

The Upside-Down Kingdom “*Like a Child*”

March 4, 2018

Endless Praise Death was Arrested

Feature-Mr. Know it All

Well good morning all.

That attitude sounds similar to that of the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They thought they knew it all and they didn’t need or want Jesus telling them or anyone else otherwise. After all, as religious leaders they had studied and trained and obeyed over 700 pages of laws that would ensure their holiness before God. They believed that the nation of Israel would be returned to its glory once all “those” people got it together and started living more like them. They awaited the Messiah, God’s chosen one, who they

believed would arrive and usher in the Lord’s judgment on their oppressors and all those filthy sinners who were corrupting the nation of Israel.

But as we have been learning, that isn’t what Jesus did. He arrived on the scene and declared the year of the Lord’s favor. In Luke 4, we read,

When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring

Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come." He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" Luke 4:16-21 (NLT)

He taught things that were contrary to what the religious leaders believed and had taught, including such scandalous things as the idea that people should love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, that God's love is reckless and that He doesn't require people to "make up" for their bad behavior, instead He loves them and invites them into relationship with Him, that Heaven rejoices when a sinner is saved, not condemned or judged.

Jesus was a revolutionary. He wasn't going around preaching sweetness and light as many seem to think, because you don't get nailed to a Roman cross for preaching everyone be nice to everybody. You get plotted against, tortured and killed for being a threat. And Jesus was indeed a threat to the religious establishment of His day.

Jesus came to preach that the Kingdom of God was at hand, that it was near and now but it certainly didn't look anything like what people, especially the Pharisees, expected. He came to share a different way, a better way. And that's why we've been taking a deep dive looking at the life of Jesus of Nazareth, specifically the three years of His ministry. If you are new or have missed any of the messages in this series, I strongly encourage you to check them out on our app, your favorite podcast client or the media section of our website.

In this portion of our series, we are looking at the Upside Down Kingdom. Jesus' way was upside down compared to the thinking of the religious leaders of His day, and truthfully it is upside down to ours as well.

In week one, we learned that the Jewish religious leaders, in an attempt to help people attain holiness, had developed those 700 pages of rules that would address just about every situation you could think of but Jesus tells them really it can all be boiled down to just one rule. Love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. And we were challenged to ask ourselves, "what does love require of me?" See rules are so much "easier" than relationship. Relationship requires full engagement and it can be messy and confusing at times which is why we still so often come back to rules-it feels easier to just make a list of who and what is in and out then to actually have to work at a relationship with God and others.

In week two, we took a deeper look at the story of the prodigal son. We heard the story of the two brothers and how the Father loves both his rebellious sons, the one who outwardly rebelled through his sinful adventures and the one who inwardly rebelled by harboring resentment, entitlement and pride. We learned that the father doesn't require either son to "pay" for his sin but rather he offers them both his love, forgiveness and deep relationship. We were left to ask ourselves which son are we most like?

And then last week we took a look at the story of the rich young ruler and the story of Zacchaeus. Both have tremendous wealth but they respond differently. The rich young ruler walks away sad for he had much he wasn't willing to part with. And Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, who is so moved from his encounter with Jesus that he moves from being someone who extorts everyone to someone with compassion to be generous

with all that he has to the poor and those he has harmed. We were left to answer questions like: is God's love transforming our economic behavior toward others? Are we a generous giver or a conspicuous consumer?

These concepts are so hard to grasp...loving others, even our enemies. That God's love for us doesn't require us or anyone else to first clean up and do work to receive His love and the invitation to relationship with Him. That generosity is all about a top down revolution where those who have much willingly give some of it up so others can move up the ladder.

These concepts were so hard for the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day. What Jesus was saying and teaching seemed so incredibly contrary to what they thought they knew, what they had been taught and were teaching others. And if we are honest they are still. 7

contrary to the way our world thinks today. Where it's all about us and our tribe and seeing that we end up on top of whatever hill there is.

So the religious leaders, hearing these teachings, became more entrenched in their thinking, and sought out ways to undermine, trick and eventually trap Jesus so as to remove the threat. But there was at least one Pharisee, Nicodemus, who responded differently. Something was going on with him, let's take a look.

VIDEO from the movie "The Gospel of John" -scene of Jesus and Nicodemus

There's a LOT to unpack in this short discourse with Nicodemus. Note that we see that Nicodemus is not attempting to trap Jesus as his fellow Pharisees were, but he's seeking to understand these confusing concepts.

Now I think it's easy to laugh off Nicodemus' question about how can a grown man climb back into his mother's womb. 20 centuries later, we think: come on, clearly Jesus doesn't mean this literally but we have 20 centuries of teaching and the rest of the story to enlighten us what Jesus means but for Nicodemus it's as mind blowing as the first time you see the Matrix and realize what the Matrix is. The first time you see that you think wait, what? Mind blown.

It's the same for Nicodemus. No one has ever heard of this concept of being "born again." He has no frame of reference for what that would mean. Jesus is pulling back the curtain for Nic, inviting him to take the red pill if you will.

"Nicodemus, to understand what I'm teaching, to understand what the Kingdom of

Heaven is like, you are going to have to be born of the spirit. You are going to have to change your mind, shift your paradigm.

You are going to have to stop thinking that what makes you right with God is following 700 pages of rules.

Nicodemus...it's not about what you DO. It's about what I'm going to do, about what will be DONE for you.

Nicodemus, the Messiah isn't going to do what you think he ought to, go in and wage war, or take over. Instead I am going to be raised up to die on a cross."

Now this is another key point. See in Deuteronomy chapter 21, it says that anyone who is hung up on a pole, a tree, a cross... well, they are cursed by God.

This is mind blowing for Nicodemus, and if you know the story of Peter, then you know it's hard for him and the others who were following as well. See the Messiah is God's chosen one so why on earth would God curse him and let him die. It's hard to grasp.

The prophecies had all been interpreted to mean that the Messiah, God's Chosen One would set all things right and establish God's Kingdom and for them that meant making Israel the crowning jewel and getting rid of all the oppressors and gentiles and filth.

They had no way to understand these upside down principles Jesus was teaching. That the Messiah, instead of riding in to save the day by conquering the oppressors, would be paraded through the streets, beaten, tortured and then left to die on a cross, cursed by God and bearing the weight and sin of ALL humanity, not just the Jewish people. 11

It was so hard to grasp. And yet we know, that Nicodemus does begin to grasp it. Two more times in the gospel we see Nicodemus as he makes his journey from seeker to believer. He begins by seeking to understand by listening to Jesus and trying to grasp what he is saying. We see him again when he tries to get Jesus off the hook with the other Pharisees through a technicality.

And finally we see him with Joseph of Arimathea after Jesus dies, providing 100 pounds of spices and supplies for a proper burial. Joseph and Nicodemus gave Jesus a burial suitable to that of royalty, clearly showing their devotion to him.

So what makes Nicodemus different? Why does he respond so differently to Jesus?

Well let's go back to what Jesus tells him. In

order to understand the ways of the Kingdom, you have to what? Be born of the spirit. Be born again. Go back to the humble beginnings of a baby.

How many babies do you know that come out of the womb knowing how to walk, talk, read and reason?

None. So Nicodemus, and anyone else who wants to get it, to understand this Upside Down Kingdom of God, will have to start back at the very beginning. Though Nicodemus is a very well educated, well respected and devout Jewish man and teacher of the law, he will have to go back to the beginning and assume he knows nothing.

See Jesus invites us, like Nicodemus, to be born of the Spirit, to be born again. We are invited, like him, to put our hope not in what we do or how well we behave but in the

Messiah and what he has done for us. The Messiah lifted up on a cross, cursed by God, his body broken and his blood poured out for our sins.

And then to continue in our faith like a child.

In several places in the Gospels, we are encouraged to have the faith like a child.

In Matthew Chapter 18, verses 1-3 we read:

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:1-3

NLT

Now don't hear what is not being said...Jesus is not saying we should be childish or immature, for in several places we are encouraged to mature in our faith, to grow, to be transformed so it doesn't mean be childish but rather child like.

To have faith like a child means that we need not lean on our own understanding, we will need to have a teachable spirit and a willingness to be a lifelong learner. I've heard many mature Christians say, people who I really look up to, that the longer they are in relationship with the Lord the more they realize they don't know. A willingness to stay in relationship with the Father, to be taught, to be challenged, to be disciplined and to grow more and more into the child of God He created us to be.

And that means turning everything upside down, giving up our paradigms.

What gets in our way of doing this?

The same thing that stood in the way of the eldest brother in the story of the prodigal, that stood in the way of Nicodemus's fellow Pharisees, pride.

See our pride, our ego gets in the way of our willingness and ability to humble ourselves to admit that we even need a savior and that we need to do life Jesus' way.

See they thought (and we think) I'm gonna do me. I'm not stupid. I don't need a savior. I'm not that bad. I'm too smart, too powerful, too rich, too...full of myself to admit that I could possibly be in need of someone to save me or that I might just possibly be wrong in my

thinking of how the Kingdom of God works.

And if I do get to the point where I am humbled and I begin to realize, hey wait, doing life my way is not working, like the prodigal I think man...I should go home to God. There is great rejoicing...but I can be certain that over time, left to my own thinking, my own desires, my own temptations then I will become the older brother.

I will be like the Pharisees: quick to tell Jesus who's in and who's out, how things ought to work, how grace is not fair, how hard I've worked and how holy I am and how much I deserve a better life.

I will lose sight of the Kingdom and suddenly I'll look around and think...how did I get here?

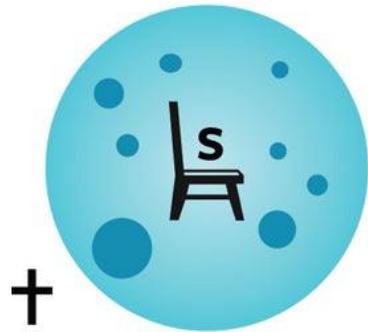
When my husband and I first started

attending North Heartland, we were in a small group and the leader took us through a study called Practical Christianity. I still remember grasping for the first time the illustrations shared in the book.

See I had come to have a personal relationship with Jesus just about five years prior. Though I was religious up through college it was all about what I did and all my good works. I didn't understand that whole concept about it not being about what I do but rather about what Jesus had done on the cross. Anyway, whenever I would mess up... like suddenly I was back to being a lot like the Shannon before she was born again. I would think, well maybe I didn't do it right so I'd pray the prayer again asking Jesus to be my Savior.

And so imagine my aha moment if you will when I was introduced to these three illustrations:

Self-Directed Life



- S** Self is on the throne
- † Christ is outside the life
- Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

*I will highlight some items on the slide

See here is where I was in college, I was doing life on my own and much like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, I was relying on my ability to keep the rules instead of living in a relationship with God.

So my junior year of college, after trying so hard to make my life "work", I was exhausted and burdened and beaten down, a good friend shared the good news with me. That Jesus died on that cross so that anyone who believed in Him would be saved.

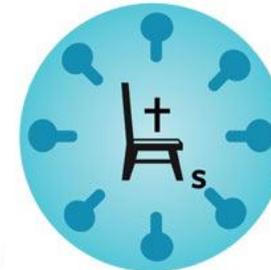
"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 NLT

And I prayed a prayer to receive Jesus as my Savior and to stop putting my hope in my works and ability to follow the rules and put my hope and trust in Him.

Which means, I could then move to this illustration.

Christ-Directed Life

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness



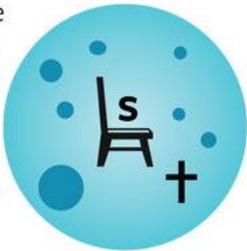
- Life is Christ-centered
- Empowered by Holy Spirit
- Introduces others to Christ
- Has effective prayer life
- Understands God's Word
- Trusts God
- Obeys God

I had a relationship with Jesus and if I was willing, He was offering to show me a better way. To teach me how to live in His Kingdom, to live my life His way.

To live a life surrendered to Him and I could start seeing myself grow in things like love, peace, patience, self control.

But alas, it wasn't long before I was living this illustration:

Self-Directed Life



- Legalistic attitude
- Impure thoughts
- Jealousy
- Guilt
- Worry
- Discouragement
- Critical spirit
- Frustration
- Aimlessness
- Fear
- Ignorance of spiritual heritage
- Unbelief
- Disobedience
- Loss of love for God and others
- Poor prayer life
- No desire for Bible Study

I had accepted Jesus as my Savior and was in a relationship with God BUT I did not really understand what it meant to allow Jesus to be Lord, to direct my life. I had added Jesus to my life but I still wanted to call the shots.

After learning these three illustrations, I realized it wasn't that I needed to be born again, that had already happened but I needed to return back to a mindset of a child. A mindset, a spiritual position which says, you know more than me, your way is better than my way, teach me. I submit my life to you and I am willing to follow YOUR way.

Now I'd love to say I stayed there but if you know me at all, you know that is not true of me and frankly of any of us. None of us stay there, in that place where Christ is on the throne and we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and direct our path. That we are willing to live according to the Upside Down principles.

Just as sure as someone hurts us or someone we love, we are quick to put boundaries on grace. We are quick to make a list of who's in and who's out and what they should have to do to receive God's grace. Just as sure as we have something we really really want, that trip, that car, that new carpet, the quicker we are to ignore and dismiss the leadings the Spirit might be giving us to be more generous. 22

A couple of years ago, my husband and I were invited to attend a generosity retreat.

Now I felt pretty darn good as we went into it because I thought...well we are already doing this "right", giving around 13-14% of our income at that time.

And just as sure as the retreat began the Holy Spirit started challenging me...see like the Pharisees I wanted to just get the rule. Even if it was more than 10%, I just wanted to know how much more did God want before I could feel good about spending the rest on me and whatever we wanted.

And I still remember the Lord saying, Shannon it's not about a percentage or a dollar amount, it's about being in relationship with Me. About a willingness to be humble and admit that it isn't YOURS, it's mine and if you will let me lead and guide you, you will see how crazy awesome it can be to live a generous life.

And for a time I lived there... til there were repairs to be made and trips to be taken and I found myself pulling away and pushing Jesus off the throne and saying, look you get what you get and I take the rest. Cool?

See I must and we must come to understand that unless we maintain a childlike faith, one that is submitted and wholly dependent on God, we cannot continue living by kingdom values because the way of Jesus is so foreign to our flesh and to this world. It will require an active choice to stay submitted to him, to stay rooted in him, to stay in relationship with him.

But prides sneaks in to our lives. It sneaks in in the form of self-pity where we feel like we can set limits on God's love and grace or we go to others to try and get the approval and deep abiding love that only the Lord can give us.

It sneaks in in the form of self-sufficiency. We forget the Kingdom principles and we think

it's all up to us. We are the ones who have to make it happen. The enemy, the world and our own flesh tell us only we can make life happen, God can't or won't so we must.

And pride sneaks in in self-righteousness: we begin to think we are right, we are deserving, we are the dutiful child of God and He owes us and we think we have every right to tell Him how he ought to run His Kingdom.

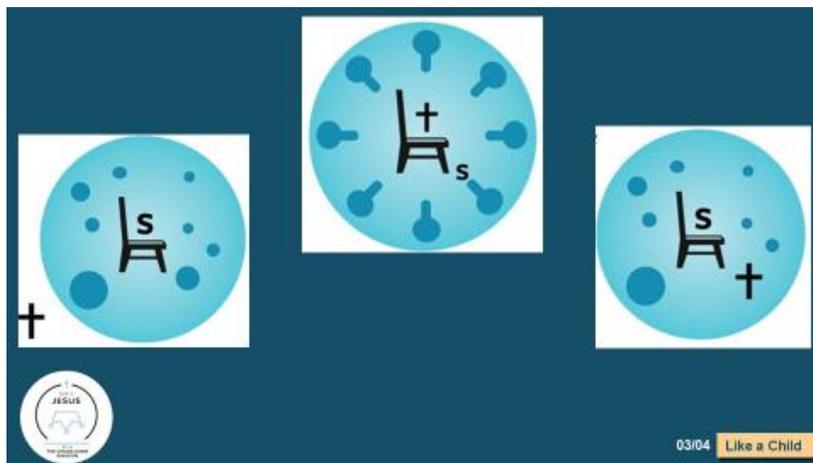
Pride puffs us up. Pride demands its own way. Pride makes us selfish and selfcentered. It causes us to focus only on us and what we think is true right or wrong (I'm ugly, I'm not worthy, I'm more spiritual, I know more, I'm less of a sinner). Pride is what keeps us from living as a child of God and having the faith of a child.

So let me ask you:

- Are you are quick to dismiss God's grace because He could never forgive you because you are just too far gone? Or maybe you are quick to give yourself grace for your shortcomings and sin but harsh and critical towards others?
- Are you quick to show everyone how spiritual you can be in hopes they will compliment and think more highly of you?
- Are you quick to defend and justify your words and deeds when someone points out a fault?
- Do you feel the need to be right and to have the last word?

Are you more interested in using God's word to prove you are right or in being transformed by God's word?

Which of these three pictures best illustrates your life right now?



So how do you get rid of pride? How do you start or get back to living like a child of God? Start or return to living a Christ-directed life?

I think two of the best tools I have found are:

The 3 Ss-Solitude (time alone with God), Silence (quieting my mind, heart and soul before him) and Self-Examination (asking and allowing him to point out anything in me that needs to be removed, restored or

transformed). I have questions like the ones I just asked and others that I pause and reflect on allowing the Lord to show me the truth about any areas in my life where pride has snuck in. Iron sharpening relationships- In Proverbs 27:17, we read:

*As iron sharpens iron,
so a friend sharpens a friend*

Engaging with others who I know are willing to tell me the truth even when I don't want to hear it. People who can show me the blindspots I might be missing are hugely helpful in pointing out my prideful places. If I'm avoiding these relationships there's a good chance pride or sin has snuck in.

Solitude, Silence and Self-Examination and Iron Sharpening Relationships are two great tools to help you spot the pride in your life.

I want to challenge you to find some time this week to spend time alone with God. Pray and ask Him to show you the truth about yourself and about Him.

Confess the places where your pride has gotten the best of you. The places where you are selfish, self-centered and self-absorbed. The places where you need Him to do His transforming work.

Worship Him and remind yourself who is God and who is not.

Thank Him for paying the price for your sin and offering you a better way to live.

And then, ask Him to give you a heart that is teachable and humble. A mind that does not lean on its own understanding and is renewed. A soul that is teachable and unwilling to settle for rules and instead desires relationship.

Let's pray to that end.

Prayer

Feature-What Do I Know of Holy

