

The Upside Of Down | September 1, 2024

CHURCH-WIDE PRAYER:

- **Next Gen: Encounter Jesus, mental health, boldness & belonging.**
 - o Pray for the ground gained at camp not to be lost, but to take root + multiply!
 - o **Prayer for F.M. Kickoff's...** KC & MS Church (sept 8), Midweek (sept 18), HSYN (sept 19)
 - o *"If our strategy doesn't involve prayer + fasting, it won't work!" P. Stefan quoting F. Chan*
 - o **PRAY FOR BACK TO SCHOOL** – students, EA's/teachers, principles, trustee's, parents, etc!

INTRODUCTION TO *THE UPSIDE OF DOWN*

As mentioned, today we are going to do a recap sermon based off of this years theme at HS camp!

- I am pleased to tell you that we had an amazing summer, marvelling in what God was doing! And not only at HS camps, but at MS camps, through the LTA program, collectively as a camp staff and all summer volunteers, Family Camp, Prime Time, Day Camps and Seniors Camp. **Let's praise the Lord for what he has done (will do) at camp!**
 - o **Read Matthew 16:24-27**, *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and **take up their cross and follow me**. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."*
 - o **Read John 12:24-26**, *"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be**. My Father will honor the one who serves me."*

This years HS Camp theme was called, 'The Upside of Down.' **WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?**

- **Jesus' Kingdom has been called "The Upside-Down Kingdom". Anyone heard that before?**
- **Question is, why has it been called that?** It's called upside down (*when really its right side up*) because it's so different from the 'kingdom' of this world, making it feel upside-down.
 - o **Jesus is THE King**, and His Kingdom is totally different, sometimes completely opposite, from the way the world operates. And not just different from 'the world' – different, sometimes opposite, from the way **you** and **I** think, speak and act.
- **In what ways is this Kingdom, His Kingdom, upside down?** (*just a few recognizable examples*)
 - o **In Jesus' Kingdom**, the last will be first and the first will be last.
 - o **In His Kingdom**, the least of these are the greatest, welcomed as honored guests.
 - o **In His Kingdom**, the poor are truly RICH, the rich *in the world* are POOR, and those most often forgotten or overlooked are constantly at the forefront of His mind.
 - o **In Jesus' Kingdom**, He seeks the lost and those sick, not the healthy and self-righteous!

- **In His Kingdom**, weakness is a strength, the proud are humbled, and the greatest leaders in the room are the *FIRST TO SERVE and lay down their lives for others*.
- **In His Kingdom**, it is *better to GIVE than receive!* When asked to lend/borrow or help, we go the extra mile and give ourselves away – freely give as you received!
- **In His Kingdom**, we LOVE our enemies. When struck, we turn the other cheek.
- **Life is gained by losing it, persecution is an honor, and those who mourn are blessed.**
- **Yet, the MOST SURPRISING feature is the King of this Kingdom; JESUS!** He doesn't just expect his subjects to live this way. He Himself modelled it to us by being the foremost example of this upside-down way of life. Jesus, the King of Heaven, God in flesh, came to earth to serve the castaways, to touch the untouchable and heal them, and ultimately save those who rejected and rebelled against Him. He did this by laying His life down on a rugged cross, *for them*. He showed us the way to live, and taught us how to embrace the upside down.

Camp Theme Verse: *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross **AND FOLLOW ME**. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” Matthew 16:24-25*

- **In a snapshot, this is the UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM of Jesus.**
 - But the question remains... why would we want to be a part of it?
- **QUESTION:** What's the UPSIDE of 'down'? **ANSWER:** JESUS IS THE UPSIDE!
 - What we gain in Him FAR outweighs anything we may lose in following Him.

A | DEFINING 'BLESSED':

Let's start by defining *one particular word* used by Jesus early on in the Gospel of Matthew... and this is important! We need to define the very first word Jesus spoke in the Sermon On The Mount. *This is the 'intro to Jesus' intro'*. It's the first word of the famous Beatitudes. *We need to define 'blessed'.*

If we don't understand what it means to be blessed as defined by Jesus here, we won't understand the Upside-Down Kingdom!

- **Read Matthew 5:1-3a**, *“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said, ‘**Blessed...**’”*
 - When a Rabbi (aka Jesus) wanted to teach his disciples, they would sit down.
- Jesus sat down, and begins to teach. His very first word is *“**Blessed...**”*.
- **What does that mean to you?** What's it look/feel like to be blessed?
 - Safe. At peace. Content. Rewarded. Fulfilled. Secure. Provided For. Happy?
- **Those words can certainly be associated with blessing, and it's not bad to like those things, but what does 'blessed' actually mean according to Jesus?**

Happiness typically defined is the right circumstances in life, allowing us to feel safe, comfortable, at ease and enjoying ourselves without hinderance!

Happiness biblically defined is the right attitude that leads to spiritual joy, life and satisfaction that remain regardless of circumstances. **(quote attributed to P. Lorne)**

- Consider Again Our Theme Verse: *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” Matthew 16:24-25*
- Could The Cross really be the pathway to the blessed life? It seems so upside-down!!

B | CAN LOSS REALLY BE A GAIN?!

- Let’s consider what Jesus is saying: Jesus is saying that everyone **IS** searching for life. That’s why He goes on to say, *“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (v26)*
 - o Here’s the truth: **EVERYONE** is searching for LIFE, and willing to pay a high price (indeed, the highest price) to get it. Yet, the dispute amongst us is, where is the life we are looking for? We all “spend our lives” on different things...
 - o Jesus says plainly – the path to life is with Him, carrying our cross! In Fact, **Jesus said – I AM THE WAY/TRUTH/LIFE. As in, He is not a means to an end, but rather, He is the end in itself. He is the prize!**

At camp we talked about the story of Jim Elliot and his 4 companions who, called by God, travelled to the jungles of Ecuador to share the Gospel with the Huaorani, an unreached people group there. Tragically, all 5 men perished. They died at the hands of those they were trying to reach.

- Maybe you’re familiar with that story. The question is, were their lives wasted? Were they fools? YES, in the sense we are all called to be fools for Christ, so in love with that we are willing to do anything He says, go anywhere He asks!
 - o But were they fools in the sense that they lost out as a result of their sacrifice? NO!
- *“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” – J.Elliot*

BIG TRUTH: God’s ways might not always look like our ways, but His ways are BETTER BY FAR.

- *God’s ways are better for me, and if I live by them, better for you! And by looking at Jesus, we can trust that God has our best interests at heart, as well as for those around us. His ways are **BEST** because His intentions are totally pure!*
 - o Don’t settle for less than God’s best desires and plans for your life!

C | THE WHY FUELS THE WHAT:

As we begin our decent near the end of this sermon today, I ask you: “What fuels your walk with God?” What motivates you to follow him? The **WHY** fuels the **WHAT**.

- Consider an Olympic Athlete and their training regiment – they do it for the love of the sport!
- *“People who are wholehearted only seem extreme to us if we lack the revelation they have... When people love something (or someone), they consider what others find extreme the only reasonable response.” – Samuel Whitefield. **This is what it means to be fueled by the WHY.***
- Why would we embrace the upside-down way of the Kingdom? **BECAUSE JESUS.** As we grow in seeing Jesus as He is, for who He is – the Greatest Treasure Ever – this fuels us. It turns ‘extreme’ into reasonable. It takes upside-down and turns it into right-side-up; the path we **WANT TO** take!

- **Matthew 13:44-46**, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!”*
 - o **What happens when you sub out the word treasure for “old boot”?** *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like an old boot that a man discovered hidden in a field.”* Does the rest of the verse make sense given the switch? No! Who would be excited about an old boot? Would anyone sell all they had to get an old boot? Not a chance!
- **Our view of God is often too small and our view of the cost is too big. We need to FLIP THAT!**

D | JESUS IS THE UPSIDE OF DOWN (THREE TRUTHS)

You might be asking, what makes Jesus so worth it? *Why would I give up everything to follow him?*

TRUTH #1: The way **HE LOVES US** is UPSIDE-DOWN! Jesus is so worth following, and so worth losing everything for because he is the one who first gave up everything for us!

- **Romans 5:6-8** *“...at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**”*
- **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**, *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*
- Simply put, *“We love because he first loved us.”* **1 John 4:19**

TRUTH #2: The way that **HE SEES US** is UPSIDE-DOWN! Even though we rebelled against Him and ran in the opposite direction, God loves us – enough that He laid down His life for us! Although we are broken, dirty, bankrupt and stained, **His upside-down vision for us makes us new!**

- o **Hebrews 12:1-3**
- o **2 Corinthians 5:16-18,21** *“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*
- o **Paraphrase Luke 15:11-31 – The Lost Son Welcomed Home Every Time!**

TRUTH #3: The way **HE PURSUES US** is UPSIDE-DOWN! You want extreme examples?? Jesus is the most extreme, upside down, amazingly good example of all time! **Look at the way he pursues us!**

- o **Paraphrase Luke 15:4-7 – Leaves the 99 to Rescue the 1 Every Time!**
- o **1 Timothy 1:15-16**, *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”*

Jesus. Is. The. UPSIDE of every down.

What we gain in Him **FAR** outweighs anything we may lose in following Him.