

Worlds Colliding: Part 1
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Brian R. Wipf

Jesus came to turn the world upside down. He didn't come to keep things the way they are. Or put it another way: Jesus didn't come merely to rescue people from the penalty of sin, give them forgiveness of sins and hope in heaven when they die, but in the meantime simply make things as comfortable as things can be on earth. The Bible tells us that the world we live in, its values and cultures, its wisdom and ways fall under the power and influence of the Evil One. The world you and I live in right now is held captive by the powers of hell. It turns round and round just as Satan wound it up to run. And if Jesus left this world alone, people would remain trapped and separated from the hope God has for them in Christ.

And get this: we very much are used to this world and even love it. By *we*, I mean two different kinds of people. The first group of people who love the world, which is hostile and opposed to the ways of God, are those who are dead in their sins, still unconverted by the merciful grace of God. Every human being is born into sin; every human being by their nature and by their choice are enemies of God set against the glory and purposes of our Creator. One of the biggest lies fully embraced and accepted in our world is that we are good people; that's not true - every person is a sinner and by their nature and by their choices are bad people. The good news of the Gospel is that God converts people and causes them to be born again; when that happens no longer is a person dead in sin or an enemy of God; no, they are alive in Christ and sons and daughters of God. When that change happens, friends, in a person they become aligned to God's kingdom; she begins to love God's ways and begins hating the way of the world. But many have not and will not repent and turn to God. That means they will remain dead in their sins and enemies of God and aligned to the world Jesus is turning upside down. And being so they hate Jesus, his ways and his people and will do anything to oppose him. That's the first group who loves the world.

But by *we* I also mean a part of us, a part of every follower of Jesus. The Bible makes clear that even though people who trust in Jesus are saved and changed, there still remains this earthly part of us that craves the things of the world. The Bible calls this *our flesh*. The flesh is the part of you and me that is still connected and impacted by sin. It's the reason why even though we are saved and forgiven we still die; it's the reason why some of us are tempted towards sexual sin or addiction, others of us are tempted towards greed and gluttony. Thankfully, God's grace and Spirit even change that. That through the course of our lives walking with God in the Spirit, we put the death the deeds of the body where we live by and are motivated by the Spirit of God rather than our earthly, fleshly desires. The power of God and the power of darkness collide in every Christian; the Spirit is renewing us day by day while our flesh wants to stay and remain connected and dependent on the world.

It's imperative that this connection to the world be broken (and by God's grace it will for every follower of Christ). Do you know why it's so important for the connection to be broken? Because by remaining connected and dependent and "in love" with the world, we remain in its power. Do you get that? Even though you may be a Christian and even though you may have been born again and a new

creature, if you remain aligned, dependent and in love with the world, you remain largely in the power of the Evil One. You present your very selves on a platter to Satan for him to do with you what he wills. And truly, as the scriptures state, if this remains your standard mode of operation (remaining aligned with the world in your day to day living) it calls into question whether you have, in fact, been born again in the first place, for (1 John 3:9-10) “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides abides in him (what’s that? his seed? It’s the gospel!), and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

One of the principle ways Satan keeps people aligned to his ways, values and power is through deception; it’s through lies. He does this by convincing us, telling us lies about God, about ourselves, about our neighbors, about what’s important, about what’s wise and foolish. So, how does Jesus counter and even defeat Satan’s deception? By teaching the truth. When Jesus prayed for his disciples and all his disciples to follow in the Garden of Gethsemane he asked God the Father to do this (John 17:17): “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” My disciples need to be set apart, Father, made holy and preserved in the truth; that’s what will do it. The truth will set them free from the power of the Evil One; the truth will preserve them until the final day. They must be sanctified in the truth!

What we are about to study over the next number of weeks is a matter of life and death; it's a cosmic battle between God and the Evil One and the weapons of war are truth and lies. Jesus is about to present the truth of his way as opposed to the world’s way; he’s going to teach what it’s like to live his way. And do you know what’s at stake? Do you know the ground being fought for? It’s you. It’s your heart, your soul, your destiny. It’s your children and grandchildren. Will you see the truth, rejoice in the truth and then teach and model the truth to your children? Or will you keep giving yourself to the ways of this world, buying the lies, and lead your children into the snares of the Devil? I’m not exaggerating the stakes, my friends. If you’re feeling the sense of urgency too, take your Bibles and turn to Luke 6 (READ Luke 6:20-26).

That passage is supposed to leave you scratching your heads. At first glance, it shouldn’t seem right. Consider what Jesus is saying: Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the sad and rejected. That doesn’t seem right. We work hard so that we are not poor, so that we are not hungry or sad or rejected. I’m beginning to sound more like my father to my kids; I tell them to work hard, to take school seriously. I’m trying to warn them about the peril of being a slacker, the shame of dishonesty. I want them to have a good job, to make enough money to pay the bills. I don’t want them to be poor. Or sad... think of it: “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” I know some of you are really sad right now. Your heart is aching; life gave you a body blow and you’re on the canvas and you want to just stay down for the 10 count because you’re afraid if you get back up you’ll just get knocked down again. How can this be? Well, that’s what we are hear to talk about.

It’s supposed to sound upside down because it is. Jesus’ wisdom is contrary, it’s different than what we are used to and different than what we would conceive on our own. Paul put it this way 1 Cor.

1, (vs.18) “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (vs. 27-29) “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” If you want to follow Christ, know this: you will adopt and embrace a life, a way, a kingdom that by natural means can not be known; natural (unbelieving) men and women will not understand; and by popular opinion will look and sound foolish.

Some might ask, “And why do it then? Why believe in something that so many think is foolish?” Because it’s not foolish to God. It’s foolish and weak to the world, but it is the very power of God. That’s our hope and faith. And because so we hold it firmly and rejoice in it together and spread to as many will hear.

But there is also a way to hold onto and embrace these things the wrong way as believing people, which also leads us into trouble. So, this morning I want to try and give you a big-picture overview of what Jesus is saying so that next week we can look at the particulars of Jesus’ words and study them.

It’s very important to know who Jesus means when he speaks of the poor, hungry, sad and persecuted. Does he mean, literally, people who don’t have enough money or food? The good news about trying to answer to this question is that Luke gives us hints throughout his gospel. For example, when he shares Mary’s song in chapter 1 he shares “[God] has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.” In chapter 14 the rich are the one’s with the right social connections. Here’s what I’m trying to illustrate: don’t think of these categories in strict, rigid ways. Don’t think riches and poverty are strictly economic; don’t think of hungry and filled purely on the basis of food. These are broad categories of people or groups. The poor, the sad, the hungry, the rejected are the outsiders, the disadvantaged, the outcasts and the marginalized around us.

So, who are the rich and the satisfied, the joyful and accepted? Those who fit. Those who have earthly and worldly advantages. This should remind you of what we studied not to long ago about Levi. Levi, the tax collector, got saved. He was rescued by Jesus. And he goes and throws a party for Jesus and invites his ragtag bunch of friends - more tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. But that’s a problem for the pharisees, right? They don’t fit. They don’t belong. They haven’t conformed to the standards. And what does Jesus say? What’s the big idea? But they’ve repented! They’ve turned! And that’s what matters. They now follow me. Sure, they did this and did that; yes, they are from that side of the tracks, but I don’t care about that stuff. I care about those who repent. They have, and you haven’t.

So, Jesus is throwing a wrench in contemporary thinking; he’s blowing up people’s worlds. He’s saying, “What’s valued, what’s sought and desired, what’s considered important - get this - *what you think saves you* (wealth, status, worldly acceptance and satisfaction) doesn’t really save you. It’s really not important; it’s not going to get you anywhere. So, don’t value it, don’t trust it. Don’t organize your life around the kingdom values of this world because it leaves you hungry, sad and rejected by God.”

Friends, I said earlier that this battle is constantly taking place inside everyone of us. Do you feel the tug of war? The tug from Satan and world on one side pulling you towards hoping in money and status, health and wellness? And then the pull on the other end from God pulling you towards Christ and to look away from everything else? Don't be blind to the battle, my brothers and sisters. Being blind to the battle means you are already a victim of the Evil One; it means you're already a prisoner of war, but you don't even know it.

We are being taught every single day; the Evil One is trying to deceive us, trying to convince us that God's way, the Gospel, is stupid and foolish. He's trying to deceive us into thinking that as long as we're accepted by the right people, as long as we are happy on earth, as long as we have the money and possessions we need, as long as we're healthy enough, everything is going to be ok. That is not our hope... but it's so tempting to believe.

Do you think it's an accident that holding to a Christian worldview in 2015 is vilified and mocked? Do you think it's an accident that if you do not stand up and cheer Bruce Jenner deciding he now wants to call himself a women when God has made him a man you get labeled a bigot? It's not an accident; it's demonic. It's part of the schemes and plans of the Satan. And it's working. Friends, "Christians" are dropping like flies. Several times a year I see Christian authors, pastors and professors changing their mind on the sexual ethics of homosexuality. Believe me, in 10 years there will be pastors and preachers and authors you know and admire who endorse and promote homosexuality as something God blesses. And you'll wonder, "How did that happen?" You don't need to wonder; here's how it happens.

My son and I share a love for music. And he's got good taste; one artist that he's discovered is Billy Joel. Billy Joel has got to be one of the most talented, gifted musicians in the last 50 years. He's a rock star literally and figuratively speaking. But he doesn't write and sing as a man with a renewed mind. In 1978 he released his song called "My Life." The song goes like this:

I never said you had to offer me a second chance
 I never said I was a victim of circumstance
 I still belong, don't get me wrong
 And you can speak your mind
 But not on my time
 I don't care what you say anymore, this is my life
 Go ahead with your own life and leave me alone

Some of you Billy Joel fans might have hummed along as I said that, right? It's a catchy song. And there's something really American, something really independent about that. But it's not God's way. Go ahead with your own life and leave me alone? God's way is, "Let's do life together." And, "I need you to help me with my life; and you need me to help you with yours in Christ." Is that what we're supposed to say to each other when we are pleading for each other to follow Christ... It's my life?

Don't tell me what to do! Friends, Satan's deception at work through music

A few sons and I played the game of LIFE a week or two ago. You talk about a game that reinforces the wrong message, holy smokes? The entire point of the game is to have the most money. That's the goal of everything in the game. Kids are either a source of income or a drain on income. A spouse either helps you make it big or costs you money. Everything is seen through the lens of money. Winning is defined by what you own and how much you have. If that's your hope in real life you will lose your soul... and many do.

Friends, can you see the battleground? Can you see the tactics and the schemes of the Enemy? Don't be blind. It's everywhere. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. You can see it and feel it with the mind of Christ in advertising, in TV shows, in the values and beliefs of our culture. They are everywhere.

What's so tricky and cunning about the Evil One and his schemes is that everything Jesus mentions in Luke 6, wealth, laughter, satisfaction and acceptance, are not evil in and of themselves. Do not read Luke 6 and think that having a lot of money is sinful, or having the time of your life at a family reunion is wrong. It's not wrong to be satisfied at a nice restaurant as you celebrate your anniversary or having people like you. With this bold teaching from Jesus, it might be tempting to think such things. What Jesus is condemning and warning about is a life set on those things; a life trusting and hoping in them. The Evil One wants you to think one of two things. He might trick you to you to think these gifts from God (laughter, acceptance from others, money and food) are evil and you should reject all of them. He doesn't want you to see God in these good gifts if and when they come. Or, he might deceive you into thinking Jesus doesn't know what he's talking about; that you can't trust Jesus so you walk away.

Don't believe those lies, First Baptist. Don't be distracted from what Jesus is saying, which is: You indeed will be cursed if your heart, your life, your joy and satisfaction is set on earthly things. You will be cursed if your hope is here and now on money, joy, satisfaction or acceptance. Instead, set your hope on Christ and yes, it may indeed increase the likelihood of rejection, of struggles and hardship. But the promise of blessing and favor from God are sure.

Questions for the week

- What do you think and feel when you see that Jesus' way is contrary to the world's way? What are your fears?
- Are Jesus' teachings hard to understand or apply? Or Both? Why do you think so?
- How does your world and life need to change in light of Jesus' teachings?