

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday Jan 31, 2021. "Caste": where might I be a part of perpetuating injustice?"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

Even though it's a new year, thankfully, we're still gathering in person. A small but growing group who follow all the safety guidelines joins us at the church. We're so encouraged with your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions you have, please pass them our way. We feel just as isolated as you, and we want to maintain that connection with each of you.

II Recap.

Ok...we started this series off with a bang. Kristen Hill gave us just an amazing introduction to a deeper, fuller, scriptural understanding of 'justice', and the difference between consequences, punishment, and justice. She also challenged us to examine how we view people's circumstances, and what we tend to attribute their situations to. All though her use of scripture, we saw God's continual message of justice being both people receiving what they deserve, but also in situations of injustice, we are called to step in and be an advocate giving people their divine rights. This is a huge difference in how our society understands and practices justice. And is an essential truth in our work as followers of Jesus. If you have not watched this message, I want to encourage you to do so.

III Sunday.

Kal was back in the pulpit, (as they say in the church world), and dove into an extremely difficult passage. We walked us through some 'drop the mic' statements Jesus made about inequality, caste systems, and our responsibility to act. And even a challenging understanding and teaching about salvation. So as always, some general questions first, and then we'll dig into the passage.

In an example Kal used, think about the last wedding you went to. And it may have been a loooooong time ago. At that wedding how did you see and experience who were more and less important people in attendance? Why is it that way?

Now getting a bit more serious. How do you see and experience the ranking of most and less important people in our world now? Why is it that way?

In the scripture used Sunday was a particularly difficult story Jesus told that has a lot of difficult issues we have to honestly deal with. So, read the story first, we'll ask a couple of open-ended questions, and then dive into some specific issues the story raises. **Read Luke 16:19-31.**

What jumped out to you about this passage?

How do you understand the different positions in life between the two people?

Were they earned, justified, or just how the world works?

And a big question. What does this story say to you about salvation?

Okay, let's start to address some of the specific issues this story hits.

1. The nature and understanding of inequality. We have no idea how the rich man got his wealth, or why Lazarus was poor. And we often fill in those gaps with our own understanding of how we believe the world works. In this story we do need to interact with the 'just world theory' Kristen talked about. Were each of these men simply living out the consequences or 'rewards', (which could be a risky belief), of their choices, or were there other factors in play.

How do you understand where these two men ended up in life?

Why did Lazarus know about the rich man but the rich man did not know about Lazarus?

2. The big salvation question. This is such a difficult part of this story. Most of us hold to some; 'say the prayer, ask Jesus into your heart', understanding of salvation. (neither of which are in scripture). Jesus confronts us here with what salvation is, with no real explanation. Lazarus went to be with Abraham, (which we assume is heaven), and the rich man didn't. We weren't told hell, but actually the Jewish understanding of simply the place of the dead. And the ONLY reason was because of their economic conditions on earth. We have to do something with this. Which means we have to grow a fuller, richer, understanding of the nature of salvation that includes teachings of Jesus like; *"it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into heaven"*. Or; *"The first will be last and the last will be first"*. This passage seems to imply that salvation that's just faith without any works is not actually salvation at all. Which is what we see all through scripture.

What will you be willing to do to 'rethink' your understanding of the nature of salvation?

3. There will be no excuses. This seemed to be Jesus's final point and the most unsettling. When the rich man begged for relief, and then for his brothers to be told, Abraham told him that they should *"already know"*. Where the rich man ended up should not be a surprise. These are the expectations for what salvation looks like, and there are no excuses. This is a foundation shaking truth. We are without excuse in addressing the systems and structures in our society that create inequality.

So, no real challenge here. How do you hold, understand this reality of our responsibility?

IV Challenge.

In understanding how 'castes', (economic classes in society), work. And coming to terms with how the forces of society can have as much influence over the lives of people as do their personal choices, we have to come to some place with this story and answer some really tough questions. **How will you interact with the forces in our society that create inequality? What are you going to do with your current understanding of salvation?** And the final big question. Isabel Wilkerson talked about *"radical empathy"*. To put yourself in the place of another person. **What will you do in order to grow your ability to practice "radical empathy"?**