

“How to Do What Is Right”

Text: Luke 3:1-17

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Brian Burrell in his book Words We Live By tells of an armed robber named Dennis Lee Curtis who was arrested in 1992 in Rapid City, South Dakota. In his wallet the police found a sheet of paper on which was written the following code, sort of a robber’s rules:

1. I will not kill anyone unless I have to.
2. I will take cash and food stamps—no checks.
3. I will rob only at night.
4. I will not wear a mask.
5. I will not rob min-marts or 7-Eleven stores.
6. If I get chased by cops on foot, I will get away. If chased by a vehicle, I will not put the lives of innocent civilians on the line.
7. I will rob only seven months out of the year.
8. I will enjoy robbing from the rich to give to the poor.

The thief had a sense of morality, but it was flawed. When he stood before the court, he was not judged by the standard he had set for himself but by the higher law of the state. Likewise, when we stand before God, we will not be judged by the code of morality we have written for ourselves but by God’s perfect law.

Justice is a huge issue in our society today.

- Middle East conflicts and war
- Ethnic cleansing in Africa
- Immigration in America
- Economic bailouts
- BART shooting

Today I’ll be starting a new eight week series I’m calling “Journey to Justice”. We’ll be looking at justice through the Gospel of Luke, starting with chapter 3.

I want to start us off by asking the question: What is Justice?

- Justice for the Christian simply means doing what is morally right according to God’s Word, the Bible; not the culture or our own moral code, but God’s Word. Another word for justice, the Bible says, is righteousness. God is righteous and so is His Word.
- Micah 6:8 tells us, *“He (God) has shown you what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly (do what is right according to God), and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

We begin our “Journey to Justice”, looking at the life of Jesus, and seeing how Jesus’ life, death and resurrection make us right, or justifies us before God.

Let me share with you a little of Luke's background:

- Luke was a physician, a historian, a Greek and Gentile Christian (non - Jewish). He was a close friend and companion of the Apostle Paul. He also wrote Acts, which goes together with the Gospel of Luke.
- Luke begins in Luke 1:1-4 by outlining his extensive research and explaining that he is reporting the facts. He was a man of detail.
- Luke's Gospel presents the works and teaching of Jesus that are especially important for understanding the way of salvation. It is only through Jesus' death and resurrection that we can become righteous before God.
- We will see that Luke is a most vigorous champion of the outsider. He shows how Jesus includes those who typically were treated as outsiders by the religious establishment of the day: women, common laborers (sheep-herders), the racially different (Samaritans), the poor.

This morning we begin by looking at Luke 3:1-17, "How to Do What Is Right".

Read Luke 3:1-17 & PRAY

"Journey to Justice" begins with John the Baptist preparing the people for the coming of Jesus, the Savior of the world. How did John prepare the people? Using the acronym MAP, let's look at how John mapped out for the people "How to Do What Is Right".

I. M - Make changes in the way we think.

A. Luke 3:2-3 *"...the word of God came to John...in the desert. He went... preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."*

God gave John a specific message to preach to the people. It was the message of baptism for repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

B. John's baptism points to a change of heart towards God. It was about repentance. Repentance means a change of mind resulting in a change of behavior. It involves sorrow for sin and turning away from sins. We can't just say we believe and then live any way we choose. There needs to be a change in the way we behave. How do we do that?

C. We need to immerse ourselves in God's word, the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16, *"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

The Bible is God's training manual for knowing God and learning how to live life God's way. It is the alternative to the world's self-destructive ways.

1. Friends in the 90's. A recent opinion showed that the moral decline in our nation is in direct correlation to the kind of television shows and movies digested by American people like Friends. TV, film and video games have a huge influence on human behavior. Violence begets violence, immorality begets immorality.

2. If I wanted to know what God has to say about being a husband, I would do a study on the husband in the Bible. If I want to know what God has to say about work, I would do a study on work. That's why I

have preached topical messages, so you can hear what God has to say about topics in your everyday life and how to live righteously.

- D. One of the ways we can immerse ourselves in God's word is by the Bible in a Year readings we are doing. If you don't have one there are Bibles available for free in the gym. Read, study, hear, meditate, memorize and apply the word of God. Join one of our Life Groups where the word of God is studied.

II. A - Apply the Word of God in your life.

- A. First we change our minds through the word of God and then the result will be a change of behavior. We need to apply God's principles in our lives. Luke 3:10, the people listening to John say, "*What should we do then?*"

Evidence of genuine repentance is application of the word of God in your life. (SLOWLY!)

- B. John's response demonstrated that the people's activity was to be love-inspired. The law of love under girded John's three specific responses from to the people:
1. The crowd – Share what you have with those who need it. Give, be generous. If you have two coats give to the one who has none. If you have food, and another person is hungry, give them food.
 - a. The Journey
 - b. Emergency Fund
 - c. Easter Food Drive
 2. The tax collectors – Whatever your job is, do it well and with fairness. Be people of integrity. Don't defraud the people.
 - a. Jason
 3. The soldiers – Be content with your earnings. John condemned the unethical practices of extortion, fraud and the abuse of power.
 - a. Our financial institutions
- C. Read the Bible and ask what personal application can I get from the readings? Write them down in a journal. It helps to reinforce the application when you write it down. Share them with your Life Group or close friend for accountability.
- D. John was calling the people of his day to righteous living, and God is still calling us today to do the same.

III. P – For the Power to Change.

- A. Luke 3:16, John answers the people's inquiry about whether or not He is the Messiah who is to come, "*I baptize you with water...But One more powerful than I will come...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*"
- B. John's baptism with water was symbolic of repentance, the forgiveness of sin. John's baptism was limited. He did not have the power to take away their sin. He was preparing people for the One who would take away the sins of the world.
- C. Jesus' baptism would be with the Holy Spirit and fire. Acts 2:38,

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Because Jesus died on the cross for your sins, He has the power to forgive you and change the direction of your life from one of rebelliousness and selfishness to one of forgiveness and love. Baptism in the name of Jesus gives you the Holy Spirit to live within you, to give you the power to live a life of forgiveness.

D. 12 step program

Step 1. - We admitted we were powerless over our addiction that our lives had become unmanageable

Step 2. - Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity

E. How do you live life with the power of the Holy Spirit for change?

Ephesians 5:18 says, *“...be filled with the Holy Spirit.”* “be filled” is a present participle which actually means “continually be filled with the Holy Spirit”. God wants us to walk moment by moment in the power of Holy Spirit.

1. Work

The MAP to a righteous life involves **m**aking changes in the way we live by **a**pplying the Word of God in your life and living a **p**ower-filled life of change. John the Baptist prepared a culture for the coming of Jesus. He spoke of sin in their lives and their need for forgiveness and God. Today in 2009, God is still seeking people who will follow His “MAP” to justice.

Let's PRAY!