

Lenten Series '08: Everything Must Change

Week #3 - How should we understand Jesus today – **Feb. 25th - Mar. 2nd**

A Summary of Chapters 15-22, pg 119-188.

You may notice some additional voices in this weeks summary. Thanks to all for contributing. My family and I thank you!

Chapter 15: Peace Through Dominion

“An individual can use (I say misuse) the Bible to prove any point or position they choose.” These are possibly the most discouraging words a diffident student of scripture can hear. McLaren takes to task all who would willfully or ignorantly misuse God’s word and specifically the words of Jesus. The author indicates this section (Part 4, pp119-147) is about “Reintroducing Jesus.” It seems chapter 15 is more about reintroducing the historical context within which Jesus lived. One we are reeducated concerning the use of specific Old Testament passages Jesus quoted like Duet. 15: 4 and 11 cf. to what is said in Matt. 26:11 it is easier to see that Jesus never would have been OK with ignoring the poor or being complacent about their plight.

The discussion of the word we translate as Gospel or Good News (*euaggelion* which is singular) is particularly helpful on pp123. Are we willing to consider that when Jesus used the word for “Good News,” people would associate that term with the powerful government authority in the world? What would be our cultural equivalent? Maybe our contemporary use of the term “Homeland Security” is similar. It would be interesting to hear others’ ideas about what would be a comparable word or phrase for us today.

Discussion of the term Kingdom of God on pp125 is concise and unambiguous. We hear “Kingdom” and think, “order, stability, government, policy, domination, control, maybe even vengeance or banishment for the uncooperative.” When Jesus uses the word for God’s Kingdom, “order becomes opportunity, stability melts into movement and change, status-quo government gives way to a revolution of community and neighborliness, policy bows to love, domination descends to service and sacrifice, control morphs into influence and inspiration and threat are transformed into forgiveness and blessing.” This sounds strangely like what we witnessed in the aftermath of the Amish school shooting.

Look up the relationship between Pietro Bernardone and Francis of Assisi. Is St. Francis the greatest man the west has ever produced?

Q. 2 Another example is Jesus words, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?...” This is from which Psalm?

Chapter 16: Occupying Regime, Equity Gap, Excrement Factory

It is interesting to remember in the previous chapter that the author told us Jesus would never have used high-falutin’ terms like “narrative” or “framing story.”

See page 129 - Is it true that if a counter movement uses the weapons or techniques of an occupying or dominant regime then it becomes a manifestation of the very regime it opposes?

See God's "Unterror Movement." How do you react to the idea that some seek: profits that make other poor, security that makes others insecure, equity for themselves but are insensitive to the plight of others, pleasure that inflicts pain on others, gain that means loss for others, power and freedom that injure, dehumanize, reduce, or oppress others?

Define, gross national affection pp131.

How is seeking God's dream for creation different than being a tree hugger?

McLaren quotes Korten in reference to stories that shape our answer to these three questions: How do we prosper? How do we maintain order and keep ourselves secure? How do we find a sense of meaning and purpose in our life?

Q-4 cf. Mk. 9:35, 10:43

Chapter 17: How Different It Would Be

Our Lenten Series this year is challenging, because as we study the words of Jesus, we begin to ask ourselves difficult questions. Questions like, "How much does this world's consumerism, greed, mass production, and pursuit of profit affect us? Is the cycle of constant stimulation followed by the act of satisfying those desires destroying our spirits as well as the world where we live?" The words of Jesus teach us that our prosperity and the investments which secure our future are issues of faith. Sometimes it's difficult for us to take Jesus seriously—His words seem to be out of touch with our circumstances. If we start believing that Jesus meant what He said in the Sermon on the Mount (especially the part at the end which talks about our ultimate loyalties - Matthew 6:19-34), would we live our lives any differently than the way we are living them now? If we don't take His words to heart, will we eventually be driven away from God by what we don't believe?

As we study together, we are reminded that the ministry of Jesus Christ took place within the context of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire represents any worldly influence over our values. Where this empire was stingy or less than generous, where it was driven by conquering, plundering, profiting and establishing its control no matter the consequences, such an empire is at odds with the teachings of Christ. Matthew 6:22-23, says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your body will be full of light; but if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Our world creates a cycle of darkness where desires are constantly in the process of being satisfied, only to have those desires replaced with new ones.

Q 1.

Chapter 18: Which Jesus

This chapter begins by reprising an earlier theme of McLaren's, that the institutional church has been co-opted by the human system he calls the Suicide Machine. He states "there are a number of other Jesuses in play in today's world, various distorted and domesticated images of Jesus trimmed to fit comfortably and conveniently within the existing societal machinery."

He contrasts this with what Wendell Barry calls 'true religion' – "the sacred ecosystem of God, which is the kingdom of God, which is the only sane alternative to the deconstructive economies and narratives that drive our world today, as in the days of Jesus."

The chapter then switches gears to discuss the eschatology, or end times. The traditional view of the Second Coming of Christ, in which the faithful are saved and rest condemned to eternal damnation "leads us to believe... that in the end, even God finds it impossible to fix the world apart from violence and coercion."

"The gentle Jesus of the first coming becomes a kind of trick Jesus, a fake me-out Messiah, to be replaced by the true jihadist Jesus of a violent second coming."

McLaren argues that the correct interpretation of Revelation is metaphorical: "Jesus' word—the unarmed truth of the gospel of the kingdom—is the force that overcomes the 'kingdom of this world,' the dominant system." It is by peaceful action and faith in Him that Jesus will come again. Any other interpretation makes God just part of the same suicide machine.

Chapter 19: Joining the Peace Insurgency

McLaren asks us to imagine what it would be like to rebuild what he calls the Security System based on Jesus' good news or transforming story.

McLaren provides examples of how religion (and in particular Christianity) have contributed to violence, intolerance, and insecurity in history. He then provides examples in the Gospels where, if we embrace this new view of the good news, we find a consistent call to turn away from the imperial narrative (Roman rule) as dangerous to itself and others. McLaren goes on to compare the Roman "Peace through victory, or peace through the destruction of enemies, or peace through domination" to Jesus' message of "peace through nonviolent justice, peace through the forgiveness of enemies, peace through reconciliation, peace through embrace and grace." He concludes that repenting, believing, and following Jesus means to turn away from Caesar's violence to join Jesus' divine peace insurgency.

Chapter 20: Whose Side Are We On?

This chapter challenges us to look at and evaluate the framing story of the United States. Are we willing to incur any expense for increased security? What do the policies of our government concerning the cost of our defense mechanisms say about our priorities? Our military budget has increased by 49% over the 2000 year level not including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US military spent \$2 billion per day in 2003.

The definition, in the chapter, of the American Empire is unsettling; the price of maintaining the Empire is very high. Dwight Eisenhower stated “.....there is no way a country can satisfy the craving for absolute security- but it can bankrupt itself morally and economically, in attempting to reach that illusory goal through arms alone”.

“ In light of the description (of the Empire on pages 164-165) the three priorities of the National Security Strategy of the United States have a rather eerie significance:

1. Perpetuate US military dominance globally so no nation can rival or threaten the United States;
2. Be prepared to engage in preemptive military strikes, whenever the US government considers another nation to be a threat to the US, its forces or installations abroad, or its friends or allies;
3. Maintain immunity for US citizens from prosecution by the International Criminal Court.”

" In other words, dominate, intimidate, and refuse to play by the rules you expect everybody else to play by- a classic manifesto of the imperial spirit"

You may not agree with the author's conclusions but he has documented his information well. This should make for a good discussion.

Consider, can faith and following Jesus Christ and changing our framing story give us hope? Perhaps we need to look at our problems with new vision, through the framing story of Jesus the Christ. “Anything is possible with God!!”

Chapter 21: Layers and Layers More

Summary: This chapter further investigates the Imperialism of the United States and its consequences. It starts out describing how the imperialism and aggressiveness of the US leads to resistance and resentment from other countries; which causes the US to become more militarized and creates a “vicious downward spiral of militarization, growing fear and resentment”.

The chapter then explores the practice of developed nations supplying arms to underdeveloped nations. The developed nations use these sales to further arm themselves. The author describes the disparity in the amount the US in particular spends between arming itself and the amount it spends to help underdeveloped nations.

It then goes on to point out how war becomes a potent “weapon of mass distraction” and that wars must have a mythic stature to maintain the public support necessary to sustain the war effort. It points out the media's complicit role in keeping this “mythic stature” alive as the media has a vested interest in the business as war since it is good for circulation. It suggests the US is addicted to this high of war and that we might need to look to spiritual solutions to overcome this addiction.

Questions 1, 4 and 5 should provide some good discussion.

Key Stats:

1. US export more weapons than the rest of the world combined
2. 80 % of top buyers of US weapons were labeled undemocratic or a failure to uphold human rights by the State Department.
3. US, UK and France earn more income from selling weapons to developing nations than they give in aid to those countries.

Chapter 22: Joining Warriors Anonymous

Continuing with the addiction theme from the previous chapter, McLaren describes how Jesus offers a more constructive alternative, a craving for justice. The author supports this idea quoting the Beatitudes and other scripture as well as imagining a conversation between Jesus and war zone journalist Chris Hedges. McLaren continues illustrating the extent that Jesus teaches we should go to avoid the destructive downward spiral of violence and war. Don't even get mad at your enemy. Don't call him names. Reconcile whenever conflict arises. McLaren concludes the chapter and Part 5 of the book by emphasizing that although we have a choice, following Jesus' example of reconciliation, justice and peace is a more functional security system than a violence begetting violence dysfunctional security system.

Consider questions 2-4 and 6.