

YOU'RE
NOT
FAR

You're Not Far - Part Three: Flipping The Script

One message connected all the individual parables and miracles in the minds of Jesus' first century listeners— the Kingdom of God is here, *now*, and it represents a complete reversal of the values of the world, extending an open invitation to *everyone* to get involved in the constructive work of making all things new. Of course, this open invitation to *everyone* chafes against the social categories we like to use to classify people according to our personal preferences. But Jesus brought a radical reminder that God is far bigger than our simple rules and regulations, prioritizing the unique beauty of every human being, no matter their social status.

Start Talking

1. Think about your workplace, social circle, neighborhood. What are the unspoken expectations, even aside from moral issues? What lines do these groups expect you not to cross? Where is there a degree of enforced conformity?
2. Have you ever had the “fish out of water” experience of being a stranger in a totally new (to you) culture? What was it like? What did you learn?

Looking Back

1. What did you do to remove the artificial, divisive cultural categories from your outlook in order to see the real, three-dimensional human beings around you this week?
2. When did you feel tempted to let divisions or insecurities keep you from acting in love?
3. Last week, we talked about intentionally looking for ways to enact our faith in practical terms during everyday life. Where did you find opportunities to do that? How did it go?
4. How would you describe the general state of your thoughts, prayers, and actions this past week? When was it easiest to prioritize the Kingdom of God? Hardest?



What About You?

1. What role, if any, did rule-keeping play in your religious experience?
2. Based upon your experiences with religion, what was stressed as being more important: the rules, or the people who were expected to keep them?
3. Have you ever accidentally found yourself on the wrong side of somebody else's religious rule? What happened? How did you feel?
4. Why do you think it is so scary to act in ways that may not blend in with our surrounding culture? What are we afraid of?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: Mark 1:15, 2:15-27, 3:1-6, 21. Matthew 11:28-30.

1. What does the invitation from that last passage in Matthew imply about the *outcome* of following Jesus? What does the term "yoke" imply here?
2. Think about Jesus' statement that the Sabbath was made for human beings, and not the other way around. What does this mean? What is he saying?
3. Why was Jesus' statement about the Sabbath considered so problematic at the time?
4. So much of Jesus' message is sewn together by one single idea: the Kingdom of God is here. What does this mean? What is that Kingdom?
5. What were the social implications of Jesus' decision to eat at Levi the tax collector's house?
6. How were the sick and disabled viewed in first century Roman culture? How did Jesus react to these kinds of social stigmas?

Putting It All Together

1. Where are you allowing a preoccupation with the rules to keep you from valuing real human beings (who are, after all, the whole reason rules are created)?
2. How can you reorient your mindset this week to value those God loves more than your own interpretation of God's laws?
3. Andy has continually talked about Jesus' determination to "reverse the order of things." Where are you allowing your behavior, mindset, or beliefs to be swept along by our cultural "order of things?" Where in your life could you trade that in for the better ethic of the Kingdom of God?
4. Where do you see yourself in the story of Jesus and Levi?
5. How could Levi's response to the invitation of Jesus inform your response this week?

