

This Is Jesus: Dawn of a New Day

Who Really Wins

January 28, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Worship Songs – Who Is Like Our God? / Called Me Higher / Prayer

Video – Behind the Scenes

Feature – “This Could All Be Yours” / Offering

Good morning everyone.

In the 4th chapter of *The Gospel According to Luke* we read that ...

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the [area of the] Jordan [River] and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”

(He said that because it’s true. Satan – for now – has dominion over the earth).

“This could all be yours [Jesus], if you worship me.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of

the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Luke writes:

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Luke 4:1-13 (NIV)

<Prayer>

As Shannon said, today we’re concluding part II of our mega-series *This Is Jesus: Dawn of a New Day*. And throughout this particular we’ve been trying to put ourselves in the sandals of the people who first encountered Jesus. As much as possible ...

- We want to see in the way that they saw as they observed what Jesus was doing
- And we want to hear in the way that they heard as they listened to what Jesus was saying.

One of the ways we've tried to help with that is through the use of video and, this morning, we're going to do that again.

We're going to take short trip (via video) to the desert where this encounter between Jesus and Satan took place. What we're about to see is once again courtesy of Pastor Andrew Gardener of *The Vine Church* of Hong Kong.¹

It's pretty creative. Let's watch.

Video Clip – Into the Desert (4.4 mins)

(Begin) Andrew: “Alright, well this is the very place where ...”

(End) Andrew: “I better get going.” <walks off,

video fades to black>

Can you imagine doing that *not just* for one day and night but for almost *six weeks* of days and nights? That's what Jesus did. Pretty incredible.

Now, the reason this desert scene is important (and the reason I think it's recorded for us by both Luke and Matthew) is not so much that it teaches us something about how to handle temptation (though it does –each time Satan attempted to deceive Him, Jesus responded with scriptural truth and that's a really good plan for you and me).

The reason this scene is so important is that it teaches us something about *Jesus* and the true *intentions* of Jesus. This is the critical moment when Jesus is confronted with the question of exactly what kind of Messiah He is going to be and exactly what kind of Kingdom He is going to inaugurate.

Remember, Jesus' message was not "believe in me and I'll make sure you go to Heaven when you die" (though that is true).

Jesus' message was "the Kingdom of God is at hand. It is among you right now because *I am bringing it* to you. So, repent," He said (which means "change your thinking; change how you perceive reality"). "Repent and believe the good news."

And this time in the desert is the critical moment because ...

- It happens *immediately after* Jesus has heard the voice of His Father (at His baptism in the Jordan River) saying "This is My Son with whom I am greatly pleased". (We talked about that last week – if you missed it you can check it out in the media section of our app and website or our podcast).
- And it happens *immediately before* Jesus

stands up in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and proclaims in so many words that He is the Messiah. (We talked about that in the first week of this series).

Let me lay out the sequence of events so it will be clear.

- There's an *affirmation* from the Father when Jesus is baptized.
- Followed by a *temptation* from Satan when Jesus goes to the desert.
- And then a *proclamation* by Jesus when He returns to Nazareth.

What I want you to see is that before Jesus ever says or does anything having to do with His ministry, He hears two voices: the voice of His Father and the voice of the Evil One.

And what's fascinating about this is that God the Spirit actually *leads* Jesus to the desert so that can happen; so that Jesus can hear *that one other voice*

He is going to hear every step of the way; the voice that will tempt Him to question the nature of the Kingdom he will establish and the kind of Messiah He will be.

See, Satan's goal in this *isn't to get Jesus to give up*. His goal is to get Jesus to settle for a different kind of Kingdom and a different kind of plan for how to become its leader ... which is why this is such a critical moment.

So, let's take a closer look.

The Desert Test

Donald Kraybill in his outstanding book, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, says that ...

The three temptations in the desert represent the three social institutions of Jesus' day (as well as ours): economic, religious and political.ⁱⁱ

Each of those institutions had (and still have)

power and authority over the people ... which obviously means that whoever has control of *them* has control of the *people*. And each temptation is Satan suggesting a way for Jesus to seize that control in an instant; and a way for Jesus to come out on top.

For example, what is gained if Jesus turns stones into bread?

Obviously, He solves his own hunger problem. But beyond that, Jesus could use that trick again and again to become – in no time at all – a welfare king.

See, Jesus has seen the rampant poverty that exists among the masses who are subject to the oppressive taxation system of the Roman Empire (and also of the Temple in Jerusalem). He understands that they have little opportunity to advance within an economic system that unjustly favors the rich.

“So, Jesus,” Satan says, “why not skip past all of that? Why not keep quiet about things like greed and injustice? Why risk offending all the rich people who *will* say you’re only interested in their wallets and not their souls?”

“You could just begin a program of miraculously feeding the masses. I mean, free food is great idea. It avoids all the downsides while creating a groundswell of public support among poor people everywhere!”

As Kraybill puts it: “Bread was the quickest way to the heart of the crowds.”ⁱⁱⁱ

So, bottom line: the stones-to-bread temptation invited Jesus to endorse and take control of the economic system as it currently stood.

And what about the proposed dramatic leap from the top of the Temple in Jerusalem? What’s the payoff of that?

- The Temple was the very heart of the Jewish religion.
- It had stirred deep passions for centuries.
- It was shrouded in mystery and awe.
- It was the repository of wisdom, law, and Scripture.
- It housed the single Jewish altar on which the high priest performed the sacrificial rites of atonement once a year for the entire Jewish world.^{iv}
- It was the place where Heaven and Earth literally came together in the Holy of Holies.^v

So, it wasn't hard for Jesus to imagine the result of a miraculous appearance at the Temple pinnacle, followed by the intervention of angels who would show up just in time to save Him from what would be certain death.

“That, Jesus” Satan whispered to Him, “would have to convince even the most skeptical

religious leaders of your divine authority. *That* would eliminate any and all harassment you're most certainly going to get from them.

“And when the scribes and the Pharisees embrace you, the masses will quickly follow. You'll instantly be proclaimed Messiah!”^{vi}

Bottom line: the Temple temptation invited Jesus to endorse and take control of the religious system as it currently existed.

Finally, what about the mountaintop offer? “Bow down to me in worship, Jesus, and this could all be yours. I will give you authority over all of the kingdoms of the world.”

This may have been the greatest temptation of all, for Jesus was well-aware of the revolutionary spirit that filled the valleys below; well-aware of the ancient longings of his Jewish brothers and sisters to be free of oppression.

And this was His chance to become the new

Alexander; to become “Jesus the Great” – a world leader with unlimited power throughout the Mediterranean world.

With Jesus as a political king, Israel would be supreme and vengeance against her enemies would roll across the Middle East. The center of the worldly authority and influence would shift from Rome to Jerusalem. Caesar would no longer tax and oppress Jews, for he himself and his Empire would be forced under penalty of death to serve Israel.^{vii}

The tables would at long last be turned.

k This temptation on the mountaintop invited Jesus to endorse and take control of the political system of power as it currently stood.

Now, obviously, in each case, Jesus refused to go along with the temptation ... which means that Satan failed to talk Jesus into settling for a different kind of Kingdom and a different kind of

plan for becoming its leader.

So, when Jesus leaves the desert and returns to Nazareth and stands up in the synagogue ...

... to read from the prophet Isaiah ...

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And then says to everyone in the synagogue

...

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:19-21 (NIV)

... His plan to accomplish that vision is completely and totally at odds with how the world runs. He is not interested in endorsing or even controlling its

systems of power.

In fact, more often than not, Jesus pretty much ignores those systems and institutions. Instead, He lays out a completely different set of values.

The Upside-Down Kingdom

For instance, in the area of economics, Jesus doesn't support revolution by angry peasants nor does He set up a miraculous baking ministry.

Rather, the plan is for those who have an abundance to be moved by God's mercy and to stop hoarding and give generously^{viii} *and* for those who lack to remember that while earthly bread and economic security is important, it's not the ultimate goal of life. He, Jesus, is the bread of life.

In the area of religion, Jesus doesn't throw out the Law and the Prophets upon which Israel's entire existence was based, nor does He do away with the idea of the Temple.

Instead, He reframes the Law in terms of the motives of the heart and says that those who believe in and follow Him are *themselves* (individually and collectively) now the Temple of God's Spirit.

When it comes to political power, Jesus (again) isn't interested in revolution or in violently crushing Israel's (and God's) enemies.

Rather, He chooses to demonstrate a new kind of power; a new way of ruling which embraces sacrificial suffering and which loves enemies and prays for them (which we talked about last week).

And quite frankly (as I said last week), all of this *sounds like crazy talk to us* because what Jesus is doing is flipping the world upside down in terms of winners and losers.

In Jesus' Kingdom ...

- The winners are not those who have gained the political power or top-of-the-heap position to assert their authority over others.
- And the winners are not those who have worked hard enough (or have been lucky enough) to have made their way up the economic ladder.
- And they aren't the ones who, because they have it all together morally and spiritually, feel they have the right to sit in judgment over others.

Jesus says that in God's Kingdom, the winners look like this:

And this list is found in Matthew 5 right after the synagogue proclamation in Nazareth.

Winners, Jesus says, are ...

- Poor in spirit
- They mourn
- They're meek
- They hunger and thirst for righteousness
- Winners are merciful
- They're pure in heart
- They're peacemakers
- They get persecuted because of righteousness
- Sometimes they're insulted and oppressed because of Jesus.^{ix}

Not exactly what we're taught to aspire to these days is it?

But Jesus calls all of those folks “blessed” or “happy” because they all win something that this world and its institutions of political power, economics and religion cannot give to them.

Specifically ...

Those who realize they have no moral or spiritual basis on which to justify themselves before God; those who admit their spiritual poverty and empty themselves of moral pride, i.e. those who are “poor in spirit” – Jesus says they win the right to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Those who look around and are grieved over the destruction that is wrought by sin and death; by what it has done to them personally and to the world around them – Jesus says they win because one day they will be comforted when He returns to make all things new. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Those who use their power and position for the benefit of others and not themselves; those who do not intimidate or use force to get their way – “the meek” Jesus calls them – they win because, one day, strange as it may seem right now, they will be put in charge of the earth.

Those who long for justice to prevail for all people

(even for those who are their enemies) – they win, too, Jesus says. Their hunger is going to be satisfied when He returns and sets all things to rights.

Those who don't hold the sins of others against them; those who aren't always looking to settle the score (“an eye for an eye”); those who are merciful – they win because they understand something glorious: that this is how God treats *them* and *their* sin.

Those who strive to maintain their purity in a world that no longer knows the meaning of the word – they win, too, because they will have clarity of heart and mind that allows them to know and perceive the presence and activity of God in this world.

Those who go the extra mile to make peace; who do crazy things like walking towards the relational mess instead of away from it or trying to love their enemies instead of ruining them –

they win, Jesus says, because they will be walking in the footsteps of their Heavenly Father who does the exact same things.

And finally, those who are persecuted because they're trying to follow Jesus and trying to live according to these crazy upside-down values even though it costs them right now, they are going to win, too, because, in the end, *Jesus Himself - who is the ultimate embodiment of all these things* - Jesus Himself wins, and they belong to Him.

Clearly, “the winners according to Jesus” look very different from the winners according to this world.

As one biblical scholar puts it, “This is the original revolution; the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values.”^x

I love that statement because one of the things that is just so phony about this world and our culture today is that the people who believe

themselves to be radical and revolutionary, really aren't. Oh, they might be on the edge or extreme compared to others but, in reality, it's just more of the same dressed up in different clothes.

For instance, those who cast themselves as moral rebels – who flaunt their desire to do whatever they want to do regardless of what anyone else thinks – there's nothing new or radical about that. That's been part of the human race since ... forever. They're just a little more on the edge than the rest of us.

Or consider those who claim they're "taking a stand" against capitalism and big corporations by consuming only "good" products: organic, natural, second-hand, hand-made, fair trade, etc. In reality (and they may not even realize this), what those consumers are actually doing is engaging in "status competition." And the ironic result of their "virtue signaling" behavior is that it creates markets for expensive new products^{xi} ... which is just capitalism all over again.

Now I don't say these things to be critical or judgmental of anyone. If you buy fair-trade coffee or recycle religiously, I say "good for you. May your tribe increase."

But don't think of yourself as some kind of radical "raging against the machine." *You're part of the machine.* And so am I. It's just the human condition.

If you *really* want to be revolutionary in this world, if you really want to live according to a radically deviant set of values ...

... then do what Jesus did: flip everything upside-down in how you define winning and losing.

- Instead of thinking you're better than anyone else, admit your spiritual poverty and empty yourself of moral pride.
- Instead of shielding yourself from the real world, grieve the destruction that is

wrought by sin and death.

- Instead of using your power and position for the benefit of self, use it to benefit others; do not intimidate or use force to get your way.
- Long for and pray for justice to prevail for all people (even for those who are not part of your tribe and may even be your enemy)
- Don't hold the sins of others against them; treat them better than they deserve.
- Maintain your purity in a world that celebrates impurity.
- Go the extra mile to make peace; walk towards the relational mess instead of away from it; love your enemies and pray that God would bless them as much as you want Him to bless you.
- Finally, try to live by these crazy upside-down values even though it might cost you right now.

Do *that* and you'll be a radical. Do *that* and you'll be a revolutionary. Do *that* and you'll actually

become more like Jesus!

And here's the thing: you don't even need to be a believer in the divinity of Jesus to attempt it. You don't need to believe in the Resurrection; that Jesus died on a cross and rose to life on the third day afterward.

As I've said several times throughout this series, the men and women who became the initial followers of Jesus didn't believe any of that either – at least not at the beginning. They just heard Jesus say, “my way is the better way to live. My way is the way that leads to life. Come along with me and see for yourself.”

And they did.

And you can, too, even if you're not a Christian.

Getting Real

Of course, all of this raises two really big

questions – and maybe you’ve already thought of them.

1. Is Jesus right? Is His way – his definition of winning – truly better than that of the world?
2. Even if He is right, how do you even begin to make this work in real life?

To me, the answer to the first question is pretty simple. Would the world be a better place if more people ...

- Admitted their spiritual poverty and emptied themselves of moral pride.
- Grieved the destruction that is wrought by sin and death (including their *own* sin)
- Used their power and position to benefit of others instead of themselves
- Longed to see justice to prevail even for those who are not part of their tribe
- Didn’t hold the sins of others against them
- Maintained their purity

- Went the extra mile to make peace (including loving their enemies instead of hating them)
- Remained committed to these values even though it costs them

If those values were at the top of the list instead of the values associated with the our political, economic and religious institutions, I think it's pretty obvious – we'd all be a lot better off ...

... which makes the second question even more pertinent.

How do we even begin to make this work in real life?

This question actually came up after last week's message when we talked about the fact that the great disappointment of the Jewish people (including John the Baptizer) when it came to Jesus is that, instead of pronouncing divine judgement on the enemies of God and of Israel, Jesus offered them "the year of the Lord's favor"

– grace and mercy. He actually *showed love to them*.

But even worse than that, He insisted that those who followed Him *do the same thing*: “love your enemies,” He said.

After the message, someone said to me, “I understand what Jesus was saying, but what about having security these days to protect us from our enemies? Even here at church we have a security team because of all the craziness that’s out there. And what about people who serve as police officers or in the military? How does the enemy thing apply to them?”

Great question. And I think the way we answer it in this one case also applies to how all the values Jesus taught that just don’t seem to fit very well in this world.

So, three thoughts ...

1. Loving someone is not the same thing as

liking them (or agreeing with them or supporting them).

Martin Luther King, Jr. often preached about this issue.

In one of his sermons he said, “I’m happy that [Jesus] didn’t say, ‘*Like* your enemies,’ because there are some people that I find it pretty difficult to like. *Liking* is an affectionate emotion, and I can’t *like* anybody who would bomb my home. I can’t *like* anybody who would exploit me. I can’t *like* anybody who would trample over me with injustices. I can’t *like* anybody who threatens to kill me day in and day out.”

“But Jesus reminds us that *love* is greater than *liking*. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive good will toward all men”^{xii} ... which means hoping and praying that, one day, God’s truth might shine in their hearts like it has your own.

The second thought I think might be helpful is

this:

2. It is possible to be *in* the world but not of the world.

Actually, that's what Jesus Himself once said in a prayer.

“They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

John 17:14-15 (NIV)

In other words, “Father, leave them in the world but protect them so that their values don't become the values of this world.”

See, the truth is that our political, economic and religious institutions are jacked-up. That's just reality. And reality is that you and I probably are not going to change them which means we pretty much *have to live within* them.

But what we *don't* have to do is to be *of* them – to be driven by their values; to define “winning” in the same way they define winning.

For example:

- If you're in the financial industry which is all about getting to the top of the economic ladder, you *personally* don't have to be driven by that. You can do your job while being someone who constantly moves down the ladder through radical generosity. That's why Jesus never told tax collectors for the Romans to quit their jobs.
- If you're in the military, which is all about taking it to the enemy when necessary, you *personally* don't have to be driven by that. You can do your job while recognizing that even the worst of enemies are loved by God so much that Jesus would give His life in hopes that he or she would repent. That's why Jesus never told Roman soldiers to quit

Caesar's army.

See how that works? You and I can be in the system and do what you have to do but not of the system.

Third thought that I think might help with implementing these upside-down values in our lives is a phrase I learned from one of my favorite preachers, Andy Stanley, who is the pastor of Northpoint Church in the Atlanta area.

3. You can do for *one* what you wish you could do for *everyone*.

What happens a lot of times is that we look at the system – political, economic or religious – and say “it’s never going to change. It’s always going to be unjust or self-serving or <whatever>“ and *then* let ourselves off the hook.

In other words, because the system isn't working for *everyone* like we know it should, we shake our heads in disgust and then get back to our own

lives.

But there's another option and that's to do for one what we wish could be done for everyone.

For example, I wish more of our politicians used their power and position to benefit of others instead of themselves. It bothers me that so many don't.

But you know what? I can do that in my own personal life. I can do for one (or two or 10) what I wish was being done for everyone.

I also wish our culture wasn't so quick to gossip about people and then condemn them for their sins. It bothers me when that happens (and it's happening a lot these days).

But you know what? I can be merciful and gracious to those in my own personal life who sin against me. I can do for one (or two or 10) what I wish was being done for everyone.

See how that works?

Conclusion

Bottom line, what Jesus is talking about isn't easy to do but it *is* possible.

- It *is* possible to get above emotion and do the right thing.
- It *is* possible to be in the system without being of the system.
- It *is* possible to do personally for one what you think the system ought to do for everyone.

But even though it is possible it still requires a leap of faith. It requires us to do what Jesus meant when He said “God’s Kingdom is right here and right now and you can experience it. But you have to *repent*.”

- You have to change your thinking and stop leaning on your understanding.
- You have to open your hands and let go of the paradigms you are holding on to.

<song slide up> And as we close this message, our band is going to lead us in a song that's actually a prayer expressing those desires.

It's a very simple melody; easy to sing along with. And I invite you to do that as a prayer – just follow Richard as he leads.

And when we're done, I have one more thing for us to talk about very quickly before we leave.

Ok, here we go.

Congregational Song – “Climb (Nothing I Hold On To)”

Closing Comments – Rick

1. Next Sunday ... annual event ... Football Sunday.

2. Show you a video of what it's all about

Video Clip – “Football Sunday”

Dismiss

CLOSING COMMENTS

Endnotes

ⁱ The Story of Jesus, Vine Church of Hong Kong @ <http://soj.thevine.org.hk/>

ⁱⁱ Donald Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, pg 35

ⁱⁱⁱ Kraybill, p 74

^{iv} Kraybill pg 60

^v N.T. Wright

^{vi} Kraybill pg 59-60

^{vii} Kraybill pg 36

^{viii} Kraybill pg 85

^{ix} Matthew 5:1-11

^x Upside Down Kingdom, p267

^{xi} <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/04/rebels-without-a-cause/303865/>

^{xii}

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_loving_you_r_enemies.1.html