Acts. He had an interesting approach. Every time he stepped into a city, he would look up the nearest synagogue in the yellow pages, visit them, and tell them that their waiting is over. Here in all these far away cities you had synagogues and Jews waiting for the Messiah. They haven't heard that he has come. Someone has to tell them. You couldn't ask for a better evangelism crowd because they knew their Bibles and were looking for the Messiah. All you had to do was tell them, right?

But it didn't always work out that way. Read though Acts. Paul would enter a town, visit a synagogue and preach. Some would believe. Many, however, would not. And they didn't just reject the message of Christ. ***"As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account,"*** Paul writes. Paul's greatest opposition did not come from the pagans; it came from the unbelieving Jews.

Look at what happened when Paul mentioned Christ. In one town, the Jews dragged him out of town and stoned him, leaving him for dead. At several towns, they started riots in the streets against Paul. Sometimes they captured him and had him thrown into jail after a good whipping. One group literally followed him from town to town. Talk about obsessive.

God faced a real sour lemon. His chosen people rejected his message of Christ. What do you do? Well, God made sweet lemonade out this lemon. ***"Their rejection is the reconciliation of the world,"*** Paul states in our text. Just a couple verses before our text, he said, ***"Their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles."*** So God used their rejection as a means to reach out to Gentiles, or non Israelites.

Dear friends, you believe in Christ and are saved for two reasons: because God loves you; secondly, because the Jews in the days of the apostles rejected the message of Christ. Someone at work just got fired. He abused his power, recklessly handled the affairs of the company, refused to listen to his superiors, and simply didn't care. They come to you and ask you if you want the job. It means better pay, excellent hours and marvelous benefits. One man's rejection means your reward.

This is what God has done for you. God wants all people to believe and be saved. What does he do? He adds us to his people. That is why our word for today is grafted. You can take any branch and literally graft it into an apple tree. That one tree will accept and use that branch to produce apples. God saves Gentiles by grafting them into his promised people. He doesn't start a new church. He adds people to his existing church. God doesn't ignore Abraham or David or the prophets. The Israelites are still his people. So he adds us to them. Read Romans. Also read Galatians. It tells us that God's Christian Church is simply the "new" Israel. It tells us that Abraham is our father, not by blood, but because we believe just like him and we are his children through faith.

Isn't this amazing? We talk about one Christian Church in the Apostle's Creed. The Bible speaks of one Church, invisible, full of only believers. We see that happening in our text. God took the lemon of Jews rejecting him and made lemonade as he grafts Gentiles like you and me into his Church.

II. God turns envy into salvation.

Does this mean that God in turn rejected the Israelites? No. He still reached out to them but in an ingenious way. Paul confesses, ***"I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them."*** And later he continued, ***"... so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you."*** God still wanted to save Israelites who rejected him, and he had a rather interesting way of doing it. God through Paul wanted them to

become envious of the gentile Christians so that they may rethink their rejection and inquire into this Christ thing. We see that in the book of Acts where the Christian church flourished and many Jews respected the Christians and started to ask questions.

Don't underestimate God's desire to save all people even if they reject him. Do not underestimate his power to change unbelieving hearts into saved souls. Do not underestimate how God can use wrong motives to lure people closer to his Word. A wife takes her kids to church every week. Dad, however, never goes. But he sees his family coming back from church, talking about the Sunday School lesson, praying at mealtime and at bedtime, listening to devotions. He sees they are happy. He feels left out. He may become curious, even envious, and joins them. Sometimes people become interested in church for the wrong reasons. A couple is getting married and like the looks of the church. They haven't stepped inside one for ten years. They are not thinking about Christ or salvation, only what looks best for their wedding. But a conversation is started. Maybe another couple observed a Christian family, your family, and is jealous at how well your family is doing, so they ask questions.

Paul saw his success among Gentiles as a way to reach out to Jews. That is why he made such a big deal about his ministry. Why don't we make a big deal out of our ministry as well? We have God's Word. We know the truth about sin and God's mercy. We have a great thing going on here. Why not make a big deal of it?

III. God turns disobedience into mercy.

But there is one more thing we need to pull out of our text. ***"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."*** Talk about making lemonade out of lemons. God turns disobedience into mercy. This is nothing more than the simple teaching of law and gospel in the Bible. How can commercials grab your attention? By advertising something you need. Right now commercials on denture cream don't catch my attention; I don't have dentures, at least not yet. I saw a commercial about "My Pillow." Sometimes I wake up with kinks in my neck and the promise of a better night's sleep caught my attention. My wife got me one and I would say, it works for me.

"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." What commercial does God play for the world? He first lets us know of our need. God has tied all people to their sins. He does this through the conscience that tells us we are doing wrong. To make it clear, he writes it down in the Bible. Who would have thought that coveting is a sin? We know it is now as we see how selfish and unloving it is. And these sins are chained to us.

What does he advertise? He has mercy on us. As we heard a few weeks ago, while we were God's enemies, while we were still sinning, God reconciled us to himself through the death of his son. That is mercy. God can't forgive sins. Someone has to pay. If the bank forgave your debt, that means they or someone else paid for it. So God forgives us by paying the debt himself. Becoming sin for us, Jesus was cursed in our place, died in our place, so God forgives us and doesn't give us what we deserve.

This is huge. Yes, it means we will spend eternity in heaven. But it has other benefits. Even during stress and days that only get worse, we have hope. A little more than a week ago we drove to see my dad in Michigan. I don't like sitting for ten or eleven hours in a car. I get stiff and cranky. But we endured that drive because it meant seeing my dad, and then we went through it again as we drove back. Was it stiff and long? Yes, but we endured it knowing we will be home and sleeping in our own beds. Our troubles are something we endure now knowing that they will stop and we will get to sleep comfortably in our own beds in heaven.

So God binds us to our sin so he can shower us with his mercy. Think about that the next time you witness your faith. Don't give them a fifty minute dissertation on doctrine. Speak as one who is in the same shoes. Don't talk about his sins. Talk about yours, how they bother you, but what it means to be free because of Christ.

God takes sour lemons and turns them into lemonade. He turned rejection into reconciliation. He turned envy into salvation. He turns disobedience into mercy. No wonder Paul broke out into a song at the end of the chapter, ***"Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? To him be the glory forever! Amen."*** May we break out into such a song. Who knows, someone may actually hear us and ask, "Why?" Then we can tell him. INJ Amen.