

1. The Gospel Confronts Injustice and Inconsistencies in Every Culture

- a. Paul and Silas wouldn't just “let it go” when the commanders wanted to simply release them
 - i. There are times to be silent and there are times to speak up
 - ii. For Paul and Silas, this was a time to speak up about injustice against them
 1. Primarily however, it was not because they personally were treated unjustly, but rather that the jailer and other believers in Philippi would be vindicated
 2. Therefore, we see that the principle for civil disobedience is rooted in “the others”, not in one's personal freedom, comforts, or rights
 - iii. The pattern for fighting injustice is always the pattern of speaking, never of taking up arms or violently resisting one's government for the sake of the gospel
- b. Revelation of injustice is firmly, yet non-violently, questioning the justice of unjust actions
 - i. They defiantly questioned justice according to Natural Law and Roman Law, not Scripture
 1. *According to Reason*, this action was unjust
 - a. Private beating and condemnation and a private exoneration are not consistent or just
 2. *According to Roman Law* these men were unjust
 - a. Thus, the commanders feared when they heard that Paul & Silas were Roman citizens
 - b. It was against Roman law to flog or beat a Roman citizen
 - c. So, Paul begins by revealing their injustice according to their own standards
 3. He draws out the injustice by revealing its inconsistency:
 - a. Punished us PUBLICALLY – you can't release us SECRETLY
 - b. Punished us WITHOUT TRIAL – yet we are ROMANS
 - c. You CAST US INTO prison – you can't CAST US OUT to freedom
 - ii. They used questions to point out inconsistencies
 1. “Would they beat us publically and then send us out privately?”
 2. “Would they condemn us without trial, thought we are Roman citizens?”
 3. “Would they cast us into this prison, then cast us out privately?”
 - iii. You see Jesus do this a lot, but the most poignantly when he had been betrayed, unjustly arrested, and beaten
 1. "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?" (Luke 22:52)
 - a. Jesus questions the justice of his arrest, making it clear that they are acting in cowardice and with injustice.
 - i. Cowardice because they feared the people.
 - b. Injustice because he had broken no law to be worthy of such treatment
 2. Jesus makes it very clear here and during his trial that it is proper to speak up against injustice, to speak the truth, to question the process and the claims made
 - a. John 18:23 – “If what I said was wrong, then bear witness against me. But, if I am right, then *why* do you strike me?”
 - b. Submission does not imply silence towards injustice.
 - c. However, it also does not imply violent resistance to injustice
 3. When Jesus' disciples try to operate on these same terms, violence against the authorities which God had ordained, Jesus reprimands them harshly.
 - a. Thus, he rushes in to fight injustice with violence, already falling prey to the faithlessness of which he was supposed to pray to escape
 - i. For, faith would have entrusted his plan to Jesus rather than marching forward in bold foolishness, stepping up with swinging sword to help Jesus avoid the cross
 - b. Jesus rebukes him harshly: “That is enough!”

- i. It's almost as if He has had enough of their petulant unbelief, from arguing about who is greatest at dinner, to seeking to serve themselves, to grabbing an extra sword for the journey, to falling asleep because they didn't understand the real danger of falling away from trusting Him when things got agonizing and costly.
 - ii. Peter's impatient self-reliance comes forth with great determination – he is courageous, but foolish
 - 1. Jesus had just finished telling them that he must be handed over, that he must die, that it is necessary, and that he will be raised up
 - 2. Yet, Peter didn't listen to plans, he had some of his own, his own assessments sufficed for him to take action, but his determinant, sincere, courageous, daring actions were opposed to the will of God – and earn another rebuke from Jesus
 - c. Then Jesus heals the severed ear of his arresting enemy
 - i. Don't miss the significant power and patience of this final miracle by Jesus' hands
 - ii. To reattach a severed ear is undoubtable power, and the moment must have silenced the building turmoil between the two groups
 - iii. Jesus made this servant's ear "whole" – fixing what His church had ruined by swinging a sword that wasn't theirs to swing, so that this man could hear
 - iv. Appealing to a culture's own values, and revealing what is inconsistent with those values is the proper work of prophetic calls to repentance
 - 1. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called to account the status quo church of the mid-20th Century America by pointing out the inconsistencies of segregation with the gospel:

"I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say, follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother.

In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sidelines and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, "Those are social issues which the gospel has nothing to do with," and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which made a strange distinction between bodies and souls, the sacred and the secular.

There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period that the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But they went on with the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven" and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century." – Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, August 1963

- a. And thus the prophet spoke what has truly come to pass...
 - c. How can we reveal injustice without violence or coercion?
 - i. We entrust our vindication to God
 - 1. Jesus entrusted his kingdom, power, and honor to the Father *who would hand it to him*
 - a. Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my servants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." (Jn. 18:36)
 - b. Thus I grant to you a kingdom, just as my Father granted to me (Lk. 22:29)
 - i. Our kingdom, too, is *granted*, not seized by us.
 - 2. If I believe that it is up to me to secure my own honor, then I will fight
 - 3. But If I believe that God will secure my honor, then I can be at peace while speaking the truth
 - ii. We are a people of the resurrection
 - 1. Before every resurrection, there must come a death
 - 2. If we are to be people of the resurrection, then we must entrust it to God
2. The Gospel Demands justice *so that the gospel might not be maligned*
 - a. The fact that Paul's wish is that the commanders themselves lead them out of prison shows that Paul is not concerned about freedom itself, or even the justice or injustice of Roman laws, but the honor of the gospel message
 - i. In other words, the gospel's honor was at stake – it was not a crime to believe the gospel
 - ii. It would also be impossible to blame an earthquake for a jailbreak
 - 1. By leading them out, it would be very public that they were released, not escaped
 - b. Their desire was for the future good of believers in Philippi
 - i. This is the portion which is emphasized in Paul's demanding statement: "they lead us out of here!"
 - ii. If the commanders of Philippi had to acknowledge that they were wrong about these followers of Jesus, then the Christians in Philippi would be left alone
 - 1. Therefore, this demand is not about personal justice, but the future freedom of the Philippian church
 - 2. You see this because Paul was not concerned about changing Philippi
 - a. He only wanted the public of Philippi to see that the commanders admitted that they were wrong that Christians were "disturbers of the peace" and "enemies of Rome"
 - b. So they could move about freely, execute business in town, and worship without fear of being jailed
 - c. In fact, it could be argued that the protection and freedom of Christians is Luke's primary purpose in writing the book of Acts to Theophilus, who was most likely a lawyer in Rome
 - i. He is trying to show that Christians should be a legally recognized group in Roman society and given the freedom to worship without fear of violence from the Roman government
 - ii. Acts is laid out like a legal defense of Christianity
3. When the Gospel Reveals Injustice, it Results in Repulsion
 - a. "The same sun which melts the wax hardens the clay"
 - b. While they were not longer aggressively antagonistic towards the apostles, they still did not respond like the jailer
 - c. Rather, they simply wanted the gospel preachers to "go away from us"

- i. This is a common response to the gospel – just go away
- ii. There is a holiness, a differentness, which causes great fear and by which we desire to get away from whatever reveals our failures and sins and injustices
 - 1. It's the same response that Peter had when he saw Jesus' awesome authority over nature (calmed the sea by sheer command, Luke 5:8)
 - a. "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."
- d. Repulsion is the response from a people whose hearts and minds feel the prick of conviction, but who will not submit
 - i. Therefore, they know that they are not in the right, but they will also not submit to the authority of Jesus
 - ii. They simply want the people and the message who are pressing in on their conscience to go away, to lessen the load upon their souls by distancing themselves
 - 1. When Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus calmly asked a question of justice which pricked his conscience, but also repelled him
 - 2. "Would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"
 - a. "Every word of Christ's answer to the shameful kiss is a sharp spear, struck with a calm and not resentful hand right into the hardened conscience. There is wistful tenderness and a remembrance of former confidences in calling Him by name. The order of words in the original emphasizes the kiss, as if Jesus had said, 'Is that the sign you have chosen? Could nothing else serve you? Are you so dead to all feeling that you can kiss and betray?' The Son of man flashes on Judas, for the last time, the majesty and sacredness against which he was lifting his hand. 'Betrayest thou?' which comes last in the Greek, seeks to startle by putting into plain words the guilt, and so to rend the veil of sophistications in which the traitor was hiding his deed from himself. Thus to the end Christ seeks to keep him from ruin, and with meek patience resents not indignity, but with majestic calmness sets before the miserable man the hideousness of his act. The patient Christ is the same now as then, and meets all our treason with pleading, which would fain teach us how black it is, not because He is angry, but because He would win us to turn from it. Alas that so often His remonstrances fall on hearts as wedded to their sin as was Judas's!" (Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions from Luke, Gethsemane*)
 - iii. The apostles did not try and coerce faith from them, but let them be with the guilt of their actions hanging in their hearts like a millstone
- e. Rather, they encouraged the newborn church in Lydia's house (what a story!) and left town, heading to Thessalonica.

Now, I've spent this sermon showing us how we can reveal injustices of our own cultures, be that culture secular or Christian, and sometimes be repelled by guilty consciences. But, I want us to now consider that we are not the apostles in this story, but rather the ones whose injustices have been revealed. Maybe we're the jailer or the commanders. How shall we respond to the revelation of our injustice by another? How shall we respond to those who reveal our sins, and we are without excuse, we are blameworthy of such things?

The only way that we can respond to the revelation of our sins like the jailer, and not like the commanders, is by an experience of God's mercy through the Christ who suffered for my injustice, who died for my injustice, and who was raised for my righteousness. We must leave behind the excuses which repel him and the diversions which distract us. We come only with an appeal for mercy in the dark, and we find it, like the jailer. We've no other defense. We've no other standing. I cannot escape the reality of my biggest problem: me! So, I appeal to the one thing in my life that is sure and will never fail. I appeal to the one thing that guarantees not only my right standing before God, but the hope of new beginnings, fresh starts, and a transformed heart. I appeal on the basis of the greatest gift I ever have been or ever will be given. I leave the courtroom of my own defense. I refuse to cast the revelation of my guilt out of town. I come out of hiding and admit who I am. But I'm not afraid, because there is one who was expelled for me, who was cast outside the gates of the city in disgrace, who was exposed to God's shaming fury, so that I am personally and eternally blessed. Because of what Jesus has done, God looks on me with mercy! It's my only appeal. It's the source of my hope. It's my life. Mercy!

We are shown mercy because Jesus was expelled by God in our place.

We are vindicated because Jesus hands us a kingdom by his grace.

Jesus alone is worthy of all honor, power, dominion, to the glory of God the Father.