



Welcome to Unity's Interactive Worship Service

Today's Topic:

God and The Grey Area

Power Point notes available at:

www.unityofbakersfield.org

God and The Grey Area

In our Tuesday class, A New Look At An Old Book, we have been discussing the ministry that Jesus had and how it affected the people and the religious leaders of his day. Currently we are looking at the week leading up to his death and the changes that were taking place to cause such an event. This morning I want share a few of my insights with you as I understand them.

God and The Grey Area

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

What Fitzgerald eludes to here is what I call the "grey" area of ones thinking. And I believe this is the area Jesus often used as God and The Grey Area in order to teach the people of about the kingdom.

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This is the "grey" area where all knowledge can be found. It is what I believe Jesus understood as the "kingdom" as he tried to bring the people into it. He starts off his ministry with these words in Matt 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And Luke 17:21 "behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

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In driving home his idea of what God's kingdom was like he used parables, but even then the people and the religious leaders of the day didn't understand. They thought he was destroying the old Mosaic Law, to which he responded in Matt 5:17, "Think not that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them."

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I believe Jesus saw things more grey than back and white; for the "grey" area allows individuals to hold onto both the old and the new without destroying either.

The "grey" area for me, as it may have been for Jesus and his constant message to the people, presents itself as "God's Realm Expressing (thru) You," for it includes both black and white.

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God's Realm Expressing (thru) You is God's grey area, the place where one can hold two opposing ideas and still function until reason and insight allow one to make a decision that is for the highest and best for all concerned.

In Matt 5:45 we have this teaching from Jesus, "Your Father is no respecter of persons for he makes the sun rise and the rain fall on the just and unjust alike."

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Are you or someone you know a black and white thinker? Do you or they see life in these terms: Good or evil; Right or wrong; Perfect or terrible; Smart or stupid; Always or never; Love or hate; With us or against us; Democrat or Republican. So, why do people need to think in terms of black and white when the world is more than that?

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Author, Jake Van Der Borne has an insight as to why. He writes: "This kind of thinking – also called *splitting* or *all-or-nothing thinking* – is the failure to bring together the dichotomy of both positive and negative qualities into a cohesive, realistic whole. Along the spectrum between black-and-white lies an abundance of grey area. But in black-and-white thinking, those shades of grey are ignored."

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"Known as the *false dilemma* or *binary thinking*, black-and-white thinking doesn't allow for the many different variables, conditions, nuance, and contexts in which there would exist more than just the two possibilities (usually opposite extremes) presented. It frames arguments misleadingly and obscures rational, honest discussion."

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"In reality, situations are almost always shades of grey, not black or white. Falling victim to black-and-white thinking tends to exacerbate problems, including depression, anxiety, and conflict in relationships. Black-and-white thinking can prevent us from seeing things as they really are."

This is the thinking Jesus had to deal with as he tried to teach about God's kingdom.

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And, Donald Miller of Storyline says, "Black-and-white thinking is attractive because it's reductionistic; it simplifies everything so we don't really have to comprehend. It allows us to feel intelligent without understanding, and once we are intelligent, we feel superior. People who don't agree with us are just dumb."

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As Jake Van Der Borne states: “Being overly simplistic can be the basis of major problems in our careers and relationships. When we believe that whatever thought camp we subscribe to is morally good and the other is morally bad, we demonize other positions. This further impairs our ability to think and uncover truth. Black-and-white thinking can disrupt the balance in our lives because...

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... it leads us to believe we have to do everything or *nothing at all*. Quite often, that results in inaction, because we’re so fixated on everything being just right that we end up doing nothing at all.

Remember: NOTHING is perfect and most things are not simply defined. Thinking in black-and-white sets us up for perpetual frustration and disappointment.”

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Jesus was seen by many as the “Messiah” the savior of the Jewish people. One to free them from the Roman whip and bondage. However that did not happen. Jesus wasn’t about the worldly concerns, only those of the spiritual and his message was about seeing life from the grey area of God’s realm and not the black and white area of the political and religious leaders.

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The writer of the Wisdomforlife blog shows how Jesus tried to break thru the black and white thinking that held his people in bondage.

1. Reality vs. hypocrisy

Jesus relentlessly cut through the smoke and mirrors to expose the sham of religious hypocrisy. Jesus exposed man-pleasers and con-artists and said, “The shows over because God knows your hearts.” (Luke 16:15)

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2. Reality as earth and heaven

Jesus relentlessly insisted on connections between earth and heaven; between time and eternity; creation and God; finite and infinite; seen and unseen. He repeatedly moved from the seen, known and familiar to teach lessons about the unseen, spiritual and eternal. Reality itself, according to Jesus, was more than the physical world.

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To live in reality, one must make connections between this life and the unseen world; between time and eternity. Jesus used many common things to teach spiritual and eternal truths (salt, light, wind, bread, vine and branches, etc...). So the teaching of Jesus insists on deep connections between the horizontal and the vertical. (Both are in the grey area of God’s realm.)

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3. Reality as scandalous reversals

The cultural setting of Jesus' ministry was deeply divided by ethnic and religious prejudice. In John 4:9, for example, we learn that, "Jews do not associate with Samaritans."

In his stories, the Samaritan keeps God's commands by loving his neighbor not the priest; the tax collector is justified before God rather than a Pharisee; the sinful woman...

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... worships Jesus and is forgiven; tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom before the religious leaders; Gentiles demonstrate faith in Jehovah, etc.

We must ask for eyes to see. If we allow prideful prejudices and prevailing expectations (black and white) to shape our worldview, we won't discern God's kingdom and work in this world (God and The Grey area).