

This Is Jesus: The Upside-Down Kingdom
Of Rights and Wrongs
March 18, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

**Worship Song – Come Thou Fount / Transition / Reckless Love / From the Day / T&G
Video - Behind the Scenes**

Feature – Respect / Offering

Good morning everyone.

That's such a great song, isn't it?

Obviously, it's stood the test of time. And I think that's because "a little respect" is something we all we want. All we're asking for is that others take us seriously and give us what is rightfully ours.

And there's really nothing wrong with that. After all, no culture or family or business or team or any other organization can flourish where people are not respected and treated fairly and with justice. Clearly, that should be the goal; that should be the standard.

The problem, however, is that you and I live in a sinful, messed-up world; a world where those things don't always happen. So the big question is ...

- What should we do we are disrespected and mistreated?
- How should we handle it when we are treated unjustly?
- What action should we take when we are not accorded our rights?

Actually, that's three questions but you get what I mean.

And that's what we're going to talk about today as we enter the homestretch in this series *This Is Jesus: The Upside-Down Kingdom*.

If you've been here or watching online since December, you know that we've spent a great deal of energy trying to understand the life and teaching of Jesus ... which, as I've probably said too many times, is something Christians tend to overlook because we see Him (and worship Him) primarily as our savior from sin ... which He most certainly is!

As we say all the time around here, it's not about what we've done or not done but about what Jesus did. We are made right with God – our failures are atoned for – only because of His death and resurrection and our faith in Him.

But Jesus came to do more than just die on a cross and rise again. Jesus came to inaugurate a brand-new way of living which He called "the Kingdom of God."

And Jesus said – promised, actually – that anyone who would listen to His teaching and follow it would experience a life filled with peace and abundance *regardless of where they stand* in the pecking order as defined by the political, economic and religious institutions of our world.

The only problem with that promise – and it’s a really big problem – is that Jesus’ way of living is upside-down from how those three systems tell us society should be ordered. To be frank, much of what Jesus says cuts so strongly against the grain of what we’ve been taught since Day One that it seems a little crazy ...

... which is why *the one thing Jesus said more than anything else* when talking about the Kingdom of God was “repent” which, unfortunately, most people think is just another way of saying “stop sinning! Quit it!”

Sometimes that *is* the result of repentance but what “repent” *really* means (at the root level) is to “change your thinking.” Tear up the script of your life and prepare to write a new one.

That’s why Jesus would often say things like “you must become like a little child” and “you must be born again from above” otherwise, you will not be able to enter in and experience the kingdom of Heaven – the life God wants you to live now and in eternity. You’ve got to go all the way back to the beginning and start over. You’ve got to relearn everything so you can see things from His perspective not the perspective of the world.

That’s repentance.

A couple nights ago, I started working on the next movie message series (which we’re going to do this summer, in July) and we watched *Dr. Strange*. How many of you have seen it?

I’m not a big fan of Marvel Comics but I really liked the movie because it has one of the most vivid illustrations of “repenting” (of rethinking and relearning) that I’ve ever seen.

In the particular scene I’m talking about, Dr. Strange, a world-renowned surgeon who has lost the use of his hands in a car accident, has come to “the Ancient One” seeking a cure.

But before that can happen, he first needs to ... well, let’s check it out.

Video Clip – Repentance Required

(Begin) Dr. Strange: “So, you figured out a way to reprogram ...”

(End) Voice: “What mysteries lie beyond the reach of your senses?”

Now, that’s what I call repentance!

To open your eyes and see a different reality which then causes you to rethink and reorder your life ...

... which is, again, what Jesus was saying:

“The Kingdom of God is at hand. It is near and it is now.

“And in order to be part of it; in order to experience it, you need to reexamine and rethink *everything this world tells you is*

necessary for your peace and fulfillment ...”

... including ...

- Your demand for R-E-S-P-E-C-T.
- Your demand for personal justice.
- And your demand that your rights not be infringed upon.

The Deadliness of Demands

Now, I know some of you are thinking “wait a minute, Rick. Didn’t you just say that we need rights and justice and respect for civilization to work?”

Yes, I did. But that’s not the same thing as *demanding* those things for ourselves.

Of course, it’s pretty rare that we actually go around saying “I demand justice! I demand my rights! I demand respect.”

Instead, what we usually do is to phrase it in terms of whatever position we have in the pecking order.

For instance, we say things like ...

- “I’m older. Therefore, my opinion ought to be *respected*.”
- “I’ve worked here longer. Therefore, it’s *unjust* that she got the job instead of me.”
- “I’m educated, I’m smart, I’m pretty, I’m rich. I’m the boss, the husband, the parent, or whatever. Therefore, I deserve (in other words, it’s my *right*) to be treated a certain way.”

See how it works? The pecking order and our demands are linked.

Furthermore, very rarely do we actually say those kinds of things out loud. Instead, we just *think* them ... over and over and over ... until they become the paradigm that shapes our lives and our entire culture.

In fact, those kinds of internal demands are a big reason why we are living in a “culture of offense” these days. Somebody somewhere (either in our circle of personal relationships or on the Internet or some talking head on TV or the radio) is always treating us – or someone in “our tribe” – with disrespect. They’re treating us unjustly. They’re infringing on our rights.

And in response, everyone is standing up to defend themselves and their position.

A great example of this is the reaction to the recent mass shootings – first in Las Vegas, then at the church in Texas, and then at the high school in Florida.

Simple question: why do these things keep happening?

I've heard five reasons expressed again and again. I'm sure you have, too.

Some people say it's the availability of certain kinds of guns. We just need to ban assault rifles and the like.

Others say it's mental health problems. We just need more control over people who are messed up.

Some claim it's the failure of the legal and reporting systems. We just need to do a better job of enforcing the existing laws and following up on leads.

Still others assert it's the breakdown of the family. We just need to hold up the value of marriage and parenting.

Others argue it's the culture of violence we've created (music, games, movies, etc). We just need to put limits on what our youth are immersed from day one.

Do you know what the real answer is?

I'm not going to tell you. ☺

But I *am* going to point out that we ... and when I say "we" I mean:

- Average Joes and Josephines like you and me
- All of the political pundits and talking heads
- All the way up to the highest-elected officials in the land ...

... we can't even have a rational discussion anymore. Instead, it almost always devolves into demonizing those who have an opinion that's different from ours.

And do you know why that is? *It's because everyone demands their rights.*

- "Don't tell me that assault rifles are the problem. It's *my 2nd Amendment right* to own whatever weapon I want."
- "Don't tell me I have to limit myself. It's *my right* to produce or consume whatever entertainment I want."
- "Don't force your archaic and repressive views on me. It's *my right* to define 'family' and 'marriage' and 'parenting' however I see fit.
- "Don't tell me I have to put my information in a database so the government can keep an eye on me. I have *a right* to privacy."

We've got a huge issue in this country that we will never solve because everyone is standing up for their rights and demanding respect and decrying the injustice of it all, which not only inflames everyone else, it also blinds us to the truth that *the real answer to the problem* – and I'm going to solve it for you right now ...

The real answer is “all of the above!”

The solution to the problem of mass shootings is multifaceted. It’s going to take an approach that’s holistic. Everyone is going to have to give up something for us to move forward.

Now, that’s just my opinion. I won’t demand that you agree with me. ☺

But the same kind of thing happens in our families, at work, at school and even in congregations like NHCC. Whenever we *demand* our rights; whenever we *demand* justice for ourselves; whenever we *demand* respect, conflict, tension and deadlock almost always follows ...

... which is why it behooves us to consider Jesus’ crazy upside-down approach to these kinds of things. Clearly, what we’re doing individually and collectively isn’t working so well.

The Example of Jesus

So what exactly is His approach?

Last week we began to hint at it when we discovered that the world is “flat” (so to speak) in God’s Kingdom.

In other words, in God’s Kingdom the hierarchies and “pecking order” as typically defined by the religious, political and economic systems of this world simply do not exist.

Even the King Himself (that’s Jesus) is a servant who willingly does crazy things like washing the feet of His disciples who are too arrogant and too hung up on their position to do it for Him and for one another (as we saw last week).

Of course, willingly *choosing* to be a servant (as Jesus Himself did and told His followers to do as well) isn’t the same thing ...

- As being disrespected.
- As being treated unjustly.
- As having our rights infringed upon.

In the first scenario, I’m choosing to move down the ladder. In the second, I’m being pushed and shoved down the ladder ... which brings us full circle to that big question we raised in the very beginning: *what should we do - if we’re followers of Jesus - when that happens?*

To answer that question ... to understand what Jesus *not only says but models* in these situations, we need to pick up where we left off last week.

Actually, we’re going to start in the same place by way of review and then move forward to where we need to be in order to address this issue of “rights when we’re wronged.”

But instead of me simply repeating the story from last week and then reading what follows, we’re going to watch a really

cool animated video produced by The Bible Project.ⁱ

So here we go ...

Video Clip – Jesus Gives Up His Life

“The innocent is handed over in place of the guilty.” How unjust!

“The innocent dies the death of a rebel.” What an infringement upon His rights!

“The innocent dies alone.” Such disrespect!

And yet – and this is incredible – this One who claims to be King of the Universe *goes along with it*. He doesn’t resist and He doesn’t retaliate.

At that point when Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane ...

Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear.

Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”
John 18:10-11 (NIV)

- And when He is dragged before the court of the religious leaders and they slap him and mock Him, Jesus does nothing.
- And when the Roman soldiers mock him and beat him, again He does nothing.
- And when He is on the cross and being taunted by the crowd, Jesus is silent. He doesn’t respond other than to say “Father, forgive them. They don’t understand what they are doing.”

What’s going on here? It’s pretty simple, really.

Jesus is just living according to the crazy upside-down values of the Kingdom. He’s doing exactly what He has taught His followers to do ...

... when He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’” Matthew 5:38 (NIV)

In other words, “the Law of Moses says that whatever they do to you, you can do back to them.”

- If they mistreat you in some way, you can mistreat them in a similar way.
- If they violate your rights, then you can violate theirs.
- If they disrespect you, you can disrespect them.

By the way this is called *the law of reciprocity*. It’s been around for a long time and for good reason.

It works.

One psychologist notes that “reciprocity – doing to others what they have done to you – helps keep peace among social creatures in nature. Fear of retaliation makes them cautious about using violence.”ⁱⁱ

In other words, if people believe they might receive in return whatever abusive behavior they direct towards you, they tend to think twice about it. They tend to count the cost.

So, in the real world, the law of reciprocity makes a lot of sense.

However, Jesus flips it upside down when He continues:

“But I tell you [instead of an eye for an eye, instead of reciprocating], do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” Matthew 5:39
(NIV)

“And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.” Matthew 5:40-41 (NIV)

“I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Matthew 5:44 (NIV)

... which is exactly what Jesus did on the cross for those literal enemies who were literally persecuting Him to death.

You know, you might not believe that Jesus was God in the flesh or that He rose from the dead as Christians claim, but you’ve got to admit: anybody who can teach this kind of thing and then actually do it in such an extreme situation is pretty special.

But the question is ... why does Jesus do it?

- Does Jesus just have really low self-esteem?
- Is He into some kind of weird self-flagellation?
- Is He just a wimp who so hates confrontation and conflict that He’ll do anything to avoid it?

I think the record of the Gospels shows that none of those are true. I mean, we just saw how Jesus called out and turned over the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple.

The reason Jesus gives up his rights and suffers (and tells His followers to do likewise) is that He truly believes that His way – the “law of non-retaliation” it’s often called – is a better way to live than the law of reciprocity.

Of course, that raises another question. Why does Jesus believe that?

More importantly, why should we believe that?

Many years later, a man who had witnessed all of these events up close and personal, the same man who in the middle of these events denied that he even knew Jesus – I’m talking about the Apostle Peter – explained it like this:

He wrote:

If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:20-21 (NIV)

Basically Peter is repeating the principle Jesus taught. “Suffer for doing good even though it’s unjust.”

Then he reminds his readers how Jesus modeled it.

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth [i.e., He was innocent]. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:22-23 (NIV)

In other words, Jesus knew that regardless of how it looked at the time, His abusers didn’t have the final word. His Father – the one who judges justly – did ... which ought to be a comfort and encouragement to us whenever we’re treated unjustly or whenever our rights are trampled upon.

And that’s a good thing ...

But, in and of itself, it still doesn’t answer the “why do it” question? It still doesn’t speak to a strong motivation for not standing up and *demanding* that we be respected and treated as we deserve and then striking back in a similar manner.

Why in the world would anyone follow Jesus’ law of non-retaliation instead of the natural law of reciprocity?

Peter tells us why Jesus did it.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. 1 Peter 2:24 (NIV)

Now, this is one of those verses where it’s real easy to flip over into theology mode and miss the point.

Peter is saying that when Jesus allowed the abuse of the cross, He was taking our sins into his body. And we all understand that. It’s good theology.

And He the reason He did that was so that we could be freed from having to pay the penalty of our sins, so that we could be made righteous in God’s sight. And we all understand that, too. It’s good theology.

But the reason He did *that* ... and this is the part that we so often miss ... *was so that* we might be reconciled to God.

Friends, this is all about *relationship*.

The reason the law of non-retaliation is better than the law of reciprocity – the reason Jesus did it, the

reason He tells us to do it – is the possibility of restoring the relationship.

When we live by the law of reciprocity – returning evil for evil – we ensure that the cycle of hostility and injury is going to continue. There is no hope for a relationship like that.

But when we treat our offender better than they deserve by not fighting back when we're wronged, we're saying that "the cycle of violence and pain ends with me. I will lay down my rights and privileges in hopes that we can be reconciled. In hopes that this relationship can be restored."

This is exactly what Jesus was doing. Instead of bringing the "day of the Lord's vengeance" as everyone had expected, He was bringing the "day of the Lord's favor" in hopes that people would repent – change their thinking – and follow Him.

In Real Life

So that's the motivation. That's the grand plan. That's why Jesus turns conventional wisdom upside-down. Again.

Now, does it always work that way?

No it doesn't.

In fact, even though Jesus lived this way to the extreme, a lot of people still didn't follow Him. And a lot of people still won't respond to you when you choose non-retaliation; to give up your rights and suffer from their injustices.

But some will.

Some will respond and want to reconcile and restore the relationship with you instead of remaining your enemy.

And that's why we do it. That's why Jesus did it.

Now with that said, I realize there are a lot of unanswered questions about this.

- What if you find yourself in danger?
- Is it ever appropriate to retaliate?
- What about protecting your family and property?

I mean, there are a lot of tough issues that need to be worked out.

But first and foremost is a change of perspective; a change of paradigm from one of self-protection and demanding rights and respect and retaliating when that doesn't happen to one of self-sacrifice and grace ... the same kind of favor that God shows us in his overwhelming reckless love.

Sounds crazy but what if we decided to live that way?

Let's pray together.

Who do you know?

Have you received?

Do not repay anyone evil for evil....If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written "it is mine to avenge, I will repay" says the Lord.

On the contrary "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."
Romans 12:17-21 (NIV)

Closing Comments

Before we leave this morning I want to take four or five minutes to share with you a really cool – and somewhat urgent – opportunity we have as a congregation.

Actually, I'm going to let our Director of Children's Ministry share it. Let's watch.

Video Clip – Pals Project Vision

This is a great opportunity we have to serve some really special kids and their parent. Very few churches in the Northland (if any) are doing what we're doing by pairing up an adult "pal" with these kids.

But, as Julie said, to make it work we need to move some other folks around and to do that, we need to make some modifications and updates to our children's ministry area.

Of course as you might expect that's going to cost a few dollars ... well, more than just a few. It's going to cost about \$20-25K to do everything we'd like to do ...

... which includes ...

- Pals room furnished with sensory enrichment toys and activities
- Soundproof wall built in adjoining room for 4th and 5th grade boys and girls
- Remodeled ADA equipped bathroom with hallway accessibility
- Soundproof wall built in 1014 for 2 elementary kid small group rooms
- Add TVs, furniture, ceiling tiles, carpet, etc to all rooms.

As Julie said, the net effect of all this will actually go beyond just helping the Pals. It "dominoes" into other areas – benefitting our children's ministry and adding space for adult small groups. (We're almost full here on Tuesday and Wednesday nights).

So I am inviting you help us raise the needed funds by Sunday May 6th.

Now, we're actually going to start on this project this week – before we have the money – because the need in the Pals ministry is urgent *and* we know the generosity of this church. We know that many of you will want to give and we will have no trouble raising this amount.

There are instructions in the program on how to do that or you can just go under the “giving” tab on our website and our app and donate to the Pals Project.

Endnotes

ⁱ From https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_unHmAf7INK

ⁱⁱ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/resilience-bullying/201205/principle-number-six-turn-the-other-cheek>