

Living the Jesus Way

“Kingdom Over Culture”

Week 4 – March 24, 2024

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Have you ever thought your process to achieving something was the only way, only to have your process turned upside down by a completely different way of thinking? Maybe it's something like weekly meal planning, booking a vacation, or celebrating a holiday. Share your experience.

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

Passover is a Jewish Festival celebrating the release from Egyptian oppression. It remembers the sparing of first-borns of the Israelites during the plagues in Egypt. It was a 7-day celebration; there was no work, but rather worship, ceremonial meals, and a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of Jews would travel to the city. Passover was a volatile time – often there were riots and bloodshed, proud Jews celebrating their heritage and freedom in the midst of oppression. This particular Passover Festival was extremely volatile because of Roman occupation and the rising popularity and followship of Jesus from Nazareth, and the belief that he could be the Messiah.

Jesus riding into Jerusalem triumphantly on a borrowed baby donkey amongst palm branches laid across the streets is the perfect picture of this Servant King. This would have baffled the contemporaries, but in hindsight, this is the Kingdom of God, a completely different kind of kingdom.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem reveals the depth of kingdom over culture. It is literally just Jesus riding into the city on a donkey, but the political, religious, and social implications and messages it sent were deep, intentional, and powerful. Discuss some of these messages.
 - a. *Humility over Pride* – Riding in as a champion (culture) versus riding in as a sacrifice (Kingdom).
 - b. *Love over Power* – Rallying the troops and storming the hill (culture) versus weeping for Jerusalem and pleading for peace (Kingdom).
 - c. *Sacrifice over Conquest* – Roman triumph is one of conquest (culture) versus Jesus' triumph leads to the cross (Kingdom).
2. What we really need and long for may be different than we thought. Consider what this means in your own life. What attributes of God's Kingdom do you find hope-filled? What aspects of the world do you find yourself drawn to?
3. Serving others, not ourselves, is the foundation of how God builds His Kingdom. How can living this out help us navigate the storms of the political, religious, and economic tensions we find ourselves in today?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God that he came into our world as a Servant King who desires to intimately know each of us. Thank God that he showed us a way of humility, love, and sacrifice over the ways of culture. Thank him that he gave us Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice; because of him we can choose His Kingdom for our lives. Ask him to help us make this choice when hardship and cultural pressure pulls us towards the ways of the world.

Living the Jesus Way

“Invitation Over Limitation”

Week 3 – March 17, 2024

Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Have you ever discovered a limit you wanted to push because of curiosity? Share your experience.

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

As tradition and cultural expectations often create a sub-culture within faith communities, the first century was no different. There were many expectations within the Jewish faith and yet hidden in plain sight, in the center of a scripture that we often reference, was a much deeper and higher calling – an invitation into a life of possibility and opportunity. The story of Mary and Martha (**Luke 10:38-42**), and many stories like it, reveal Jesus' invitation to those considered “other”, “outsider”, or too far broken to be part of the voices proclaiming the power of transformation and mobilization. It is the reminder that Jesus placed a higher value on where one is going, and becoming was the way of Jesus. Jesus broke norms, broke barriers, and broke ceilings as he broke bread with people. Too often people feel a limitation from religion and religious communities because of the past, their beliefs, or experiences, and yet Jesus is constantly inviting people closer. Jesus knew there were limitations in the faith community and multiple times he stepped into them to invite people into something greater, fuller, deeper, and more hopeful.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Limitation often creates deficit thinking – I am limited because of...my past, my beliefs, my struggle, my tightly-held theology, etc. When we live limited, how can we lose intentionality, possibility or even hope?
2. Often the story of Mary and Martha (**Luke 10:38-42**) focuses on Martha and her busyness, but the invitation Jesus gives Martha is significant. Because women were expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities, Martha's behavior fits the cultural expectations, while Mary's violates it. Against cultural expectations, Jesus affirms Mary's choice more highly: a believer can have no greater role than being Jesus' disciple.
 - a. Martha was in her spot, within the limitations. She was doing what was honorable and expected. Discuss where we place limitations in our society today.
 - b. Mary was acting inappropriately. To sit at the feet of a Rabbi was one considered to be the highest honor in society; it meant you belonged. Discuss what it means to belong.
3. When someone has to BELIEVE or BEHAVE like “us” before they get to BELONG, it is as if someone has to cross a line before they get to experience the joy of whatever defines the group. Jesus shows us that BELONGING before you BELIEVE is a better way.
 - a. What happens when like-minded thinking dictates who our friends are, who we serve with, and who we show love to?
 - b. When it comes to our faith, how are limits part of our relationships?
 - c. In your own life where could God be inviting you to focus on the center, and not draw lines of limitation?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God his invitation is determined by his passion for us, his sacrifice for us, and his hope for our future. Thank him for the invitation to sit at his feet and let go of the buckets that define us. Ask him to help us extend an invitation to belong to the people in our lives.

Living the Jesus Way

“Mercy Over Judgement”

Week 2 – March 10, 2024

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Is it easier to show compassion to the people you know or strangers? Why?

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

Feeling like we are on the outside with no way in can crush our hope, even when it may have been our own doing to place ourselves in the situation, but God's mercy and grace and love is larger than the margins we are confined to. Jesus wants to pull us close to him. In **Luke 19:1-10** we find Jesus pulling Zacchaeus toward him, a man who was a chief tax collector – a position that was culturally taboo and harshly judged. Jesus entered Zacchaeus' home inviting him into vulnerability and intimacy. Jesus demonstrated he values Zacchaeus and makes the religious elite very upset. In this moment Jesus makes his proclamation that he came to a lost and hurting world (**Luke 19:10**). Jesus heart to reach Zacchaeus is the same heart he has for all humanity.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Carolyn Custis James describes mercy this way: “Mercy” is the rich Hebrew word *hesed* — one of the most potent words in the entire Bible and the bedrock of God's people. At its core, it describes God's heart for them. No English word captures the meaning of *hesed*, so Hebrew translators chose from words like kindness, mercy, loyalty, loving-kindness, loyal, steadfast, unyielding (or just plain) love.”
 - a. Discuss the meaning of mercy and how you've experienced it in your life.
 - b. When we need to extend mercy, why do we so often offer judgement instead?
 - c. Is healing possible without mercy? Is forgiveness possible without mercy? Why or why not?
2. Read **Matthew 25:35-40** and **Micah 6:8**. How does Jesus describe mercy?
3. Mercy and grace both describe God's love for us. Mercy holds back from us what we really deserve; grace gives us what we do not deserve. Mercy is a compassionate love to the weak, and grace is a generous love to the unworthy. Humans are weak and unworthy – we all need God's mercy and grace. Mercy takes us to the path of forgiveness, while grace leads us to reconciliation.
 - a. Discuss how guilt, fear, and shame can convince us that we are not worthy of receiving mercy.
 - b. How did Zacchaeus respond to Jesus' expression of love in **Luke 19:6-8**?
 - c. How can you respond to God's mercy and grace and love for you today?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God he goes after us and pulls us closer. Thank God he extends mercy no matter who we are and what we think we've done to feel unworthy. Ask him to help you receive mercy – it is free, no strings attached, no performance needed. Ask him to help you give away mercy, even to those we prefer to judge. God, we are grateful we do not need to live our lives on the outside because your love is bigger than all the barriers humans create.

Living the Jesus Way

“People Over Practice”

Week 1 – March 3, 2024

Scripture: Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-14

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Think about a time when you were looked over or left out of something. Maybe it was from childhood or more recently during adulthood. Share a reflection or learning from that experience.

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

Looking closely at the ways Jesus reached people, he consistently chose people over practices. Jesus' methodology frustrated the religious leaders of the day and they were angry with his approach, but all along Jesus was revealing the heart of God for the one. Jesus breaks the sabbath rules and heals a woman (**Luke 13**) and a man (**Luke 14**). The religious elite are furious, but Jesus combats their 'religion' with a posture of relationship. Jesus pushed back strongly at religious leaders' hypocrisy (they are working on the sabbath by helping their own livestock or their own family) and brings it back to relationship versus religion. Jesus was about people over practices – the same practices that were in place to help people grow the relationship Jesus desired to have with them, to heal them, to be their Savior, and true Heavenly Father. Jesus wants this for us too: to reach people over our practices that often become barriers.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. As a culture and population, we hold biases that cause us to place a higher value on the preferred rather than the person. Bias is unequal favor of or against an idea or thing, usually in a way that is, inaccurate, closed-minded, hurtful, or unfair. Biases can be innate or learned. Discuss these four types of bias and how you have experienced them in your own life.
 - a. Relational biases: we only connect to people who look like us, talk like us, think like us.
 - b. Religious biases: we only connect to people who believe the same way we believe.
 - c. Socioeconomic biases: we only connect to people who make the money we make, love where we live, and have the same economic standards we have.
 - d. Ethnic biases: we only connect to people who have the same cultural preferences we have.
2. Barriers built in an attempt to prevent one from breaking God's laws are barriers that can distance people from the true purpose of the law. What types of barriers do you see present in our community?
3. The woman in **Luke 13:10-17**, who lived in a time when infirmities were seen as a result of “God's disapproval” because of sin, was living a life of shame because of her imperfect body. While this woman would be viewed differently today, what practices in your life are causing you not to see people like this woman? Discuss the impact of busyness, the lack of empathy, being unintentional, or apathy.
4. What people in your life today is God asking you to see more valuable than your practices?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God we are *all* made in his image, for his purposes, and thus have the highest value. Thank God that he elevated us over the practice of his own position in heaven and came to earth as a man, die for us, and show us a better way to live! Ask God to help you commit this week to pray for someone he has placed on your heart, and even go to that person and serve them in some way.