

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Last week we looked at our purpose statement - to follow Jesus. We said that Micah 6:8, or signature verse for this church, was a response to the Israelites not following God. In response it says, *He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you? But to do justice (act justly), to love kindness (mercy), And to walk humbly with your God?*¹

This week we want to look at our vision statement which says, *'To live as Jesus did, in word & deed. Awakening others to their own spiritual journey with him - To live as Jesus did.'* Following Jesus & living as he did are very similar.

Let's look at how Jesus lived in Philippians 2:5-8 ⁵*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:* ⁶*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;* ⁷*rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* ⁸*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*²

My friend Keith was an assistant coach for his daughters soccer team. The head coach didn't show up & Keith didn't know how to coach soccer. So he called his wife & asked if her Saudi University students could help, they loved soccer. Eight Single Saudi Muslim men drove out to the suburbs, showed up early, ran drills & were terrific. When the mothers came to pick up their daughters, they pulled Keith off to the side, "Who're these guys?" Keith responded, "They're Single Muslim Saudi men." Every mother gasped. Keith was barraged with questions, "Would they steal their daughters & bomb the country, aren't they terrorists?" they asked.

God's bringing us full circle from Genesis to Revelation. In the garden of Eden Adam & Eve lived in harmony with God & the world around them. Everything they were intellectually, emotionally, behaviorally & spiritually came under his reign. Literally & metaphorically, they lived naked before Him, ashamed of nothing. He gave them purpose in stewardship of creation & they were to do that in reflection of His character. There was freedom to move & live under the umbrella of His grace. Micah 6:8 is a reflection of that - God's message is consistent. Yet sin entered our world, the image, harmony & reflection were broken. Now look at the world; fragmentation, war, racism, murder, control, poverty, polarization.

Yet hope is shown by God pursuing his people in Jesus, who's bringing us full circle back into that reflective relationship with the Father - to live out of those good works he prepared in advance for us to do, as we talked about in Ephesians 2:10 last week. We learn to follow Christ *not* in the isolation of a homogenous church life - we push outward

¹ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (Mic 6:8). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

² *The New International Version.* 2011 (Php 2:5–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

into community, living reflective of Jesus. Ephesians 5:1-2 urges us to “...be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” ³ And 1 John 2:5-6 says, ⁵ “But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” ⁴

Barna says, “Focusing on Jesus’s exhortation that His followers must love both God and people with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength,” he notes that “transformed individuals are those who have aligned their intellect, emotions, behavior, and spirit with the call and ways of God. In other words, genuine, Christ-driven transformation is four-dimensional.”

So, were those Christian women reflecting God in their attitude towards those Saudi’s? Were they loving God & people four dimensionally? No, their value was ‘safety’; the guarding of self. To live as Jesus did in word & deed takes an overturning of your world view. It takes risk. Seeing people & situations as Jesus sees them & acting accordingly. Philippians 2 overturns our humanistic worldview.

We live first & foremost as a citizen of heaven, but also as citizens of America; a kingdom of the world with all its rules & regulations. Expectations of how to play the game, get ahead, prove yourself & survive. The Philippians, on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, understood the dichotomy of being a citizen of God’s kingdom while living surrounded by another.

Philippians chapter two is a word picture of our king; a poetic description of the character of Christ. A model to reflect. A king different than worldly kings. A few years back we saw Saddam Hussein go from riches to rags. A worldly king who’d rather be feared than respected as he amassed power & wiped out anyone in his way toppled from his throne. Pak Soeharto did the same in Indonesia, imprisoning & murdering many. But he too was overthrown, forced out of his 32 year reign. Two kings who went unwillingly from riches to rags; lives marked forever with disgrace; once great, now pathetic.

The kingdom of God is opposite. Not a kingdom of the sword, of amassing wealth, or grasping hold of power. Not subjugation, control, fear, manipulation, guarding self, or rights. It’s compassion, humility, gentility, care, justice, mercy & sacrificial Calvary-like love! We live in a dichotomy of two kingdoms. How are we supposed to ‘live’ as citizens of heaven, stuck in our worldly kingdom?

Tethering ourselves to Philippians chapter two, let’s look at other passages to see. Let’s start with Matthew 20:25-28 ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Eph 5:1-2). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁴ *The New International Version*. 2011 (1 Jn 2:5–6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The disciples, arguing about who'll be first in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus says it's not that way. He came to serve, not to be served. To ransom his life for many. Just as in Philippians, we're called to be 'just as the Son of Man'; with an attitude the same as that of Christ Jesus. To be first means being a servant. He contrasts this whole idea with the world & its rulers who seek to wield power over, but in Christ we practice power under.

We can see this idea played out in Matthew 26:50-53, ⁵⁰Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵²"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³Do you think I cannot call on my Father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

Jesus, being arrested, one of the Disciples drew a sword & cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus says, 'No, put it away, that's not how I advance my Kingdom'. Although Jesus could've called down legions of angels - but he didn't grasp at, nor wield his power.

John 18:33-38, ³³Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" ³⁵"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" ³⁶Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"Are you the King of the Jews?" Legitimate question. Pilate was concerned a rebellion was starting – a challenge to his worldly kingdom? "My Kingdom is not of this world or we'd fight." Pilate saw no threat, and said, "I find no basis for charge against this man."

The essential difference between the kingdom of the world & the kingdom of God is...
 The Kingdom of the world = Coercion/Force – behavioral modification by law or threat of punishment. The kingdom of the world only has power to institute laws controlling behavior. The heart doesn't factor in, only behavior. If you don't steal from me simply because you'd go to jail, then it works. It has no power to change a heart. It can't make you love the king, only fear him.

The Kingdom of God = Christ-like servant love as seen in Phil 2:5-8, characterized by heart transformation. Marked by servant-hood, humility & sacrifice. Marked by the power of the Holy Spirit who's able to change the heart of the most stubborn person. It wins the hearts of its followers by grace through faith in loving action & word.

The early Church grew like wildfire in the Roman Empire through suffering Christ-like love for the first 4 centuries - they had no position of power, forced to serve from underneath. Then Constantine, the emperor of Rome converted. As a result in 313ad Christianity is legalized under the Edict of Milan. And Christians got their first taste of political 'power over others'. They thought, maybe all this suffering was only provisional. Now that we have Constantine on our side, we can 'enforce' Christianity. In 381ad Christianity is declared the official religion of the Roman world. In 382ad the first infidel is put to death; how fast it digresses.

Is forcing people to believe like you Christ-like, just, merciful, or humble? Is worldly power the way to advance the message of Jesus? Of course not. Some say we have to bring America back to God which infers at one time it was a Christian Nation following God in word & deed. Was that when 6 million blacks were brought over from Africa. 3 million survived the trip & were enslaved for 200 yrs. Was it when 20 million Native Americans were murdered, and the remaining members of the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw nations had their land taken away, and were forcibly relocated having to walk the Trail of Tears in 1831 on which thousands died. It wasn't until June 20th 1995 that the Southern Baptist Convention denounced slavery, the very issue they were birthed upon in 1845. Were these, and other such acts like the Crusades in Christian history Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of the World acts? They were kingdom of the world acts for sure. Just because something is done by those who call themselves Christian, or in the name of Christ, doesn't mean they're reflective of Jesus.

When I got in a fight my mom would punish me. I'd say, "He hit me first!" She'd reply, "I don't care what he did. I care about what you do." God says the same, "You need not worry what they will do to your body. I care about your character, you represent me." This concerns the Christians heart attitude towards others. No wonder there is ethnic strife, and 8 churches a day close down in America. It's not because we don't have enough Christians in politics. Maybe we haven't fully lived as Jesus did in word & deed before our neighbor? When we feel our way of life encroached upon, our first inclination is to pick up the sword & wield it back instead of serving in love. One side vilifies the other, and we try to kill each other with the vote, mudslinging, accusation, or whatever sword we have. When have we truly & consistently reflected Jesus in word & deed? We've had bright spots. MLK. He didn't vilify others, as a matter of fact, he saw himself as liberating the oppressor as well as the oppressed! He loved his enemies.

Wesley said, "Orthodoxy, or right opinion, is, at best, a very slender part of religion. Though right tempers cannot subsist without right opinions, yet right opinions may subsist without right tempers. (in other words, you cannot have a right heart without right understanding of God; but you can have right understanding of God without a right heart) There may be a right opinion of God without either love or one right temper toward Him. Satan is proof of this."

"But we have to defend our rights - to win the fight! They're the enemy!" Jesus says, 'Be careful, don't go there.' Jesus guarded the uniqueness of his Kingdom & never mixed the

two. Jesus loved *people* in word & deed. He was out & about, not holed up in the halls of politics, and his worst criticism was reserved for those inside the faith community. It's easier to fight for causes 'in Jesus' name', than to love people in Jesus.

And the American Church continues to dabble in political idolatry - marrying the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of the World. Governmental law & coercion are never substitutes for Christ's kingdom. We vilify others, look at them as the enemy, and never cross into their world to show them the love of Christ both in word & deed. We legislate & argue. Sometimes we've sought to have 'power over' instead of serving out of 'power under'. And, in doing so have alienated people from the Gospel.

Do we really want to be Christ-like; humble, loving, servants in this world? Would we rather be right or forgiven - operating out of a prideful or a humble position? What if God's love was contingent on us getting it right, or on his emotion? What if God withdrew his love when he was unhappy with us? Have you ever said, "That person doesn't deserve my love!" If love is the most powerful force in the world, then withholding love is the most destructive.

Our power doesn't come from grasping at rights, winning arguments, getting ahead or being first, positions of authority, governmental law, manipulation, coercion, being louder, stronger, better at arguing, being served, or withholding love from another. Our power comes from our unique King & the transforming power of the Holy Spirit worked out in loving action informed by His message of grace. That's *Good* as seen in Micah 6:8.

Paul says in Galatians 5:6 *'the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.'* We're never given power to condemn, but to love. No matter how often we screw this up, we always go back to our model - God came in the likeness of a man...entering our world. He didn't grasp at his rights, he gave them up.

Soren Kierkegaard the Danish Philosopher illustrates Philippians 2 with a story of a prince looking for a queen (*Pursuing a Princess*). *One day while the prince was running an errand in the local village for his father he passed through a poor section of the city. As he was passing through, he happened to see a beautiful young maiden. She was poor and lower class, but she was absolutely beautiful. After passing through the village several times, he found he was falling in love with her.*

But he had a problem. How would he go about winning her hand in marriage? He could simply order her to marry him, but he wasn't just seeking a queen. He was seeking a partner. If he coerced her to love him, he would never know if she really loved him for whom he was, or just because of the splendor of his wealth.

So the prince came up with another solution. He took off his kingly robe and put on the garb of a peasant. He moved into the village and began to live among the people. He shared their interests and their concerns, and he talked their language. This was no mere disguise; it was a new identity. Over time, he was able to see the young girl. It

wasn't instant, but in time the young woman grew to love the prince. She loved him because he first loved her.

That's the kingdom of God, giving up what is rightfully yours, laying aside your importance, serving others with humble, Christ-like, sacrificial love. Acting justly, loving mercy, walking humbly. Our real power lies in nothing but following our true King. Our king went willingly from riches to rags & back to riches again [vs9-11].

Those Saudi students spent the whole semester with no pay, running around Colorado, training & encouraging those girls. By the end of the season though, they were still terrorists in the mothers' minds. Keith convinced the reluctant mothers with their daughters to come over & break the fast of Ramadan with the men. When they walked into the room they witnessed 8 young Saudi men in the kitchen hovering over a boiling pot. One on the phone with his sister in California, "Okay, it's boiling, what do I do now?" Their hearts melted - and in the end, maybe all other Saudi's in America were terrorists - but THESE were good boys, and they loved them. When they were no longer viewed as the enemy, the door was opened for the women to love in word & deed. It takes a lot to break down walls, and more than knowledge to live the Christian life - it takes obedience to Jesus!

That's why our vision says "To live as Jesus did, in word & deed. Awakening others to their own spiritual journey with him." We don't view others as the enemy, but as fellow human beings whom God loves. It opens the door for relationship to happen through simple acts of kindness, through being like Jesus. And that affords you the voice to verbalize the Gospel. God is bringing you full circle to reflect Him. When we can walk in humility before Him, he'll lead us into the lives of others where we learn something of God - and our spiritual journey is awakened.

Six:Eight can only provide teaching, training, encouragement & opportunity. We can't make you love God & people, you must partner with God, allowing the Holy Spirit to influence & inject the Word into your intellect, emotion, behavior & spirit.