

THE RULE OF JESUS
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Christ the King / The Reign of Love
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Here's a parable from Jesus. Take it seriously. But don't take it literally.

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, He will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, *Come, you that are blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.*

Then the righteous will answer, *But, Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we welcome you, or clothe you? When did it we visit you when you were sick or in prison? And the king will answer, Truly, I tell you, as you did it to one of the least of these my people, you did it to me.*

Then the King will say to those at his left hand, *You are accursed. Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.*

Then they will answer, *But, Lord, when did we ever see you that way and not help? Then the King will answer, Truly I tell you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.*

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

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It's a parable, people. Take it seriously. But don't take it literally. And that, by the way, is how we take the whole Bible around here. We take it too seriously to take it literally.

I'll get back to that parable but first let's consider the vow of membership we just heard our new members affirm.

Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

I do, we heard them say, as many of us have said at one time or another. But what does that mean?

Many have said it just to say it, because that's what you say to join the church or get baptized. But these days many of us—including those who just affirmed the vow—are weary of hollow promises and empty words. What in the world does it mean to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior?

At one time, claiming Jesus as your Lord and Savior could get you arrested, thrown in jail or to the lions. Such was the fate of many who took that pledge of allegiance 2,000 years ago, because it expressed treason against the Empire and disloyalty to the Emperor who was known as "Lord and Savior" of the realm.

Caesar meant Lord and King and there could be no King but Caesar. Only Caesar could be proclaimed Lord.

And Caesar was the Savior, too. Savior, in this case, meant Liberator—liberator from war, famine, disease and insecurity. And that's what Caesar delivered. Safety and security. Peace, justice and prosperity. At least for the few. The privileged. The powerful. "Bread and circuses" for the rest.

Caesar wanted world peace. The Roman Empire wanted world peace so badly it would kill anyone who got in the way. Greed, violence and retaliation were the rule of that kingdom. The Empire ruled with the sword the way all empires have and still do.

Yes, Caesar wanted world peace.

Jesus wanted world peace, too. A kingdom or empire not ruled by a sword but by love. Bread, hope, justice and healing not for a few but for all, including the least in the other kingdoms of this world.

Both Caesar and Christ wanted world peace. As it turns out, the means and methods matter.

So what does it mean to embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior today? I could make this complicated but I won't. The rule of Jesus is pretty simple.

To give oneself to the rule of Jesus is to give up the rule of ego, that petty tyrant that drives us crazy with its constant demands. To give oneself to Jesus is to give up the rule of ego, of comfort, complacency, convenience, retaliation, grudges, fear, and the need to be right all the time.

The rule of Jesus is pretty simple: Be kind.

Be kind to the hungry for I am hungry, too.

Be kind to the thirsty for I am thirsty, too.

Be kind to the shoeless for I am shoeless, too.

Be kind to the shirtless for I am shirtless, too.

Be kind to the homeless for I am homeless, too.

Be kind to the stranger for I am a stranger, too.

Be kind to the immigrant for I am an immigrant, too.

Be kind to the refugee for I am a refugee, too.

Be kind to the prisoner for I am a prisoner, too.

Be kind to the victim for I am a victim, too.

Be kind to the ostracized for I am ostracized, too.

Be kind to the wounded for I am wounded, too.

Be kind to the broken hearted for I am broken hearted, too.

Be kind to the sick for I am sick, too.

Be kind to the dying for I am dying, too.

Be kind to the grieving for I am grieving, too.

Be kind to yourself for I am you and you are me. We are one. All of us. One. One being. Not separate.

The rule of Jesus is pretty simple: Be kind.

If Jesus is our Lord and Savior, our Ruler, then that's the rule by which we live.

But Jesus is a ruler in the other sense, too. Jesus draws a line.

On one side are those who are kind to others. No, they don't get a reward in heaven. Kindness is its own reward.

Heaven is more of a condition now than a destination later. You reach out in love to others and you get a taste of heaven. It's heavenly! And even if not, you reach out in kindness anyway. It's the loving thing to do. And so we do it.

We don't need heaven as an incentive. There's no judge to judge us as in the parable. It's a matter of consequences for certain behavior.

The rule of Jesus draws a line.

On the other side of the ruler line are those who are unkind or just plain indifferent, smug in their righteousness. No they don't get sent to Hell. Unkindness is its own hell. It turns us cold as ice.

Hell is more of a condition now than a destination later. Ignore others, treat others unkind and your life will be like hell. A cold and dark place even if it is on fire.

There's no judge to judge us as in the parable. It's a matter of consequences for certain behavior.

This is a parable about behavior and consequences. And since we take it seriously, but not literally, we can see that the line isn't really between people so much as it is within each of us.

The parable of the King separating sheep from goats is set in the future and on the world stage, but it's really about now and small things. Every moment of every day we choose one way or another. We can practice the religion of being right or practice the religion of being kind.

Every moment of every day we choose one way or another. We can practice the politics of being right or practice the politics of being kind.