

Nones & Dones Series Slide

Welcome-

Some of you may have been invited, So grateful your'e here.

I want you to know that you are always welcome at City Church, no matter what you believe about God- we want to be a people that its safe to explore who God is- and what that means.

What we're looking to do during this series of messages is explore both positive ideas that make Xianity attractive- and also- to understand ideas or misconceptions that make it not so attractive.

If you're interested in what's coming up- scan that QR code on these inviter cards.

Moment of Silence

In 1948- in the wake of the atrocities of WW2, the United Nations created the Declaration of Universal Human Rights.

The aim was to say what all nations should agree were the right of every human being- no matter the culture or context..

Rights like- to not be tortured or killed by their government, or the right to own property, or be married with mutual consent.

While there have been many declaration of human rights over the course of modern man- this one was different.

Because it didn't include anything about WHY we should believe humans have those rights. Or where those rights come from.

For example, in America's declaration of independence- (next 2 quotes on same screen)

"We hold these truths self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights"- Declaration of Independence, 1776

Compare that with

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

You see what's missing? The UDHR doesn't say WHO ENDOWED humans with reason and conscience- it just says that its so. This- really was a first for a document of its kind- to not appeal to a higher being- a creator- as the SOURCE of human rights.

The UDHR just kind of says- DUH- we all know what is right and wrong. It doesn't have to come from anywhere. We just all know its true.

And, if some country infringes on these rights that don't come from anywhere- We are all agreeing its right for us to hold them accountable.

Let me make this a little clearer with a true story about a person.

Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban is a world-renowned anthropologist who specializes in studying Islamic Cultures of the Sudan.

As an anthropologist, she believes that she shouldn't interfere with the cultures that she studies.

She shared a pretty popular belief that morality is culturally bound.

IOW, There is no larger sense of something that is right and wrong for everyone- just smaller societies that determine what is right and wrong for their communities.

This became a problem for her though. Because over and over she would witness the mistreatment of women- violent acts of abuse or mutilation done in the name of religion or society in the Sudan, and it felt like it was wrong- even though those local communities all accepted it as a moral good.

On one hand, she knew she shouldn't interfere- just study and observe. But, when she was at home in the US, she would contribute to various causes that protected women from abuse...while also because of her academic study- she found herself defending violence toward women in the Sudan.

Eventually, she couldn't live with the dissonance any longer- so she wrote this article in the late 1990s- that gave her reasoning why she could take a stand against violence toward women, even in cultures where it was an agreed upon good.

“[Discussions during a Human Rights conference] made me realize that there was a moral agenda larger than myself, larger than Western culture or the culture of the northern Sudan, or of my discipline. I decided to join colleagues from other disciplines and cultures in speaking out against the practice. “¹- Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban

¹ <http://anthropology-bd.blogspot.com/2008/07/cultural-relativism-and-universal-human.html>

So what is the larger moral agenda-

Well- turns out, for Fleuhr-Lobban- it just means a bigger group of people from more places.

She says what changed her mind was that a bunch of people from lots of cultures came together to say that the treatment of these women was wrong. And so that outweighed what the people were saying in the Sudan.

“[A] broad spectrum of the human community has come to an agreement that [mistreatment] of girls and women is wrong.” - Fleuhr-Lobban

IOW- a lot of people outside of the Sudan looked at practices toward women IN the SUDAN and said- “It doesn’t matter what you’re agreed upon morals are- ALL of US have agreed that what you’re doing is wrong- so it is- and we’re going to stop you from doing it.

“We have moved beyond the idea of a value free social science to the task of developing a moral system at the level of our shared humanity that must at certain times supersede cultural relativism”- Fleuhr-Lobban

My question to you today is this- is the conclusion that Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban came to right? And if so- how do we know?

I certainly agree that abuse and mistreatment of women is wrong in any culture. But I would argue that her reasoning falls short of establishing any kind of morality that has the authority to tell anyone else what they should do.

Essentially- Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban says “If you have one group of people that says agrees that something is right- but you think its wrong- just get a bigger group of people that agree with your sense of morality— then go in and force the smaller group of people to live by that morality.”

Also known as Might equals Right. Or Colonizing. Which- the greater human community would also agree is wrong.

Title Slide “The Search for Justice: How Jesus Makes Sense of Right & Wrong”- Matthew 12:9-21

Every single human being has some sense of right and wrong. We also have a sense that when we see something that is wrong- we want it to be set right. Just like Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban did with the Sudanese women.

In fact, the more we love someone- the more we care about a person or a people, the deeper our sense of Justice is for them.

If someone hurt my wife or one of my sons- I wouldn't merely say "Well, I guess they have a different sense of morality than me- Nothing I can do about that! To each his own. Everyone decides right and wrong for themselves!"- Of course not! Because of my deep love, I would want justice. I would want the wrong that was done to be set right.

All of us are searching for, longing for- justice. I have never met a human being who could not give me at least one thing that was wrong with the world- a way that the world or humanity was broken- \that needed to be set right.

What I want to show you today- is that we can't just HAVE morals- we can't just HAVE a sense of justice- without also having something or someone outside of ourselves to appeal to.

Today, I want to show you where some of our attempts to say what is right and wrong have failed, and then I want to show you how Jesus answers the search for Justice.

Matthew 12:9-21

9 Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. 10 There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand, and in order to accuse him they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? "

11 He replied to them, "Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out? 12 A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath."

13 Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

15 Jesus was aware of this and withdrew. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them all. 16 He warned them not to make him known, 17 so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

18 Here is my servant whom I have chosen,

my beloved in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him,

and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

19 He will not argue or shout,

and no one will hear his voice in the streets.

20 He will not break a bruised reed,

and he will not put out a smoldering wick,

until he has led justice to victory.

21 The nations will put their hope in his name.

Transition:

I want to do this in two parts today- Part one- I'm going to show you some common solutions that our society has put forth to explain- our sense of justice...and then I'll show you the problems with those ideas. Where they fall short.

in then in part 2- I want to show you- from this passage about Jesus- how Jesus actually makes sense of right and wrong where other ideas fall short.

For those in the room that don't follow Jesus- or aren't sure- I hope that this helps you to make up your mind- and surrender your life to him.

For those of you that do follow Jesus- I hope you worship him today, as you see another turn of the diamond- another glimmer of his beauty and truth and goodness. And anywhere where your life is telling a different story than his life and death and resurrection- I hope you repent and say YES to him again today.

1) Justice that doesn't transcend humanity, creates more injustice for humanity.

First- lets talk about what we mean by morality & Justice.

When we talk about morals- we are talking about a way to live in the world according to what is right- which also requires saying what is wrong.

Even if you say "Whatever any person decides is right... is right. TO each his own."

Just by that statement- you are saying that anyone that disagrees with you is wrong. Therefore- you do think that some people are wrong.

Everybody has to operate like this. There is no escaping it.

Justice- then is what we want when we recognize that something is wrong. We have a desire for it to be made right.

And there are 2 basic kinds of Justice.

Retributive Justice- Negative consequences for wrong-doing

Restorative Justice- Fixing what's broken, Giving back what's lost

Sometimes those two kinds of justice go together.

Like making someone pay back what they have stolen. Its both retributive for the thief, and Restorative for the victim.

Ok- now I'm going to get to that Scripture in the second part, but first- I want to show you some attempts at making Justice make sense that we've tried to do without GOD- that end up falling short- and causing more injustice.

Nature is makes right?

Some people have said we can ground our morals and sense of justice in Nature. If we just observe nature- we can see that humans are special and therefore deserving of some kind of special treatment. But then, Darwinian evolutionary theory came along and said- Actually- we're not that different from animals- and the law that transcends the animal kingdom- and therefore humans as well- Survival of the Fittest. The Strong can devour the weak.

Well- most of us would say that that doesn't really help us with protecting the weak, which we have a kind of sense that Justice includes helping those who are powerless. For example, those Sudanese women.

The Social Majority makes right?

This was Fleuhr-Lobban's solution. If you have one group of people that is doing something you don't like- just find a larger, more diverse group of people from outside of them to come in and say "We all agree that what you are doing is wrong!"

You don't need God, you just need a lot of humans that agree.

Well, the problem with this is that Hitler was voted in by a majority. He didn't take power- the Social Majority in Germany said "The Nazi way is the Right way."

With this idea, there is no such thing as speaking truth to power. Which is what so many of us over the centuries have valued and seen as the spark to Justice. When everyone agrees, but a small minority says- this isn't RIGHT! IF morals are created instead of discovered- if we make them up instead of receive them from God- then the powerful always win.

Back to 1)

There have been more solutions than this, but these are 2 major ones- that people still appeal to.

And those have led to some pretty big problems and inconsistencies.

But why do we tend to avoid God as a moral law giver?

Here's why:

Over human history we've seen that people who claim to have THE TRUTH- tend to be oppressors.

Meta-narratives- or BIG TRANSCENDENT STORIES that explain everything for everybody often end up hurting people.

If everybody was JUST LIKE US- then the world would be perfect.

META-NARRATIVES, absolute truth and morality- seem to just aim at creating Utopias. and the creation of Utopias- end up with bloody revolutions- Look at Marxism and Communism in 19th & 20th century Russia.

Or Nazi-ism- that led to Genocide.

Meta-narratives and absolute truths shut down political dissent and turn everyone who is not on board an enemy to be dominated or killed.

They offer one explanation for everything- they are TOTALIZING- which ends up in TOTALITARIANISM. Dictatorships. Loss of freedom. Loss of Life.

But our solution to this, was to say "There are no transcendent truths! Everyone decides what is right for themselves! And we'll kill or harm or cancel you if you don't believe that!"

You see the problem?

If all claims of truth are just power grabs seeking to dominate and exploit people- then THAT CLAIM itself turns out to be a power grab that dominates and exploits people.

WE ARE ALL ABOUT LOVE AND TOLERANCE— AND YOU IF YOU AREN'T WE'LL PUT YOUR ADDRESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND DESTROY YOUR LIFE!

So what do we do?

See- we need a non-totalizing meta-narrative

A non-oppressive absolute

A Transcendent morality- that somehow is compassionate and down to earth.

We have to believe in truth- something transcendent- but it cant be a meta-narrative that turns us into oppressors ourselves.

That's where Jesus comes in.

2) Jesus makes sense of justice.

In the bit we read from Matthew's gospel today, we get a picture of the way Jesus handles Justice.

First- you see restorative Justice.

v 10

When Jesus goes into the synagogue, the religious leaders try and test him. These Pharisees are the ones who have been using God's transcendent moral law, and twisting it as a way to dominate and control others.

Which still goes on in churches and religious communities today. Its the age old problem of taking the big story, and just working it for your advantage. Something Jesus did so beautifully was to expose the people who misused God's law in order to abuse others.

The Pharisees are at it again here. There is a man who has a shriveled hand that he can't use. In other words- something is wrong. Not as it should be. And they don't look at the man with compassion- or as a human being- he becomes a prop and a tool to their bigger mission- which is to keep their power and position in their religious community.

v 11-12

Jesus shows them that they have actually overlooked a part of the law that allows for a person to pull livestock out of a precarious situation on the Sabbath. Then he appeals to the transcendent truth that HUMANS are worth more than animals.

(Some of y'all cat lovers need to hear that today!)

Every person is valuable because they are created in God's image. Regardless of their capacity to think, or whether or not they are disabled, or beautiful or whatever- if you are a human- you have value because GOD created you in his image. This is the start of all of our morals and ethics.

Jesus says- it is LAWFUL to do GOOD on the Sabbath.

v 13-14

Then look at the restorative Justice of Jesus vs the retributive justice of the Pharisees.

Jesus restores the mans hand- he makes what is wrong, right. And the Pharisees think Jesus has transgressed their lower law- so that figure out how to kill him.

Now- just in case you think “Oh Jesus is only about restorative Justice!” Thats not true. In fact just before this in Matthew 11- Jesus talks all about God’s retributive justice. And if you have some questions about that- about hell- and how could a good God take that kind of retributive justice- I’m addressing that in 2 weeks.

v 18

Now Matthew quotes the Prophet Isaiah- and he’s saying- What Isaiah wrote- is all fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus is God’s servant- the son of God in whole God the Father delights. You remember at Jesus’ baptism, the audible voice from the heavens- This is my son in whom I’m well pleased!”

And it says that Jesus will proclaim Justice to the NATIONS.

The nation’s. That totalizing. That’s all people everywhere. Not just the JEws. THE WORLD.

Jesus is bringing a TOTALIZING METANARRATIVE. Uh-oh. Here comes the oppression and abuse.

No- look at the rest of the prophecy.

v 19- 21

19 He will not argue or shout,

and no one will hear his voice in the streets.

20 He will not break a bruised reed,

and he will not put out a smoldering wick,

until he has led justice to victory.

21 The nations will put their hope in his name.

in popular expectation messiahs exercised their authority by crushing opposition, but Jesus showed his authority in his concern for the helpless and downtrodden

This is the opposite of Oppression.
No argue or shout.

Reeds grew plentifully and were cheap. They were used as walking sticks- or to lift things up high. In other words- if you broke them- just throw it away and get a new one. Kind of like we do with TVs and refrigerators now.

But the Lord's servant does not discard those who can be likened to *shattered* reeds, earth's "broken" ones.

The same truth is brought out with the reference to *a smoking wick*. A wick that functioned imperfectly was a **nuisance**: it would not give out good light and its smoldering released a certain amount of smoke. The simple thing was to snuff it out and throw it away.

A little bit of flax did not cost much, so replacing it was the normal procedure. It took time and patience and the willingness to take pains to make anything useful out of a bruised reed or a smoking wick.

People in general would not take the trouble.

In a similar fashion most of us regard the world's down-and-outs as not worth troubling ourselves over; we do not see how anything can be made of them.

But love and care and patience can do wonders, and that is what the prophet is talking about. God's servant will persevere to the end. He will persist until he *brings out*⁵⁴ *justice into victory*. The prophet cannot acquiesce in the thought that evil will finally have the victory. For him it is clear that in the end the servant will bring about the triumph of justice

Its the opposite of survival of the fittest.

Jesus- the prophet Isaiah said- and Matthew here again points out- will be the STORY, the META-NARRATIVE that doesn't oppress- but instead brings Justice for all nations. We put hope in him to make all things right.

Back to 2)

1) Mystery. Read the Bible- and get to JOB- Jobs

Anybody who thinks the Bible gives you all the answers doesn't know how to read.
God is God and you are not

Tons of mystery in the Xian faith. A meta-narrative that creates confidence but humility.

2) Its not Utopian

World not gonna be what it needs to be until Jesus comes back. We cant bring the Kingdom in until Jesus does.

Augustines City of God- City of man- Power and exploitation vs Love and Service
Every city is 2 cities- so get rid of your utopianism.

Republicans- get rid of your nostalgia

Liberals- stop thinking in the future if we just get social justice right everything

3) Not Domination- subversion of power

God subvert by choosing the weak, the foolish, the powerless to accomplish his purposes.

EXAMPLE- Ancient times- Primogeniture,

Abel over cain

David over Eliab

Working with Women

Choosing not most beautiful of fertile

Little Israel over superpower Egypt

Chooses Judges from powerless tribes. Lower status parts of the country

Matt 1- Genealogy- never women- but there are 4 women

Tamar

Rahab

Ruth

Bathsheba

Mothers of Jesus

Choosing to be with the outsiders, politically, morally

Philippians 2:2-11

2 make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

5 Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

6 who, existing in the form of God,

did not consider equality with God

as something to be exploited.

7 Instead he emptied himself

by assuming the form of a servant,

taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man,

8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient

to the point of death —

even to death on a cross.

9 For this reason God highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus

every knee will bow —

in heaven and on earth

and under the earth —

11 and every tongue will confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus emptied himself

Being a nice guy- he helped an old lady across the street

NATURE OF GOD- HE EMPTIED HIMSELF

Saved us by poverty through weakness

Only the strong- would be saved if he saved in strength.

I'm gonna pay the debt you owe- so those who aren't good can be saved too.

Jesus saved us

THE WAY TO POWER- is Service through love, sacrifice

What if the absolute truth - is a man dying on a cross for his enemies.

You can never be an oppressor

The gospel of Jesus is a non-oppressive absolute truth. One that cannot be used to oppress others.

And when it is, you can be sure that Jesus will come back to set it straight.

Baptism, Belief