

The Upside-Down Kingdom

Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003).

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In Mary's song of exaltation, the Magnificat, Mary sings her hopes for the new kingdom. A poor Galilean peasant girl, Mary expects the messianic kingdom to flip her social world upside down. The rich, mighty, and proud in Jerusalem will be banished. Poor farmers and shepherds in rural Galilee will be exalted and honored. Mary sings words of hope and judgment. Hope for the lowly, as she describes herself, and judgment for those who trample the helpless. Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003),5-6.

Political Background of Jesus' life

Rome dominated Palestinian politics after 63 B.C.E. During the period of imperial domination, Roman armies periodically tried to smother peasants revolts through 'search and destroy' campaigns of terror. The armies ravaged villages, slaughtered the elderly, and took thousands back to Rome to sell as slaves. As a grim remind of their brutality, Roman soldiers crucified hundreds of people on crosses along public roads – warning for others would-be revolters. At times they crucified, butchered, or enslaved entire populations. About the time Jesus was born, not far from where he likely grew up, the Romans burned houses and enslaved thousands to squelch the popular revolt of 4 B.C.E. But the fire of freedom, ignited by Judas the Hamerer, couldn't be extinguished. It flared up again and again in the era of Jesus and eventually erupted into two full-scale Roman-Jewish wars in 66 C.E. and again in 132 C.E. Rome finally smothered the Jewish revolters for good in 135 C.E. when it destroyed Jerusalem.

Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 39-40.

In 37 B.C.E. Herod the Great, a Jew, came to power in Palestine, as a Roman puppet king. A symbol of oppressive tyranny, he ruled until his death in 4 B.C.E., shortly after the birth of Jesus. He held a tight rein over the people by hiring foreign soldiers. This Herod killed the male children in Bethlehem because he was frightened by the prospect of a new king. ...The demise of the brutal tyrant triggered a wide-spread revolt that swirled across the land during Jesus' childhood. Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 40, 42.

Herod wasn't popular. Resentment seethed throughout the land. His ten wives lived in his palace. Over the years he killed two of them, plus at least three sons, a brother-in-law, and other relatives. Even the Roman emperor once reportedly said, 'it is better to be Herod's pig than his son. Soon after Jesus' birth, Herod lay dying. To keep his seething people from celebrating his death, he ordered leading Jew held in the Jericho arena so they could be executed when he died. He wanted ensure that Jewish tears would flow at his death, even if not for him. Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 41-42.

Upon his death, Herod's kingdom was divided into three parts. His son, Herod Antipas, ruled the district of Galilee west of the lake, including Jesus' hometown Nazareth. Herod the Great ruled at the time of Jesus' birth but died shortly afterwards. Herod Antipas, his son, was a contemporary of Jesus. It was Herod Antipas who executed John the Baptist and whom Jesus called a fox (Luke 13:32). During his trial, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time. Phillip, a second son of Herod the Great, ruled northeast of the lake of Galilee for thirty seven years. Herod's third son Archelaus governed the third and southern portion of Herod's kingdom with Jerusalem in its center. Joseph, returning

from Egypt with the baby Jesus, was afraid to go to Judea when he heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father. So Joseph settled in Nazareth, ruled by Herod Antipas (Matt. 2:22)... Archelaus killed three thousand Jewish rioters. Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 42.

Rebel leaders arose throughout the country. Beyond Jerusalem, the outlying districts of Galilee, Judea and Perea erupted in bloody disorder. One of the Herod's former slaves, named Simon, led guerrilla attacks on the Herodian palaces and estates of the wealthy ...The Roman commander in Syria moved his armies into Palestine. He burned Sepphoris to the ground and sold its Jewish population into slavery. The Roman commander killed two thousand rebels. Jesus was likely less than ten years old as the violence happened nearby so the memories surely shaped his outlook Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 44.

Protesters, Prophets, and Bandits

In the decades before and after Jesus' birth a variety of Jewish protest movement emerged. The voice of unrest became increasingly violent after his death in the years before the Jewish-Roman war of 66-70 C.E. Various factors fueled public anger, including rural poverty, high taxes, Roman control, inflammatory acts of Jewish puppet kings, and the crushing violence of Roman armies. Political, economic, and religious factors combined together to stir revolt and rebellion. The slogan of many of the zealous resisters was 'No Lord but God.' Including the John the Baptist, at least ten prophets popped up in these years challenging the ruling powers and proclaiming a message of deliverance. Most of them had a sizeable following. Moreover in the four decades after the death of Herod the Great, at least five self-appointed messiahs, not including Jesus, appeared. Coming from poor peasant backgrounds, they too reflected the widespread turbulence. The prophets and the messiahs hoped that God in miraculous ways would eradicate the Romans and establish divine rule as in bygone days. Social bandits and terrorists also kept rulers on edge. Unlike regular robbers who stole for personal gain, the social bandits championed religious or economic causes and thus often enjoyed support among local peasants. At least eleven bandit groups of various sorts flourished in the decades before the Jewish-Roman war of 70 C.E. Some terrorists operated in Jerusalem, killing opponents with daggers, including a High Priest, in surprise attacks and then melting into the crowds. Other freedom fighters fought from the countryside, often to the cheers of local peasants who supported their call for liberation. Many of the social bandits were considered religious zealots because they wanted Jewish independence and declared 'No Lord but God.' Barabbas, released at Jesus' trial, was a political rebel who was considered less dangerous than Jesus. Jesus died between two robbers, likely social bandits who had threatened the 'peace,' imposed by Rome. The resistance movement pulsated largely among the common folk. Meanwhile, the upper crust of Jewish leaders living in Jerusalem, collaborated privately and silently with the Romans. (P, 46-49)

Pontius Pilate was appointed the fifth Roman procurator of Judea in 26 C.E. Compared with Jewish leaders, Pilate appears neutral toward Jesus in some accounts of Jesus' trial. But there is another side to Pilate – a brutal one. Philo of Alexandria described the conduct of Pilate's office as marked by 'corruption, violence, degradations, ill treatment, offense, numerous illegal executions, and incessant, unbearable cruelty (49).

Zealous rebels hated tax collectors –traitors who exploited fellow Jews under the power of Roman rule. The rebels were willing to kill Jewish tax collectors, but Jesus embraced them. He even invited them to join his disciple band. Jesus taught that the radical call of the kingdom undercuts loyalties to other human institutions. (54).

First-century Palestine had basically two economic classes: *upper* and *lower*. In peasant societies rooted in agriculture, ninety percent or more of the people are usually poor peasants. Wealth is based on land ownership, but much of it is held by wealthy absentee landlords. So it was in Palestine. A small *upper class* accounted for ten percent or less of the population. These were the landowners, hereditary aristocrats; appointed bureaucrats, chief priests, merchants, government officials, and various official servants who served the needs of the governing class. The rest of the people-likely ninety percent or more-were in the *lower class*. Mostly poor peasants living precariously, hand-to-mouth, they were at the mercy of weather, famine, pestilence, bandits, and war. There were some layers within the lower class. Near the top were craftsman, carpenters, masons, fishermen, and traders. Most, however, were farmers. Some were tenant

farmers or sharecroppers on large estates owned by absentee landowners. On the fringe of the lower class were 'unclean' occupations such as leather tanning. At the bottom of the bottom were the outcasts – peasants forced off their land, wandering vagabonds, beggars, and lepers. These down-and-outers may have numbered some ten percent of the peasant class. In Galilee, where much of Jesus' ministry took place, there existed both the extremely rich and the miserably poor, the latter being the lot of the majority of the people. The *few* lived in luxury while the *many* lived in poverty. The large middle class of modern capitalist societies was simply absent. (72-73).

The poor masses were called 'people of the land.' At one time this simply meant *common people*, who lived outside the city. The name concurs with *minjug* in Korea.

The Pharisees, avoiding contact with the 'people of the land,' even refused to eat with them. The religiously careless were so scorned they couldn't testify in court nor be the guardian of an orphan. Pharisees wouldn't marry them and considered their women unclean vermin. Galilee, sixty miles to the north of Jerusalem, was a heartland of common folk. The Galilean population included a large number of slaves and many Jews who had absorbed some Greek culture. Most Galileans were poorly educated and ignorant of the finer point of religious law. Overwhelmed with making a living, peasants had little time to worry about the minute details of ritual purity. The sarcastic words of a Pharisee show his disdain for the people of the land:

"A Jew must not marry the daughter of the people of the land for they are unclean animals and their women forbidden reptiles. And with respect to their daughters the Scripture write 'Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast' (Deut. 27:21)..said R. Eleazar: one many butcher a people of the land on a Day of Atonement that happens to fall on a Sabbath. His disciples said to him, master, say 'slaughter' (instead of vile word butcher). But he replied 'slaughtering requires a benediction, butchering does not."

Feeling was mutual, for it was said that 'people of the land' hated the Jewish scholars more than the heathen hated Israel. 75-76.

Nazareth, in the heart of people-of-the land country, was Jesus' home. The masses of Nazareth lived in poverty. Most had to get along with one set of clothing.

Therefore, the social ferment in first-century Galilee was stirred not only by Roman rule and patriotic nationalism but also by the harsh economy. Some peasant farmers owned small plots of land, but rising debt often pushed them off their land. They were forced to mortgage their property to pay taxes amounting sometimes to half of their harvest. Tax collectors and estate owners then snatched the land from indebted peasants, who couldn't pay their bills. In agrarian societies, such as Palestine, the ruler and the wealthiest five percent often control as much as sixty-five percent of the national wealth 76-77.

According to Kraybill,

Jesus grew up in this peasant setting. Several shreds of evidence place him with the poor of Galilee. Mary describes herself as a person of 'low estate' in her song of exaltation (Luke 1:48). The prescribed offering for the dedication of a child in Jerusalem was a lamb and a dove. But Mary and Joseph brought only two doves, an acceptable practice for the poor families unable to afford a lamb. (80)

Jesus challenged the three major social institutions: politics, religion, and economics. And as often happens, the three were woven together. The rich aristocrats – the chief priests and Sadducces in Jerusalem – owned large estates in Galilee, which trapped small tenant farmers. This ruling elite also controlled the mighty Jewish supreme court – the Sanhedrin. This body, in turn, supervised the temple ritual and religious regulations. This same upper crust of Jerusalem was in cahoots with the Romans. The wealthy welcomed the Roman occupation because it protected them from bandits and supported the system that fed their wealth. This ruling Jewish elite cheered when the Romans crushed zealous freedom fighters. The religious leaders were likely part of the crowd that shouted, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' They too considered Jesus more dangerous than the rebel leader Barabbas. Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 81-82.

As Kraybill contends, releasing, letting go, forgiving, restoring are images of messianic hope. This is what the Messiah, 'the Anointed One,' is all about. Using Is. 61:1-2, first, Jesus reveals *he* is the Messiah. Second, his role is to bring liberating news to the poor, the blind, the slaves, and the oppressed. Third, this is the proclamation of God's favorable year. Then Jesus concludes with dynamite: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in *your* hearing.' The messianic announcement is alive today in your presence. You are the witness to it. I am much more than Joseph's little boy, *I am the Messiah!*" Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 85.

As Kraybill suggest, Jesus omitted a phrase from the Isaiah passage concerning a Day of Vengeance when God would punish the wicked. He said just the opposite. God, in fact, would extend mercy and liberation even to the wicked. This upside-down announcement infuriated the crowd. (85). Kraybill too thinks that the usual reading of Jesus' inaugural sermon spiritualizes its meaning. We often assume Jesus proclaimed release to the captives of sin, gave sight to the spiritual blind, and offered liberty to those oppressed by spiritual bondage. Although this is true, the Old Testament background of the text expands its meaning by rooting it in practical social realities. 'The year of the Lord's favor' refers to the Hebrew Jubilee. Jesus thus links his messianic role back to the Jubilee. The sermon is, in essence, a Jubilee proclamation. (85)

Kraybill informs that historical reference outside the Scriptures suggest that the practice of letting land idle on the sabbatical year continued until the destruction of the temple in 70C.E. and perhaps even later. It's uncertain, however, how often slaves, debts and land were restored. Some evidence suggests at least partial observance of these practices. During the reign of Zedekiah, before Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.E., the rich released their slaves but soon recaptured them. Jeremiah fumed at their disobedience. (Jer. 34:16-17). Jeremiah viewed the sabbatical violation as one of the reasons for the impending destruction of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34:18-22). About 423 B.C.E. Nehemiah (5:1-13) rebuked the people for not observing the Jubilee after returning from captivity. Ezekiel calls for reestablishment the Jubilee (Ezek. 45:7-9; 46:16-18). A leading Pharisee, Hillel, living about the time of Jesus' birth, started a legal practice called *prosbul*. This legal procedure ended the devastating effect of canceling debt every six years. Despite erratic practice, the sabbatical and jubilee were important symbolic markers of Hebrew time. Above all, they embodied key theological values. 87-88

Kraybill summarizes that Jubilee command gives message that God owns everything including people and natural resources, jubilee is God's driving motivation for liberation; Jubilee is response to God's gracious liberation and deliverance from the Egyptian slavery; the Jubilee response has one eye on history, on God's gracious acts of deliverance. The other eye is on the less fortunate. Jubilee behavior responds to God's act in history and to the cries of those crushed by social injustice. Jubilee envisions a social revolution. It is upside-down revolution. The Jubilee concept is rooted in a keen awareness of human sin and greed. Without social controls, economic pyramids rise. Without constraints and periodic leveling, the weak at the bottom are stamped into the dirt. Societies must have special provision to defend the protect the helpless. 89-92.

The literal meaning of Jubilee was certainly good news in Nazareth. The poor could say good-by to their debts. Those driven into slavery because of debts could now come home. Peasants forced to sell land would see it returned once again to their family. No question about it – this was *very* good news! But there is more. Jesus wasn't making another Jubilee proclamation. 93.

As Kraybill suggests, this Jubilee message appears on Is. 29:18, 35:5 and 61:1. They are age-old descriptions in Eastern culture for the time of *salvation*, where tears, sorrow, and grief will end. Jesus added lepers and the dead to the list of the saved. Both are missing from Isaiah passages. Listeners in the synagogue would have heard him saying, 'The Messiah is *here!* Salvation is dawning. The Kingdom of God is *near*. God's presence has broken in among you *now*. 93.

The theme of restoration (liberation, salvation, coming home) links together the Jubilee, Jesus' Nazareth sermon, and his reply to John's disciples. When John asked, Jesus didn't say yes or no (Luke 7:22-23). Rather, he said that 'the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.' These are exactly the same folks Jesus

mentions at Nazareth. Things will be restored, returned to their original state. Images of paradise – no debts, no poverty, no slavery – so forth. 93.

And his punch line insulted Jewish pride when claimed that God used Gentiles in Hebrew history. The Jubilee restoration wasn't only for Jews. Now, in the words of Jesus, it restored *every one* – even Gentiles. Jesus courageously offered Gentiles words of grace instead of vengeance. The day of favored people was over. The Jubilee kingdom was universal. It knew no ethnic barriers, no ethnic favorites. This was the startling news that incited rage in the Nazareth crowd. Instead of a day of God's vengeance against Gentiles, Jesus had announced a day of universal mercy and forgiveness. Jesus, Gentile-lover, was a false prophet. And so they chased him out of town and tried to shove him over a cliff. 94.

Kraybill claims that a redemptive rhythm emerges from the Jubilee. It echoes from garden to empty tomb. The drummers of holy history pound out a four-beat message vibrating down through the ages: 1) Garden – Egypt – Exodus – Jubilee; 2) Perfection – sin – salvation – mercy; 3) Freedom – oppression – restoration – forgiveness. The first beat reminds us of God's perfect creation. The second beat recalls oppression in Egypt. God's mighty intervention brings restoration and salvation. Finally, we can respond to God's salvation by extending mercy and forgiveness to others. Once we were oppressed. Once we were captives. But now, the Jubilee reminds us, we're forgiven debtors. 94.

Lord's Prayer; Kraybill links Jubilee to Lord's Prayer: "One is that accepting and granting forgiveness are linked. We're eligible to accept God's forgiveness as we repent and forgive others. Moreover some scholars note that the word *debt* in the Lord's prayer may refer either to sins or to financial debts...In the heart of the Lord's Prayer we find the Jubilee principle." Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 95.

As Kraybill claims that Jesus' teaching on wealth can be viewed from Jubilee model. Although many of the details aren't applicable today, the theological *principle* of the Jubilee do offer a biblical framework for Christian economic practice. The Jubilee vision weaves together social and spiritual, political and personal, inward and outward. It also blends God's initiative with ours. Prodded by divine liberation, we forgive. As we forgive, so we are forgiven. As we are merciful, so we receive mercy. These truths lie at the heart of the Jubilee. And the Jubilee vision permeates Jesus' teaching, not only at Nazareth but throughout his entire ministry. Mercy, liberation, freedom, compassion, release. These are the code words of Jubilee. And these same words energize Jesus' economic vision. Jesus' theological vision has social consequence. The Jubilee declares God's kingship. And God's decree brings release from enslavement to old authorities, forgiveness from indebtedness to old kingdom, and liberty to those in spiritual *and* social bondage. This lavish grace is Jubilee. It is the favorable day of the Lord, the day of liberty, the day of salvation. 97-98. It is also the day that all suffering poor oppressed people come home along with the oppressive wealthy people if they repent, convert, and transform. 97-98

The Rich and Lazarus

The text reports that Lazarus was a beggar. The Greek word for *beggar* is related to the word for *spit*. Lazarus was a 'spit upon' person despised by the revelers. The puppies symbolized the unsaved, the Gentile outcasts. The upside-down moment dawned. The rich, religious Sadducee spit on the beggar in contempt. But the dogs, of all things, showed compassion. Instead of spiting, they used their saliva for healing. They licked the sores of the poor Lazarus – dogs have more compassion than rich Sadducees. Suddenly, the story unfolds the world turns upside-down. The rich man roasts in hell and old spit-upon Lazarus sits at Abraham's right hand. He holds the place of honor. The tables turn. High and low reverse. Earlier, Lazarus had reached up to the rich man, begging for crumbs. Now sizzling in hell, the rich reveler reaches up to Lazarus and begs for a drop of water. Echoes of Mary's Magnificat ring in our ears, 'He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty' (Luke 1:53). The message is that the rich man, blinded by luxury, refused the Jubilee and faced a scorching end. The huge gulf in the story symbolizes his distance from God. Almighty God had not forgotten weak, spit-upon Lazarus. This isn't the story to comfort beggars. The parable doesn't ask the poor to patiently await their reward in the sky. The ending of the story focuses on the five rich brothers who are still living. Abraham says, 'they have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them. The rich man's brother have known about Jubilee since their childhood. Judgment will singe those who refuse Jubilee. 103-104.

A Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)

Most scholars including Kraybill point is that 1) wealth is selfish expansion at the poor's expense; 2) The rich man lives as though there is no God; 3) his only focus is the good life for 'me and only me;' Wallowing in self-obsession, the fool is callused to the needs of others 3) God doesn't ask about his motives; he snatches away his life; 4) The story is not just about greed; it's a warning about fragility of life and the true goods that count for eternity; 5) The fool's refusal to practice Jubilee – his captivity by wealth damns his soul.

The rich who enter God's reign give generously. In so doing they save their souls because they followed God's will. We find an inversion between kingdom values and societal standards. Jesus is very clear. Other values govern the upside-down kingdom. Investment portfolios don't measure a persons' worth. Financial growth doesn't equal higher status in the kingdom. In God's new order, covetousness and the pursuit of excessive profit and privilege are wrong. The mindset which builds bigger barns for selfish purpose is clearly named: it's greed. 108-109

Beatitude (Luke 6:20-26)

Kraybill concurs by emphasizing that Beatitudes sharpen the contrast between rich and poor. Jesus, in upside-down fashion, awards the poor and spans the comfortable. The term *poor* in the biblical context has at least three meanings.

First, it refers to the materially poor – destitute living in squalor with meager food, housing, and clothing. The term occurs more than sixty times in the Old Testament and usually refers to material poverty. Second, in a broader sense, the poor in the Bible are the oppressed. They are the captives, the slaves, the sick, the destitute, and the desperate. These nobodies are, in fact, the same ones whom Jesus offered good news in his Jubilee sermon in Nazareth. They are down-and-outers, the outcasts who can't defend themselves. Living on the fringe of society, they depend on the mercy of the powerful. The multitude following Jesus often included the disreputable, the uneducated, and the stigmatized. By Pharisee standards, their social blemishes blocked any hope of salvation. Jesus' followers, in fact, were often called the 'little ones,' and 'the least ones.' The third connotation of poor comes out of an Old Testament tradition. Here the poor are the humble in spirit – those who are toward God. Regardless of their economic status, they stand before God as beggars with outstretched hands. They plead for mercy with contrite and broken spirits – humility – which Matthew highlighted in his version of the Beatitudes, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:3). 110.

Luke is clearly thinking of those who are indeed financially poor, really hungry, actually crying, actively persecuted. These are the people who share one thing in common; suffering. Poor peasants and beggars – they are in fact hungry, crying and poor. But they are also lowly in spirit – little ones – on the edges, at the bottom of society. This poverty is both attitude and circumstance. God cares about them. Meanwhile, the rich in Jerusalem, who refuse to practice Jubilee, may be indicted for snubbing the law of God. But they too have new life in the kingdom if they cast off the shackles of possessions. 111.

Kraybill compares the case of the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus. As he claims, Zacchaeus and rich young ruler make opposite choices about Jubilee. Both are rich and in position of power. Both meet Jesus, but they walk away in different directions.

As Kraybill contends, to the question 'what must I do to inherit eternal life,' Jesus links eternal life to wealth. The rich ruler is sincere and conscientious, not a cunning robber. He grew up in a devout family. He knows God's commandments. He not only knows the creeds – he lives them in his daily life. Jesus answers his big question by pointing to one deficiency. He must sell his possessions. They are ruling his life – not God. To experience the reign of God, to gain eternal treasure, he must sell his possessions. Why should he sell out? Because the poor are hungry and needy. Wealth has captured his heart and claimed his allegiance. Selling out will not only feed the hungry; it will also refocus his attention on the heavenly kingdom. Jesus invites him to 'come, follow me.' Selling all was, in this case, a necessary first step. Jesus didn't always counsel persons to sell everything. But in this case he does. The ruler turns away sadly because the grip of mammon is simply too strong. He forfeits eternal life. 113.

Rich Young ruler (Luke 18:18-30)

“How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:24-25).

Kraybill interprets that Jesus probably *meant* a camel and a needle. The camel is the largest animal and the needle had the smallest opening. 114

Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” He replied, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” (Luke 18: 26-27).

“What is impossible for mortals is possible for God” seems to be one of the most misunderstood passage. When the rich read this part, they feel relieved because God is going to do it what the rich cannot do it. But Kraybill claims this doesn’t mean God will miraculously drag the wealthy through the kingdom’s gate. It means, rather, that God’s grace can inspire and free even rich people from wealth’s demonic grip and motivate them to practice Jubilee. Everything is possible when people open their lives to God’s reign. This way the rich can come home but the rich ruler refused to be inspired and walked away from the invitation. He had never come home. He was lost and homeless in his wealth.

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

According to Kraybill, Zacchaeus was rich because he was the chief tax ‘farmer’ of the district. A team of subordinates actually collect the taxes for him. Tax collectors often used force and fraud to make a financial killing. Tax bosses like Zacchaeus sometimes even embezzled from their employees. Then tax collectors and especially the tax bosses were despised. This was not only because they were Jews collecting taxes for the Romans, but because they often cheated and used force to collect taxes. Tax bosses were stigmatized. They weren’t allow to be judges nor could they serve as witnesses in court. Like Gentile slaves, they were even denied the civil and political rights granted to blemished bastards. Money from a tax collector couldn’t be given for alms because it was tainted. Eating and associating with tax collectors would contaminate the righteous. 115.

It would have been unthinkable for a Pharisee to lunch with Zacchaeus. Yet Jesus took him to lunch. The rabbis and scribes would have joyfully spit in his face. Jesus deliberately contaminated himself by eating with this outcast at his elaborate mansion. Jesus’ care and compassion move Zacchaeus. 115 They so move him that he decides to practice Jubilee. ‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much’ (Luke 19:8). What count is a change of heart that produces economic change. 116

Jesus affirms his action. ‘Today *salvation* has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek out and to *save* the lost.’ (Luke 19:9-10) This man has been saved! He has joined the people of God. He is in the royal family, a son of Abraham. This is what the day of salvation is all about. Jesus ties personal salvation to social ethics. What is impossible with humans is possible with God. By the grace of God, a rich man has walked through the eye of the needle. Jubilee is under way. 116

Kraybill compares the case of the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus. The rich young ruler who never came home and Zacchaeus who came home. As Kraybill claims, Zacchaeus and rich young ruler make opposite choices about Jubilee. Both are rich and in position of power. Both meet Jesus, but they walk away in different directions:

“Things are quite upside-down. The rich young ruler has perfect theology but lacks obedience. Zacchaeus has a lousy or nonexistent theology but practices Jubilee. The ruler calls Jesus a ‘good teacher.’ Zacchaeus, the cheat, calls him ‘Lord.’ The ruler hopes for eternal life but refuses to share and can’t squeeze through the needle’s eye. Zacchaeus probably gives little thought to life eternal, but his new care for the poor

opens the needle's eye. The religious leader runs up to Jesus. In contrast, Jesus invites himself to lunch with a sinner who is moved by his compassion. In the first story (rich young ruler) economic concern stagnate faith. In the second story (Zacchaeus) faith drives the economic agenda. Here we have two contradictory response to the gospel, opposite reactions to the poor. On the one hand, good theology, no Jubilee, and condemnation. On the other hand, scant theology, Jubilee, and true salvation. In both stories private spiritual experience connects to social justice, no, to economic justice.”¹¹⁶

Kraybill informs that a **widow in Palestine** society was an outcasts. She had no inheritance rights form her husband's property. When the husband died, the oldest son acquired the property. If there was not son, a brother of the deceased husband might marry the widow. If the brother refused or there was none, she would return to her father's house or to begging. Widows, like other women, had no role in public or religious life. They often wore black clothing to signal their plight. Moreover, the rich often oppressed them.¹¹⁷

According to Kraybill, conversion, which doesn't involve economic change, isn't complete conversion. Jesus not only condemns greed in first-century Palestine; he calls for a perpetual Jubilee. ¹¹⁸.

Kraybill concludes:

“God's love for us transform our economic behavior. Mercy, not accumulation, becomes our new yardstick for measuring success. Generous giving replaces conspicuous consumption. God's highest command forms the core of his upside-down way. Loving God with all our heart means loving our neighbors as much as ourselves. And this means caring, sharing, giving – valuing our neighbors welfare as much as our own. Care for our neighbor strips the old demons of their grip. Jesus invites us to treat the poor as our neighbor as our self.” ¹³⁰

Who is Rich?

Social scientists note that happiness doesn't automatically rise with wealth. One psychologist posed the perennial American paradox: Why are so many people sad amid prosperity? We're satisfied when we *feel* we have enough resources to meet our perceived needs. The people around us shape what we think we need. Our needs, and thus our happiness, are based on soft social comparisons with others, not on absolute standards. If we don't think we need much we can be happy with little. If we try to match our upscale peers, a modest salary hike may leave us sulking. What we need, what makes us happy, all depends on our point of comparison. Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom* 131.

The meaning of “rich” all depends on our social context and points of comparison. By looking *up* the ladder, we're *never* rich. Staring up the ladder makes us feel poor. The ones above us are also looking up and feeling poor. So the feeling of poverty spirals ever upward among the rich because no one can ever have enough. ¹³¹.

The upside-down Jubilee perspective reminds us that once we were slaves, once we were captives. This reminder shift our focus downward, where the biblical spotlight always points. When we follow the biblical spotlight, we look down and realize we're rich. When we look down, things suddenly appear different and we are moved to compassion. The Jubilee message strikes home.¹³²

Ironically the global class structure today looks much like ancient Palestine. A small elite at the top lords it over the vast multitude at the bottom. About one fifth of the world's population gobbles up some 80 percent of our global resources and produces 80 percent of the pollution. The poorer four-fifths of the people in the global village scrap for the remaining 20 percent of the goodies. Nearly *half* of the people of the world live on less than \$2 a day – less than what is spent on pets in developed countries. ¹³³.

Reason why Jesus was crucified

Kraybill asks why would a preacher of compassion get nailed to a tree? The message of new kingdom went far beyond a critique of wealth. According to Kraybill, what surely sealed the fate of Jesus was his bold challenge to the symbols of Jewish identity. His words and action scorched the flag of Jewish nationalism. ¹⁴⁰.

Jesus announced that the Spirit of God would transform sacred symbols – Sabbath observance, purity rituals, sacred boundaries, and even the mighty temple in Jerusalem. Many of the practices surrounding these symbols served to bolster tribal and national identity. The new kingdom would have bigger doors, bigger tables, and a much bigger family. The old ways created tribal identity through separation and exclusion. The new order welcomes everyone. 140.

Tax collectors and sinners who ridiculed the rules of purity were considered filthy and were considered beyond the sight of God's redemption. The Pharisees shunned them. Jesus excluded no one. He invited sinners to meals (Luke 15:2) and joined in their parties (Mark 2:15; Matt. 9:10). This infuriated the Pharisees, who mocked him, saying 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34)

Some scholars contend that Jesus' table fellowship with sinners and outcasts was the distinguishing mark that set him apart from the other religious prophets of his time. In Palestine culture, inviting someone to a meal was a sign of honor. Sharing a meal signaled group boundaries – who was in the circle of friends and who was excluded. Dirty and polluted wicked people would never be invited by a Pharisee. The meal signaled peace, trust, intimacy, and forgiveness; sharing a table meant sharing life. In Hebrew culture, table fellowship also symbolized fellowship before God. Breaking bread around a common table brought a corporate blessing to all that joined in the meal. By eating with social rejects – the target of righteous wrath, Jesus embodies God's compassion for all. He signals their inclusion around the heavenly banquet table. He thus welcomes them into the community of salvation. 149-150.

As Kraybill suggests, Jesus' criticism of wealth and religion and bring the excluded home stemmed from his perfect love. The very foundation of Jesus' new kingdom rests on love – *Agape* love. The Greek word, *agape*, means unconditional love. Wholly unselfish, *agape* surpasses self-interest, passion, friendship, and benevolence. *Agape* is more than unselfish feeling. It acts. It loves unlovable, even enemies. Compassion, generosity, forgiveness, mercy – these are the essence of *agape*. *Agape* flows from the king of the kingdom, who is like a loving parent. The ruler's subjects aren't slaves but children. Citizens in this new order love generously because a gracious Parent has overwhelmed them. Divine love stirs their own. 167

A Vision of Shalom 191.

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, is closely connected with ideas of justice, righteousness, salvation, and well-being. It suggests a complete sense of well-being in personal, social, economic, and political spheres. There is no peace when greedy systems oppress the poor. An individualism, which cares only about number one also destroys the harmony of community. 191. Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003),

Inside Outsiders

Racial purity in Palestinian culture

Racial purity was crucial in Palestinian culture. People were careful not to contaminate family lines by marrying a person with bad blood. Purebred pedigrees (lineage) determined one's civil rights in Hebrew culture. A clean pedigree was required to participate in court and to hold a public office. In short, a pure family tree was a ticket to power and influence. The thoroughbreds – priest, Levites, and others who could prove their pure lineage – lived at the top of the checkerboard. In a box below were the slightly blemished Jews, often illegitimate descendants of priests and proselytes. Much lower were those gravely blemished – the bastards, eunuchs, and persons without known fathers. Gentile slaves were exiled to a box by

themselves. Although circumcised, they weren't part of the Jewish community. Dumped in the worst box – below the checkerboard – were Samaritans. These rigid social rankings shaped daily interaction in ancient Palestine. On top of the smaller boxes were two large ones – Jews and Gentiles.¹

How the Gentiles were treated in Jewish social world?

Jews treated Gentiles with the same contempt and animosity as they did Samaritans. The Gentiles were unclean outsiders. They were pagans who contaminated the purity of ceremonial ritual. Jews avoided Gentiles, whom they called “wild dogs.” They were careful not to let the Gentiles tarnish them in everyday life. Early Hebrew Scriptures envision Abraham's blessing touching all nations [Gentiles]. In the first pages of the books of Moses, Gentiles receive the divine blessing. By the time of Jesus, however, that vision had vanished. To most Jews, Gentiles were pagan dogs who polluted racial purity.² The original Jubilee vision applied only to Hebrews. Gentile slaves and debts weren't released in the seventh year. Hebrews could charge Gentiles interests on loans. Jews expected God's vengeance to fall on Gentiles.³

Jesus' position on the Gentiles and Jews' reaction with hatred of Gentiles]:

Jesus moved to Galilee of Gentiles to launch his ministry (Matt. 4: 15). Luke reports that after Jesus' inaugural speech, “All in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up and drove him out of the town, led him to the brow of the hill so that they might hurl him off the cliff” (Luke 4:28-29). Because Jesus told two stories. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah. But in time of famine, Elijah didn't visit a pedigreed Jewish widow. He was sent to a Gentile widow in the land of Sidon for help. The second story has the same opening and punch line. There were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha the prophet. But it was Naaman, a Gentile Syrian, who was cleansed. The message sliced through Jewish pride. It stirred rage because belonging to Israel gave no one a special right to healing. In two swift strokes, Jesus cut through the crowd's ethnicity. He shattered their tribal pride. He demolished national identity.⁴

Jesus moves to a Gentile region on the east side of Lake Galilee and heals a deaf mute. Pharisees quarrel with Jesus for refusing to wash before eating [violation of purity law]. Feeding of five thousand involves five loaves. Twelve baskets are left over. It's on the western side of the lake – the Jewish side. There are five books of Moses and twelve tribes of Israel. This is the Jewish feeding. Here bread's significance is profound. It's prophetic bread. The Messiah's own life is about to be broken for the life of his own Jewish people. Jesus moves onto Gentile turf in the land of Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 15:21-28). A woman begs him to exorcise a demon from her daughter.⁵ Jesus defends his hesitation with a Jewish proverb, “It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dog,” meaning the Gentiles. Jesus tells her it's unwise to share the Jewish Messiah with Gentiles. But she courageously sues his own proverb to argue back: “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs” (Mark 7:28). Jesus

¹ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 197.

² Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 197.

³ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 198.

⁴ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 198.

⁵ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 199.

heals her child. A Gentile woman receives healing for her daughter. Then Jesus pushes eastward to the Decapolis, a circle of ten Gentile cities. Here he heals a deaf mute, another sign that the Gentile hear. This miracle leads to the second feeding. In contrast to the first one [feeding five thousand]. This luncheon is on the eastern side of the lake – the Gentile side. Four represents the four corners of the earth. It signifies the time when people from east, west, north and south will come to eat the salvation banquet. In the second feeding the messianic bread is broken for all humankind. This complete and perfect messianic meal includes the Gentiles and all other peoples.⁶ Jews and Gentiles march arm-in-arm into the new kingdom.

In another instance a Roman centurion – commander of 100 men – asks Jesus to heal his servant (Matt. 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10). This Gentile army officer displayed greater faith than the religious leaders of Israel. This Gentile servant was healed. Jesus meets another Gentile, the chained demonic in Gerasenes, Gentile turf east of the Sea of Galilee. Mark says the demoniac worshipped Jesus and called him "Son of Most High God." Jesus healed this demonic man. Jesus shatters the ethnic wall between the Jew and Samaritan. Striking at Jewish pride in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus holds up a Samaritan, not a Jew, as the supreme example of agape love. Another Samaritan whom Jesus called a foreigner, was *the* only one of ten lepers to return and give thanks for a healing. This thankful half-breed was the sole recipient of Jesus' blessing (Luke 17:16-19). Jesus went to Samaritan turf and started to talk to Samaritan woman. Samaritan couldn't permit a Jew in their backyard. But Jesus boldly walks on their turf and engages them. He loved them. Kraybill concludes that the social barriers between Jew and Gentile crumbled in the presence of Jesus, the Messiah, and they continue to crack in the early church.⁷

⁶ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 200.

⁷ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 202.

Jesus' welcoming Women

It is difficult to grasp the dismal status of women in Hebrew culture. They were stashed at the bottom with slaves and children. One of the six major divisions of the Mishnah is devoted entirely to rules about women. None of the divisions deal exclusively with men. The Mishnah section on uncleanness has seventy-nine legal paragraphs on the ritual contamination caused by menstruation! Women were excluded from public life. They belonged at home. When walking outside the house, they covered themselves with two veils to conceal their identity. A chief priest in Jerusalem didn't even recognize his own mother when he accused her of adultery. Strict women covered themselves at home so even their rafters wouldn't see a hair of their head! In public places they were to remain unseen. Social custom prohibited men from being alone with women outside the home. Men dared not to look at married women or even greet them in the street.⁸

A woman could be divorced from simply talking to a man in public. Public life belong to men. Father could sell his daughter into slavery or force her to marry anyone of his choice before she was twelve. The father of the bride typically received a considerable gift of money from his new son-in-law. Because of this, daughters were considered a source of cheap labor and profit. In the house, the woman was confined to domestic chores. She was virtually a slave to her husband, washing his face, hands, and feet. Considered the same as a Gentile slave, a wife was obligated to obey her husband as she would a mater. If death threatened, the husband's life must be saved first. Under Jewish law, the husband alone had the right to divorce. The wife's most important function was the making male babies. Her womb was the temporary garden where the husband planted *his* seed. The absence of children was considered divine punishment. A daily prayer repeated men intoned, "Blessed be God that hath not made me a woman." A woman was subject to many taboos in the Torah. Girls couldn't study the Holy Law – the Torah. Women couldn't approach the Holy of Holies in the temple. In the temple plaza, they couldn't enter the Court of Israelites – the exclusive domain of men. During their monthly purification from menstruation, they were excluded from even the Women's Court on the temple plaza. Women were forbidden to teach. They were barred as witnesses in court for they were generally considered liars. The Hebrew adjectives for "pious," "just," and "holy" do not have a feminine form in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁹

In this context, Jesus knowingly overturns social custom when he allows women to follow him in public. His interaction with women shows he views them as equal with men before God. In a stunning, outrageous upheaval, he declares that female harlots may enter the kingdom of God before religious male leaders (Matt. 21:31).¹⁰ The prominence of women in the Gospels as well as Jesus' interaction with them shows his irreverence for sexual boxes. Without hesitation, he violates social norms to elevate women to a new dignity and a higher status.¹¹

One of the examples of Jesus' upside-down attitude toward women is his talk with Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1-42). A person approaches with three stigmas hanging around her neck: woman,

⁸ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 203.

⁹ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 204.

¹⁰ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 204.

¹¹ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 205.

Samaritan, flirt. Jesus asks her for a drink. His simple requests slices through six social norms. In the first place, Jesus violates turf rules. Jesus has wandered into enemy territory controlled by a rival religion. Second, he violates gender rule because she was a woman. By law, Jews prevented from talking to woman in public. Third, he violated purity law because she was unclean by having sixth affair. She is a promiscuous flirt. Jesus doesn't rune. He puts his career at risk. Fourth, She's Samaritan who was considered unclean. Jesus boldly shatters the social barriers. Fifth, he initiates the conversation with her which was taboo. Finally, and worst of all, he *deliberately* defiles himself. She was unclean and anything she touches become unclean. A whole Jewish village was declared unclean if a Samaritan woman entered it. By asking for dirty water, which she has touched, Jesus is intentionally polluting himself. Jesus was completely out of place in every way – doing the wrong thing with the wrong person in the wrong place. Merely saying 'Give me a drink,' shattered six social norms regulating gender, religion, purity, and ethnicity. Jesus reveals himself to this promiscuous half-breed. She asks about the Messiah. And Jesus responds, "I am he." A defiled woman from a rival religion receives the highest honor – hearing the Messianic confession in first person. Jesus not only cuts through social red tape to ask for a drink, he lifts this defiled woman up to the privileged holy holies and whispers, "I am the Messiah." This miracle moves Samaritan villagers to beg Jesus to stay with them. Many believed. ¹²

Jesus meets another woman – a prostitute anoint Jesus at a Pharisee Luncheon (Luke 7:36-39). Jesus, the Messiah is anointed by a woman – a prostitute. On another occasion, a woman with a twelve-year hemorrhage(Mark 5:25-34) touches Jesus. Such a person was considered filthy and ceremonially unclean. Leviticus purity laws viewed her as a perpetual menstruant (Lev. 15: 26-27). Her touch infected others. Moreover, anyone touching what she touched became polluted. A typical rabbi would have cursed the filthy woman and scampered for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus invites her to come forward not for a rebuke but for a blessing. "Daughter, your faith had made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease (Mark 5:34). Despite her stigma, he loves her. ¹³

¹² Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 206.

¹³ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 207.

Inviting outsiders and nobodies

Of twelve apostles, we find Matthew a tax collector. Jewish tax collectors, working for the Romans, were considered outright traitors – especially by patriotic rebels. Matthew left his job to follow Jesus (Luke 5:28). Another disciple was Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15). It's possible that other disciples were former rebels or at least shared their sympathies. James and John, “Sons of Thunder,” Judas Iscariot, and Simon Peter are likely prospects with rebel connections. Now, political opponents are walking and sleeping together. Old labels and tags are torn off. Former enemies stand together as friends in a new kingdom, under new lordship. Political adversaries also come together at the cross of Jesus. One of the bandits hanging beside Jesus is moved by his forgiving love. This rebel confesses his faith and asks Jesus to remember him. That very day, Jesus assures him, he will be in paradise (Luke 23:43). The crucifixion also overwhelms the Roman centurion, exterminator of Jewish rebels. He exclaims, “Truly this man was God's Son! (Matt. 27:54). Bandits and centurion, lawbreaker and law keeper, find themselves face-to-face with Jesus in between. Jesus also converses with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Pharisees. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich, silent sympathizer, donates a tomb. The daughter of Jairus, ruler of a synagogue, is healed. The Roman centurion's request is honored. Rich Zacchaeus has a surprising guest for lunch. Doctors of the law debate with him. The rich young ruler challenges him. Magi, astrologers from afar, visit the manger. People of wealth, prestige, and influence seek him out. Jesus accepts them, regardless of their tag.¹⁴

Jesus goes to the bottom and interacts with the lowly. Shepherds as well as wise men visit the manger. Herding sheep was a dirty and despised occupation. The wealthy living in Jerusalem hired shepherds to watch their flocks in the countryside. But shepherds were suspect. They were considered dishonest for several reasons. Sometimes they led their flocks on other people's land. Sometimes they sold milk and young animals on the sly and pocketed the cash. Indeed it was forbidden to buy wool, milk, and kids from shepherds because they often embezzled the money. Some rabbis called herding the *most* disreputable occupation. Angels sang the good news of God's incarnation to shepherds in a Bethlehem field. Shepherds hear the good news first. In parabolic form Jesus compares God to a shepherd who wiggles through thorny thickets to find a lost lamb. Jesus even calls himself a *Good* Shepherd, underscoring their negative reputation. From beginning to end, from start to finish, the thread of inversion and irony weaves its way through the gospel. He spends most of his time with the masses – the poor and the sick. Although he relates to all sorts of people, the Gospels show Jesus' special care for those branded with stigma. His network includes the demoniacs, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the ill, the paralyzed, prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners, adulterers, widows, lepers, Samaritans, women, and Gentiles. In short, a big band of nobodies from nowhere.¹⁵

Jesus spends much of his time with outcasts. These were the throwaways – dumped on the social trash pile. Instead of spitting on them, as most people do, Jesus touches them, loves them, and names them Gods

¹⁴ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 210.

¹⁵ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 211.

people. Table fellowship in Palestine involved ritual meals that reflected the ladders of status and stigma. The meals marked social boundaries – they included some and excluded others. Jesus’ fellowship with social outcasts turned the rules of table fellowship upside-down. Everyone was welcome at his table. The poor, the blind, the lame, the oppressed pop up in his inaugural sermon. He mentions them when John’s disciples probe his messianic identity. He welcomes them at the banquet when the invited guests refuse to come. He tells us to invite them, instead of friends, to our meals. In the final judgment scene they reappear again. People are rewarded or damned for their response to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the prisoner, and the sick (Matt. 25: 31-46). In the East these words stir images of the dead. These are folks without hope. These are people overwhelmed with suffering. Life for them is too miserable to be called life. Jesus brings life to these who are as good as dead. He brings healing, hearing, walking, talking, sanity, purity, and freedom. These images of transformation signal the age of salvation. The Messiah is here. Restoration is complete. *Now* is the favorable year of the Lord. The spirit of Jesus penetrates social boxes. Barricades of suspicion, mistrust, stigma, and hate crumble in his presence. His kingdom transcends all boundaries. God’s love overpowers the social customs which divide, separate, and isolate. All are invited to the table in the new kingdom. None are pushed aside or excluded. Jesus’ broad welcome lies at the heart of the gospel. Reconciliation forms its core. This good news melts spiritual barriers between humans and God and dismantles walls between people. The agape of Jesus reaches out to boxed-up people, tells them God’s love washes away their stigma, and welcomes them into a new community. ¹⁶

¹⁶ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 212.