

The Gospel Of Luke

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’²⁰

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’(Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)

Message 10

The “In Between” Kingdom

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Luke 6:27-28

Luke 7:1-23

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Introduction:

If you have attended our church for any length of time you know that we take the whole Bible seriously in here. People joke with me and say: “You’re that guy that likes the Old Testament right? “ I’m that guy. I think the Bible is quite likely not joking when it says:

¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17. NRSV)

All scripture is inspired by God. I believe that. I believe that the Old Testament is not the opposite of the New Testament. I do not believe that Jesus abolished the law. I think Jesus was likely quite serious when he said:

‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. (Matthew 5:17. NRSV)

I do not believe that Jesus came to bring a more liberal interpretation of the law, as our neo-liberal emergent friends would suggest. Rather I think Jesus was likely quite serious when he said:

²⁰For I tell you, unless **your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20. NRSV)

I believe Jesus takes us DEEPER into the character of God, DEEPER into the call of holiness and that he empowers us through his Spirit to live in ALL truth and progressive understanding, and all God's people said: amen. Do you believe all of that? Do you believe that the New Testament does not contradict the Old? Then you may be surprised by the passage I'm going to show you today. I hope by now that this will, at first, surprise you. Open your Bibles to Luke 6:27-28.

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (NRSV)

Look at that first word. BUT. But I say to you. This is teaching in contrast to what you have heard. You have heard it said: "Do not commit adultery, but I tell you...." You have heard it said "Do not murder, but I tell you...." Now in each of those cases did Jesus overturn a law or did he take people deeper into the heart of the law? He took people deeper into the law. I tell you if you even look at a woman with lust in your heart you have committed adultery with her. I tell you if you even hate a brother or sister you have committed murder. So with this passage do we expect deeper or different? We expect deeper. Open your Bibles now to Deuteronomy 23:3-6.

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, ⁴because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁵(Yet the Lord your God refused to heed Balaam; the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loved you.) ⁶**You shall never promote their welfare** or their prosperity as long as you live. (NRSV)

This is the legal outworking of God's promise that the reaction of nations to the people of God would be grounds for blessing or cursing. God had promised to Abraham, before the law that:

³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' (Genesis 12:3. NRSV)

So the Ammonites and the Moabites cursed and betrayed and abused the people of God, as a result they were counted as accursed by God and barred from his presence. The law codifies that and says that the Israelites are not to seek their good. That word translated in your English Bibles as “welfare” is the Hebrew word *tobah* and is the same word translated in Genesis as “good” as in “God saw all that he had made and it was good”. That’s why Jesus says:

‘But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do **good** to those who hate you (Luke 6:27. NRSV)

So, do we do good or do we not do good to those who curse us and hate us? Have we discovered a difference between Old and the New Testament? To answer that question we have to ask some other questions.

Q1: Does the New Testament maintain the Old Testament teaching that the attitude of “nations” towards the people of God is a token of faith?

Answer: Yes.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 25. We’ve preached on this passage before so we will not read it all but you know it as the story of the sheep and the goats. The story begins with these words:

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
³²**All the nations** will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. (NRSV)

The story goes on with some people being designated as “sheep” and welcome at the king’s side and others being designated “goats” who are not welcome at the king’s side. The criteria for this separation into blessedness and cursedness is what? Verse 40 says:

⁴⁰And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are **members of my family**, you did it to me.” (NRSV)

This is one of the most frequently misquoted passages in Scripture. This Scripture is generally used to advocate being kind to the poor. Now truly there are a truckload of Scriptures that say we should be kind to the poor but that is not the point of this passage. This passage is simply reiterating the teaching of Deuteronomy 23 in saying that a person’s attitude toward the people of God is received as a token of faith. If you believe in the God behind God’s people then you will

treat the children of that God with kindness. If you do not believe in the God behind God's people, you will treat them carelessly fearing no reprisal. It was taken as proof of faith.

The New Testament affirms this Old Testament teaching again and again. We have time to see one more. Look at James 2:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵**If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,** ¹⁶and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-16. NRSV)

It does not say: "If a neighbour" or "If a poor stranger in your land"; there are tons of those passages in the Bible. This is a story about how we treat the members of God's family; the brothers and the sisters. Callousness and hard heartedness towards the household of God is assumed to flow from lack of faith. If you believe in the father you will care for the children.

The New Testament sings right on key with the Old Testament on this issue. Let's ask another question:

Q2: Does the New Testament abolish the concept of "recompense"?

Recompense is a word that has to do with God's sense of justice. The Bible says: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." That is an expression of proportionate justice. The punishment should fit the crime. Do not execute a man for stealing a loaf of bread, but neither allow a murderer to buy his way out of his crime by paying a fine. Blood for blood. But Jesus says:

²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. (Luke 6:29. NRSV)

Does the New Testament delete recompense from the range of just responses to be expected from the character of God? This question takes us to the heart of the matter. Last week we talked about the importance of having Scripture interpret Scripture. When you arrive at a confusing verse, consult other Scriptures that provide context and a basis for sound conclusion. Don't trust your instincts or your feelings. Your own greed, permissiveness, laziness, fear, anger or some other weakness or flaw may become a distorting lens. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Let's do that here. Go back in Luke to chapter 4. Here Jesus provides his sense of mission quoting from

Isaiah 61, the famous Old Testament definition of the full mandate of messiah. Let's read the self understanding of Jesus:

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:17-21. NRSV)

TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE is fulfilled in your hearing. That is a loaded phrase. Those of you who have been here a while know that we have taught on this passage before. Jesus cut the mandate of Messiah into two pieces. We see that by going back to the Old Testament passage he was reading from. In Isaiah the mandate of the Messiah has two more pieces to it, let me show you:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; (Isaiah 61:1-2. NRSV)

AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE AND TO COMFORT ALL WHO MOURN. The Hebrew word translated as "comfort" is the same word as the word for RECOMPENSE. This is what the Jews call "the Great Recompense" and it is what Christians call The Last Judgement. So, don't get lost now, Jesus comes and he says, "TODAY I am only addressing half of the mandate of Messiah. In this my first coming I will open the year of the Lord's favour. Issues of wrath and recompense will be saved for another day.

The New Testament speaks about those items and it speaks about that Day. Revelation 19 talks about the day of wrath executed by Messiah:

Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. (Revelation 19:11-16. NRSV)

The New Testament also talks about the recompense or judgement when all men receive according to their due:

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And **the dead were judged according to their works**, as recorded in the books. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15. NRSV)

Recompense: as stark, frightening and final in the New Testament as in the Old. The New Testament does not delete the concept of recompense, pay back, it defers it.

Q3: So what lies in the vacuum?

If judgement and recompense have been pushed into the future, what then lies in the vacuum?

The extended season of grace and favour. Or as the Bible likes to refer to it: TODAY. Hebrews says:

¹⁵As it is said,
'**Today**, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' (Hebrews 3:15. NRSV)

Today is the DAY OF SALVATION, it is the season of favour, when recompense is deferred so that grace can be offered to all who would receive it. But TODAY is not forever. The author of the Hebrews goes on to say that as it was in the Old Testament so it is in the New:

¹⁹So we see that **they were unable to enter because of unbelief**. (Hebrews 3:19. NRSV)

If you harden your heart TODAY, if you refuse to believe TODAY then you will be like the Moabites or like the Ammonites. Forever forbidden to enter the presence of God. Judgement is real, recompense is real. TODAY it is deferred that grace may have its season.

The answer to our original question is now clear to see. This isn't a difference; it is a DEEPER. This is the deep mystery of deferment, this is the mystery of the Gospel and the mystery of God's patience and kindness towards those who do not yet believe. This is the space created for the "in between kingdom".

Living In The "In Between" Kingdom

Next week we are going to talk at length about the upside down values of the in between kingdom but today, in the few minutes we have left I just want to orient you to the brief world of the in between kingdom. I want to provide some travel tips for living in this space.

1. Defer issues of personal justice.

First of all, we need to learn to defer issues of personal justice. If God is deferring issues of justice, how can we do any less? Jesus said that he did only what he saw the Father doing, which probably explains why as he was being nailed to a Roman cross he said:

'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34. NRSV)

Jesus never sought justice for himself. He never expected wrongs done to him to be righted in this life. He extended grace because grace was in season. He taught his disciples to do the same:

Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. (Matthew 5:39-41. NRSV)

Jesus brings wonderful clarity to the Law! Recompense is deferred and it is outsourced to the wisdom and justice of God. The Christian is free from the need to seek personal justice; he can wait and he can trust in the justice of the Lord. That is why the Apostle Paul said:

¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

²⁰"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21. NASB)

Recompense is not deleted, it is deferred and it is outsourced. Praise the Lord! We are free to live without offense and free to wait for the justice of God.

Yet how many “Christians” walk in that freedom? There seems to be a rash of offense in the kingdom of God these days. “But pastor, you don’t understand what he did to our family, let me tell you....” I don’t understand and I don’t want to. God knows all of the details and he will sort it out in the end. That is not my concern and neither is it yours if you are truly his disciple. When a “Christian” says to me: “I am so offended” what I hear is: “I am not a Christian”. Christians have no right to offense. When you accept the forgiveness of the Lord you forfeit your right to personal offence. That is why the Bible says:

if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:15. NRSV)

You can only hold one thing in your hands in the in between kingdom. You must choose to hold the grace of God or your personal offence. You cannot carry both. There is a phrase we need to learn in the church today friends. Are you ready for it: “Let it go”. Let’s say it together: “Let it go”. That’s a Biblical phrase taken right from the NEW TESTAMENT. Let me show you:

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? (1 Corinthians 6:7. NRSV)

You whine and you cry about this fellow who stole money from you, or this fellow who slandered you and in so doing you betray your total ignorance of salvation! You have been forgiven of just these sorts of things! Are you dropping the mercy of God to grab hold of these petty offences? Why not rather be wronged? Let it go. And all God’s people said: Amen.

2. Focus on evangelism

Quickly, I want to give you two more. In this in between kingdom we need to keep the focus on evangelism. Let’s look again at that strange verse from Romans 12:

²⁰“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING **YOU WILL**

HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:20-21. NASB)

At first glance that phrase seems out of place with the general theme of the passage. The basic thrust here is that when people do bad things to you, don't return bad for bad, return good for bad and thereby overcome evil with good. But throwing burning coals at a person sounds like “a bad” rather than a good, does it not? This is one of those phrases that doesn't quite translate over into English. It means that your kind acts will stir up a spirit of conviction and remorse within the other party. When a person does evil to you, they expect evil in return. If you treat them kindly, it will kindle up a spirit of repentance in them that will cause good to be birthed inside an evil heart. That is the goal here friends! To change hearts! That's why God doesn't rapture us up after we get saved. He leaves us here so that we can spread the grace around. Don't miss out on that!

I find it so tragic when Christians lick their wounds while the master carries. I have friends and even some relatives who have quit and retired from active kingdom life – they don't go to church anymore, they don't give, serve, witness or contribute in anyway because somebody hurt their feelings back in 1989. Are you kidding me? When Jesus comes back and you dig your talent up out of the tear stained handkerchief you buried it in 25 years ago now do you think he will buy that excuse? “Pastor Johnny was mean to me”?! My dear friend, unless Pastor Johnny nailed you to a Roman cross I do not believe Jesus will be very impressed with you. There is a reason Jesus said:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24. NRSV)

To be a follower of Jesus you have to DIE EVERY DAY to your petty offenses and grievances. Let it go friends, there is work to be done. Jesus said in John's Gospel:

Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. (John 4:35. NRSV)

Time is short brothers and sisters. Anyone with eyes to see should know that harvest is approaching. Now is the time for evangelism, it is not the time for licking our wounds and moaning over petty and imagined slights. That is the bait of Satan and the snare of the evil one. Rebuke it, forsake it and focus on the glorious task at hand.

3. Remember and anticipate the justice of the Lord

Lastly, friends, in this in between kingdom we must remember and anticipate the justice of the Lord. Deferment is different than deletion. The neo-liberal emergent church; the vast body of evangelicalism has been confused by the deferment of justice. They think it means God is no longer just, that he is no longer holy. “Perhaps God took a valium and is no longer concerned with sin. Perhaps God is only kind, rather more like Santa than the God of the Old Testament”. No! The New Testament warns us:

²²Behold then the **kindness and severity** of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:22. NASB)

Justice and a severe hatred for sin have not been deleted from the character of God. Our God is unchanging, yes? Our God is Jesus; Yahweh and Jesus are ONE amen? So Jesus is still severe in his hatred of sin. Yahweh hates sin, he cannot countenance it. The Bible says:

There are six things that the Lord hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that hurry to run to evil,
¹⁹ a lying witness who testifies falsely,
and one who sows discord in a family. (Proverbs 6:16-19. NRSV)

God hates sin, church! And before you tell me: “Oh yes, he hates sin but he loves the sinner” please notice that the last two on the hate-list are people. A lying witness is a person. A person who sows discord in the family is a person. God hates people who have given themselves to sin and he treats them as an abomination. That Hebrew word means “an accursed thing, unfit for God’s presence”. God is holding back his anger and his hatred for sin and for those who have given themselves over to the infection of sin so that the blood of Jesus can cleanse many unto holiness and salvation. He is holding his anger back like a great flood behind a dam, but this holding back is not weakness, it is not the cancelling of justice and holiness. Peter said:

⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9. NRSV)

This delay does not reveal a “differentness” in God, it reveals a patience in God. A patience to defer, to delay but not to delete his hatred for sin and the finality of his justice. The wrath of God will break forth like a flood, released from the dam that restrains it and it will wash across the earth and it will engulf, terrorise and overwhelm the enemies of God and the lovers of evil. That day is not far off, I can feel it in my spirit. Now is not the time to sleep, forgetful of his coming. Now is the time for salvation for we do not know the day or the hour of his appearing.

Conclusion:

If you are a born again believer in Jesus Christ, if you have taken him as your Saviour and you are following him as your Lord, listen to me now. Let loose all your offenses and wounds and free your hands for the work of the Gospel. I do not know how much longer we have but I do know that the hour of the Lord’s appearing is much nearer than when we were first were saved. Join us in reaching this city. I’m sorry about whatever disappointments or hurts you may have acquired as you’ve walked with us. Sheep bite, sheep smell and I’m sorry if we have offended you, I truly am. But time is short. We promise to be more loving, more considerate and more grateful and more gracious; but let’s agree to let it go. If I’ve hurt you today, I’m sure you’ll hurt me tomorrow, let’s assume it was accidental and let’s forgive so that we can focus on the task at hand.

And if you are not a believer, if your wife dragged you here or your neighbour or your mom or if God dragged you here by pulling on your ear, whatever, if you do not know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord THEN TODAY IS THE DAY you need to get that sorted out. The doorway to God’s kindness is wide open today. The grace of God is at hand. All of your sins can be covered over in the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ TODAY. As far as the east is from the west so far will he remove your sins from you TODAY. DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS. You need to do this today as we close in prayer together.