



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

February 26, 2017

Discussion Guide

Who Am I?

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO KNOW WHO THEY ARE? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- READ LUKE 2.20-26 ALOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE YOU ARE PRESENT AS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.

- JESUS CALLS OUT THE IDENTITY OF HIS DISCIPLES. WHAT IS THIS IDENTITY? DOES THIS SURPRISE YOU? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- JESUS NOTES THAT THIS IDENTITY DOES NOT REST UPON EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES BUT UPON GOD'S CHOICE TO BE ACTIVE IN THEIR LIFE. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES THIS RUN CONTRARY TO THE WAY PEOPLE TYPICALLY THINK?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THIS IDENTITY DIFFER FROM ONE WHICH YOU MIGHT CLAIM FOR YOURSELF? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- CONSIDER FOR A MOMENT THAT THE IDENTITY WHICH JESUS CALLS OUT IS TRUE OF YOU. HOW MIGHT THIS IDENTITY IMPACT HOW YOU NAVIGATE AND EXPERIENCE LIFE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT TAKE TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS JESUS IDENTIFIES YOU? HOW MIGHT THIS COMMUNITY HELP IN THAT JOURNEY?

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

LAW

THE TYPICAL DEFINITION OF LAW IS THAT OF A SYSTEM OF STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW A SOCIETY VIEWS AND ADMINSTRATES ITSELF. IN GENERAL, THESE STATEMENTS INCLUDE FORMS OF RESTRAINT UPON BEHAVIOR AS WELL AS TRIGGERS WHICH INDICATE WHEN RESPONSES MUST BE MADE AND WHAT CONSTITUTES AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO PREVENT FUTURE OCCURRENCES OF RESTRAINED BEHAVIORS. IN THE WESTERN TRADITION, THESE LAWS HAVE IDENTIFIED BY FIRST UNDERSTANDING THE ASSUMED LEGAL POSITIONS OF THE POPULACE AND THEN LAW CODES ARE BUILT UPON THESE POSITIONS BY APPLYING THEM TO REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS. IN THIS MANNER, LAWS AND CODES BECOME FLUID, EVER-CHANGING AS THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF

WESTERN SOCIETY CHANGES. FURTHER, IN THIS SETTING, LEGAL BATTLES EMERGE, NOT BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF CLARITY OF THE LAWS BUT BECAUSE THE UNDERLYING PRESUPPOSITIONS ARE BEING CHALLENGED.

IN THE EASTERN TRADITION, LAWS EMERGE MUCH DIFFERENTLY, WITH CRISIS TYPICALLY SERVING AS THE CATALYZING MOMENT FOR THE CREATION OF LAWS. SOMETHING HAPPENS AND SOCIETY NEEDS TO RESPOND. THEREFORE, IT CREATES LAWS WHICH GOVERN BEHAVIOR. HOWEVER, PACKED INTO THESE STATEMENTS ABOUT BEHAVIOR IS OFTEN MUCH MORE, MORE WHICH INCLUDES THE BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE AND SOCIETY ITSELF. THUS, THESE LAWS BECOME STATEMENTS ABOUT IDENTITY MORE THAN BEHAVIOR AND ARE THEREFORE UNCHANGING. SUCH IS THE CASE WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE MOSAIC LAW OF ISRAEL.

THE LAW OF MOSES COMES OUT OF THE CRISIS OF THE EXODUS. A LARGE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN RESCUED OUT OF SLAVERY, BUT THEY NOW HAVE NO IDEA WHO THEY ARE AND HOW THEY ARE TO LIVE. THEREFORE, GOD APPROACHES AND PROVIDES A LAW CODE FOR THEM (EXODUS 20). THIS LAW CODE, LIKE OTHERS, CONTAINS COMMUNAL STATUTES AND PERSONAL STATUTES WHICH RESTRAIN SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS AND OUTLINE HOW TO RESPOND IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS. HOWEVER, THESE LAWS ("WORDS" IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT) ARE MORE ABOUT WHO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL ARE THAN WHAT THEY MAY OR MAY NOT DO. THEY ARE A PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN CHOSEN AND RESCUED BY GOD (EXODUS 20.2). THESE OPENING WORDS ARE ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF THE ISRAELITES. WHAT FOLLOWS IS THEREFORE GUIDANCE FOR HOW TO LIVE OUT THIS IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE.

THE QUESTION THEN BECOMES, WHY THESE LAWS? WHY DOES THIS WAY OF LIFE REFLECT THE TRUE IDENTITY OF THE ISRAELITES AND NOT SOME OTHER WAY? THE ANSWER IS ROOTED IN UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRE OF GOD TO EXPRESS HIS NATURE. GOD LONGS TO SHOW CREATION WHO HE IS. WE CAN SEE THIS IN HIS PURPOSES FOR CREATING PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE (GENESIS 1.26-27). IN PEOPLE, GOD PUT A REFLECTION OF HIMSELF SO THAT CREATION MIGHT BEHOLD AND WORSHIP HIM. THE SAME IS TRUE WITH THE MOSAIC LAW. THE LAW WHICH GOD GAVE MOSES WAS NOTHING SHORT OF ONE MORE WAY TO EXPRESS HIS TRUE NATURE, AND THIS THROUGH PEOPLE! IN LEVITICUS 19, THE OPENING EXPLANATORY STATEMENT REGARDING THE NATURE OF THE LAW IS THAT IT IS ROOTED IN GOD'S HOLY CHARACTER (LEVITICUS 19.2). THEREFORE, TO KEEP THE LAW IS TO ACT LIKE GOD HIMSELF. THIS THEME IS ECHOED THROUGHOUT THIS CHAPTER WITH THE PHRASE, "I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD." THIS IS NOT A PHRASE WITH WHICH GOD IS COMMANDING OBEDIENCE BY NATURE OF HIS POSITION. IT IS A PHRASE WHICH REMINDS THE ISRAELITES THAT THE LAWS ARE ROOTED IN HIS CHARACTER. THEREFORE, IN KEEPING THEM, PEOPLE ARE ACTING LIKE HIM.

THIS IDEA OF THE LAW BEING INTENDED TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S CHARACTER AND THIS THROUGH PEOPLE IS AT THE HEART OF THE

INCARNATION. JOHN MAKES THIS POINT IN THE OPENING CHAPTER OF HIS GOSPEL WHEN HE SPEAKS OF THE "WORD" AND HOW THIS "WORD BECAME FLESH" (JOHN 1.1-2, 14). WITH THE TERM "WORD," JOHN IS ECHOING EXODUS 20, LAW, BUT HE IS TYING IT TO THE IDEA OF LAW AS A REFLECTION OF GOD'S CHARACTER. IN OTHER WORDS, JOHN IS SAYING, GOD EXISTED AND IN HIS CREATION, HE LONGED TO SHOW US WHO HE IS, SO HE TOOK ON FLESH THIS TIME. JESUS ECHOES THIS SENTIMENT IN MATTHEW 5 WHERE HE ARGUES FOR THE LASTING NATURE OF THE LAW AND HIS ROLE AS THE ONE WHO FULFILLS IT; THAT IS, HE SHOWS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO LIVE THE LAW IN HUMAN FORM (MATTHEW 5.17-20).

BECAUSE THE LAW WAS ABOUT WHO GOD WAS AND NOT JUST WHAT PEOPLE WERE ALLOWED TO DO, IT WAS CONSIDERED TO BE A PRECIOUS GIFT TO THE JEWS. IT WAS MORE THAN A WAY OF LIFE. THE LAW WAS A STATEMENT ABOUT THE NATURE OF LIFE ITSELF, A NATURE ROOTED IN GOD'S OWN NATURE. THIS IS WHY THE PSALMISTS WILL OFTEN SPEAK ABOUT THE LAW AS A SOURCE OF LIFE (PSALM 1), DELIGHT, LOVE, TRUTH, PEACE, AND SUSTENANCE (PSALM 119).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, IT HAS OFTEN BEEN ARGUED THAT THE LAW HAS BEEN REJECTED WITH GRACE BEING OFFERED AS THE TRUE PATH TO KNOWING GOD. THIS IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST SEVERE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF BOTH THE LAW AND THE NEW TESTAMENT WHICH IS PASSED DOWN IN MODERN CHRISTIANITY. JESUS WAS VERY CLEAR AS TO THE LASTING NATURE OF THE LAW (MATTHEW 5.17-20). THE LAW CANNOT PASS AWAY BECAUSE GOD HIMSELF CANNOT PASS AWAY. THE STATEMENT OF WHO GOD IS AND HOW THIS IS TO BE EXPRESSED IN PEOPLE IS, BY DEFINITION, EVERLASTING, AN ASPECT OF GOD'S OWN CHARACTER. HOWEVER, WHAT DOES CHANGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IS HOW PEOPLE ARE TO KEEP THE LAW, REFLECT GOD'S CHARACTER. JESUS ALLUDES TO THIS IN MATTHEW 5.20 AND THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS GEARED TO POINTING TO THIS NEW WAY. THIS NEW WAY ASSUMES THE LIFE, MINISTRY, AND DEATH OF JESUS. IN JESUS, WE SEE THE LAW OF GOD PERFECTLY KEPT; THAT IS, WE SEE THE IMAGE OF GOD HIMSELF (MATTHEW 5.17; COLOSSIANS 1.15). FURTHER, WE HEAR THE CALL TO LIVE THIS SAME LIFE (1 JOHN 2.6) WHICH IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE CALL OF DISCIPLESHIP, A CALL TO TAKE UP JESUS' LIFE. BY DEFINITION, THIS LIFE IS A LIFE WHICH PERFECTLY EXEMPLIFIES THE LAW. THE NEW COMPONENT IS THE CROSS. THE CROSS IS THE RENEWAL OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, INVITING PEOPLE TO LIVE AS HIS PEOPLE AS THEY EXPERIENCE HIS REDEMPTION. THE CROSS FREES PEOPLE TO LIVE AS THEY WERE MEANT TO LIVE BY RECONCILING THEM WITH GOD. IN THIS RELATIONSHIP, PEOPLE FIND THEY HAVE GUIDANCE AND STRENGTH TO LIVE WHAT IS TRUE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THEY HAVE THE EXAMPLE OF WHAT IS TRUE IN JESUS HIMSELF (JOHN 14.6); THAT IS, JESUS BECOMES OUR LAW, HIS LIFE SERVING AS THE EXAMPLE OF GOD'S IMAGE IN A WAY THE WRITTEN LAW NEVER COULD.

THE TEXT

LUKE 6.12-26

A NEW / OLD WAY

IN LUKE 6, WE DISCOVER LUKE'S VERSION OF MATTHEW'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT. WHILE THE TIMING OF THIS SERMON IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF MATTHEW'S, THE CHOOSING OF HIS DISCIPLES (MATTHEW 4.18-22; LUKE 6.12-16), THE NATURE OF THIS CHOOSING AND THE LOCATIONS ARE VERY DIFFERENT BETWEEN LUKE'S AND MATTHEW'S RECOUNTING, AS IS THE WORDING. IT IS THEREFORE BEST TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT JESUS PREACHED THIS SERMON NUMEROUS TIMES IN HIS MINISTRY, PERHAPS AS ONE OF HIS FIRST SERMONS AS HE MOVED ABOUT. THAT IT IS RECORDED TWICE INDICATES THE ENORMOUS IMPORT OF THIS SERMON FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW JESUS, AN IMPORT SEEN WHEN ONE CONSIDERS JESUS' STATEMENT ABOUT FULFILLING THE LAW IN MATTHEW 5.17-20. IN HIS SERMON, JESUS IS DOING NOTHING SHORT OF INTERPRETING THE MOSAIC LAW FOR HIS AUDIENCE, HELPING THEM TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF WHO GOD'S PEOPLE ARE AND HOW THEY ARE TO LIVE, A WAY WHICH REFLECTS THE VERY CHARACTER OF GOD. THIS FITS WITH JESUS' GOSPEL PROCLAMATION WHICH IS NOTHING SHORT OF AN INVITATION FOR PEOPLE TO CHOOSE TO LIVE UNDER GOD'S REIGN (MARK 1.14-15). IF PEOPLE WHO HAVE FORMERLY NOT LIVED UNDER GOD'S REIGN CHOOSE TO RESPOND POSITIVELY, WHAT MUST FOLLOW IS AN EXPLANATION OF WHAT THAT LIFE ENTAILS.

WHILE THE SERMON PROPER BEGINS IN VERSE 20, ITS HEADWATERS LIE AT VERSE 12. HERE JESUS ENTERS INTO A TIME OF PRAYER, AFTER WHICH HE CHOOSES 12 MEN TO BE HIS DISCIPLES, CALLING THEM APOSTLES (SENT ONES). THIS LANGUAGE IS VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT ECHOES THE BEGINNING OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT IN GENESIS 12. THERE, GOD CHOSE A MAN, AND HE CHOSE HIM TO SEND HIM FORTH, NOT JUST TO A NEW LAND BUT TO THE WORLD TO BE A BLESSING. ABRAHAM WAS CHOSEN, NOT BECAUSE OF ANY RIGHTEOUSNESS ON HIS PART, A POINT WELL MADE AS THE 12 MEN CHOSEN INCLUDE FORMS OF NEPOTISM, POLITICAL RIVALS, AND A TRAITOR.

JESUS TAKES THESE CHOSEN MEN TO A LEVEL PLACE WHERE HE FINDS OTHERS WHO WISH TO FOLLOW HIM. SEEING THEM, HE HEALS THEM, FREEING THEM FROM THEIR SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL BONDAGE. HERE, WE NEED TO FOLLOW THE TRAJECTORY OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT ONCE MORE. ONCE GOD CHOSE A PEOPLE, THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM, HIS NEXT MAJOR MOVE WAS TO DELIVER THEM FROM BONDAGE, A PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL BONDAGE IN EGYPT. FOLLOWING THE NEXT MOVEMENT IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, LAW SHOULD FOLLOW. THOSE WHO ARE RESCUED TO LIVE WITH GOD MUST KNOW WHAT IT IS TO LIVE AS GOD'S PEOPLE, A PEOPLE WHO REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.

LOOKING AT HIS DISCIPLES, JESUS PROVIDES THIS "LAW." HIS

STATEMENT OF LAW BEGINS WITH THE IDENTITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE, JUST AS THE LAW OF MOSES. THIS IS BECAUSE LAW IS NOT ABOUT WHAT ONE MAY OR MAY NOT DO, BUT IT IS FIRST ABOUT WHO ONE IS. AS THOSE REDEEMED AND CHOSEN BY GOD, THE DISCIPLES WERE IDENTIFIED AS BLESSED. TO BE BLESSED IS TO BEAR THE FAVOR AND PROTECTION OF GOD. THIS IDENTITY AS BLESSED SETS A TRAJECTORY FOR HOW LIFE IS TO BE LIVED, AS BLESSED PEOPLE. HOWEVER, JESUS IS CLEAR THAT THE BLESSING OF WHICH HE SPEAKS IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES. HIS FOLLOWERS MIGHT BE POOR, HUNGRY, DISCOURAGED, AND FIND THEMSELVES PERSECUTED AS THEY MOVED TO REFLECT THE CHARACTER OF GOD, THE CHARACTER OF JESUS HIMSELF. HOWEVER, AS BLESSED PEOPLE, JESUS ASSURED THEM THAT THEY COULD DEPEND ON GOD'S PROTECTION ("KINGDOM"). THEY COULD REST IN GOD'S PROVISION ("SATISFIED"). THEY COULD HOPE IN THE GIFT OF GOD'S JOY ("LAUGH"). THEY COULD BE PATIENT BECAUSE OF GOD'S VINDICATION AND REWARD ("GREAT REWARD"). THOUGH THEIR LIVES MIGHT NOT REFLECT "BLESSING" ACCORDING TO THE CULTURAL STANDARDS OF THE DAY, AS BLESSED PEOPLE THEY WOULD FIND WHAT THEY NEEDED MOST PROVIDED BY GOD.

JESUS THEN TURNS TO A SERIES OF WOES OR STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW LIFE WOULD NOT GO SO WELL. THESE STATEMENTS MIRROR THE STATEMENTS OF BLESSING. THEREFORE, THEY TAKE THE FORM OF IDENTIFYING PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT BLESSED, THOSE WHO DO NOT BEAR GOD'S FAVOR. WHAT IS INTERESTING TO NOTICE IS THAT THESE PEOPLE DO BEAR ALL THE CULTURAL MARKS OF BEING "BLESSED." THEY ARE RICH, WELL FED, HAPPY, AND PEOPLE SPEAK AND THINK WELL OF THEM. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE NOT STEPPED INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD; THAT IS, THEY HAVE NOT ANSWERED JESUS' GOSPEL INVITATION AND ARE LIVING A LIFE CONTRARY TO GOD'S CHARACTER. THESE PEOPLE, WHILE FEELING AND LOOKING BLESSED IN THE PRESENT, FIND THAT THIS BLESSING WILL EVAPORATE IN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SENSE; THAT IS, THIS BLESSING IS TEMPORARY BECAUSE IT IS A STATE AND NOT THEIR TRUE IDENTITY.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

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REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHO ARE YOU? NO, NOT YOUR NAME. WHO ARE YOU? WHAT IS YOUR TRUEST IDENTITY? DON'T WORRY. WE OFTEN GET STUCK ON THIS ONE. MOST OF US DON'T KNOW, BECAUSE NO ONE HAS EVER TOLD US, AND TO KNOW WHO WE ARE WE NEED SOMEONE TO TELL US. MANY OF US WHO HAVE BEEN AROUND CHURCH VERY LONG HAVE HEARD ONE SUGGESTION. WE ARE SINNERS. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT WE SIN, I AM NOT SO SURE THIS IS WHO WE ARE, REALLY. WHO WE ARE SETS THE COURSE FOR WHAT WE DO, AND IF WE ARE SINNERS THEN ALL WE WILL EVER DO IS SIN. JESUS OFFERS US ANOTHER SUGGESTION. WE ARE BLESSED. WE ARE A PEOPLE WHO ARE INVITED INTO A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, HIS CHOSEN AND BLESSED PEOPLE WHO LIVE BLESSED LIVES WHICH BLESS OTHERS. THAT IS WHO WE ARE. IF THAT IS WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO AND WHAT WE CAN EXPERIENCE IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT IS BEYOND WORDS. THE TROUBLE IS, WE DON'T FEEL VERY BLESSED. OUR CHECKBOOK IS EMPTY AND OUR PANTY IS BARE. OUR HOUSE AND CAR ARE NOT ALL THAT GREAT. BUT BLESSING ISN'T ABOUT THOSE THINGS. BLESSING IS HAVING THE WONDERFUL GRACE AND FAVOR OF GOD UPON US IN SPITE OF THESE THINGS, A FAVOR WHICH SAYS, "I LOVE AND ACCEPT YOU AS YOU ARE." THIS WEEK, CONSIDER PONDERING THE TRUTH OF WHO YOU REALLY ARE. YOU ARE BLESSED. YOU MIGHT SIMPLY ROLL THIS IDEA AROUND IN YOUR HEAD AS YOU MOVE THROUGH LIFE, PARTICULARLY IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS. SEE WHAT INSIGHTS GOD REVEALS TO YOU AS YOU OPEN YOURSELF TO HIM IN THIS WAY. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING YOUR EXPERIENCE.



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