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Sermon Series: *Jesus Revolution*, No. 2

New Channels

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[Stacked boxes as visual illustration.]

I don't know about you, but I'm an organizer by nature. I want things in *boxes*, and I want my boxes in *neat stacks*, and I want my stacks of boxes in *straight lines*...rows that are ordered and predictable.

A place for everything and everything in its place.

And...the truth is, I want that sort of order in every part of life. I like it when things can be neatly categorized and classified...pigeon-holed...so there are no loose ends.

I like it when everything fits...which is precisely one of the most maddening things to me about Jesus sometimes...actually *often!* He *simply does not fit* my categories...and He *certainly* doesn't fit the categories of our world.

We began talking about this "Jesus as radical" sort of thing two Sunday nights ago, in light of all the election year news...and non-news...when I asked, and I told you not to answer...at least out loud...whether you consider Jesus a liberal or a conservative.

To you, is Jesus a Democrat or Republican?

Is He a governmentalist or a libertarian?

You see, those are the categories of our world...we've grown up with them, most of us anyway, and they've become just part of our brains...part of our existence, and so we tend to think that, "Well, of course we must fit Jesus into one of those boxes."

And, since we, thankfully, live in a democracy (for the moment anyway) we have the privilege and responsibility of having to (usually while holding our noses) do that very thing...ty to fit Jesus into one of those boxes...on election days.

But the reality is, Jesus simply doesn't fit into any of the boxes of our world...and He never has.

From the moment He was born...from the moment He was *conceived*, in fact, Jesus began blowing apart our world's categories...our world's boxes...and building new ones.

Of course, this did not go over very well with the world...it got Jesus killed, really.

And truth be known, Jesus promised the same may well happen to anyone who chooses to follow Him.

[Globe as visual illustration.]

This is because the world, even by Jesus day, had been turning, for centuries and centuries, in a sinful direction. There's a great inertia...a great momentum of sinfulness in our world.... Trying to push back against that is neither easy nor for the faint of heart.

It's like trying to stop a moving truck or train simply by standing in front of it and putting your hands out, you know? And not one that had just begun to move either...one that had been moving...and gathering steam...for some time.

For millennia, the world had been spinning in a certain direction...moving along this road...moving in this channel...with all its boxes and definitions and

expectations, the way it sees things...and with lots of momentum behind it.

But along about the day of Abraham, God looks around and says, "This isn't good...the direction my world is going!"

So, He began to raise up a people...Israel...to try to pull back at it...to re-inject God's influence for good into it.

But Israel couldn't do it. The momentum of the world was too much...it sucked them in, so to speak.

So then, God then sent a series of prophets...spokespeople for Him...to try to make His voice heard. He worked through them with power, and they all did a measure of good, but never enough to really substantially change the whole of the motion.

So then, God decided to send His Son. "*They wouldn't listen to my servants, but surely they'll respect my Son.*" [Matthew 21:37]

But surely the world did *not* respect God's son. Yet, in spite of that, Jesus did accomplish His mission, and part of that mission was to form a new force, a new movement, a new nation...raised up to push back against the world's crush toward sin and destruction.

And even more...God put this new force on earth to establish a whole new order...a new Kingdom.

A Kingdom of power and influence and good and right.

A Kingdom that would turn the motion of the world around, you see? A kingdom that would change the momentum...and begin moving the world this way, instead of this way.

And, of course, that force...that new nation is the Church.

The Church is where God's Kingdom's principles and values and practices are put into action.

It's the Church that pushes back against all that is against God...all of the world's lines and stacks and boxes and ruts...against the world's conventional wisdom.

We who follow Christ...we who are the Church...we're supposed to be the ones who redefine the categories here...we're the ones who God has raised up to continue what Jesus started in this carving of new roads...new channels in which to walk.

We're the revolutionaries...the people who walk in the way of Jesus.

Yet all too often, the Church has yielded to the motion and momentum...the status quo, really, of the world. The fact is, it's a powerful thing...all these years of motion in this direction...it's hard to stop that kind of inertia and get it moving in another direction.

Yet that's the call of God upon His people...to take hold of this river that is our world, sinful and raging as it may be, and change its course.

Do you know the story of the **Pikeville Cut-Through?** Right here in Kentucky.

The city of Pikeville was founded on the banks of one of the branches of the Big Sandy River. It sat out on a sort of

peninsula. Behind it was a mountain, and in front of it, around 70% of it probably, the river flowed. Being on a river in Eastern Kentucky, with a mountain behind, means the city was constantly flooding.

In 1973 though, a project was started to cut a channel through the mountain behind Pikeville, meaning, the moving of over 18 million cubic yards of dirt and rock, in order to re-direct...re-channel the river, as well as a railroad and a four-lane highway, in order to stop the flooding of Pikeville, and to give the city room to grow.

It was completed in 1987...it took 14 years and is one of the largest civil engineering projects of the western hemisphere.

People said it couldn't be done. But it was done.

Much like the city of Pikeville, which re-directed the flow of a river, so does God want His church...his people...to stop and re-direct the flow...the movement, the momentum... of sin in our world.

And we simply can't do that...we will never accomplish that... if we insist upon operating *within the world's categories*. If we, ourselves, are stuck in those categories and so use only the world's -isms...if we wield only the world's sort of power. We have to begin using God's categories and God's power...that's the only way God's church will accomplish God's good purposes.

Too often we have tried to re-imagine and re-define Jesus to fit the world's categories.

But what God has raised us up for...what He's called us to do...is to reimagine and redefine the categories of our *world* so that *they* fit Jesus, and that starts with this notion of the "renewing of our mind" that Paul talks about in Romans...where he writes in Romans 12:2 - "***Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.***"

We are called to break out of long-held, long-standing conventions and cultural mores and boxes and categories and parties and realize that we have to change the way we think...change the way we see things...change what has always been normal to us...change how we align ourselves, if we're to be Kingdom people, and if we're to fulfill our mission...the mission of God to change...to re-shape...and ultimately to redeem the world!

It can't be about trying to make Jesus fit what exists here, you see? It's about making what exists here fit Jesus!

And let me quickly say...this is not about God being against culture. God is *for* culture, but for culture according to *His* parameters and values. John 3:17, "***For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.***"

God does not hate the world. God loves the world, and motivated by love, Jesus came as the transformer of the world's culture.

He's the savior of culture.

He's the "revolutionizer" of culture.

And if we're to follow Jesus, you see, then that is what we must be too. We cannot simply be people who go along to get along. We cannot just look the other way. We cannot be those people who stuff God into the boxes of the world.

We are to be as revolutionary as Jesus...to look at everything...every decision, every principle, every value, not as conservatives or liberals, not as Democrats or

Republicans, not as governmentalsists or libertarians, but as revolutionaries in the army of Christ.

If we're followers of Jesus in this world, you see, we're a whole new "thang." We don't fit the world's boxes and lines, because we have been sent to cut a whole new channel...to move a mountain if we have to, in order to become God's saving grace in our world...to begin turning this world around...to begin moving it in a different direction, a God-ward direction.

This is what Jesus did, and this is what Jesus' followers are called to do too.

That is what E. Stanley Jones wrote about in this book [*Christ's Alternative to Communism*] we introduced a couple weeks ago. He wrote this stuff nearly 100 years ago...right when the world was taking stock...evaluating things.

It was still reeling following the stock market crash.

Capitalism was in question.

Ancient kingdoms were collapsing.

And big parts of the world were courting communism as the solution.

To that, Jones' response was something like this: "Look, the world has its programs. Sure it does. But we are not of this world. We are of Jesus...and Jesus has a program, too...and Jesus' program is something different than the programs of the world."

Jesus' program...God's Kingdom program...is one that cuts across the world's categories. Sooner or later, it cuts across every program of the world. It messes up the world's boxes and stacks and lines, but it's the program God's people have to follow if we want to accomplish all that He set out for us to do.

So, here's the question for us tonight...and for every follower of Jesus of our day: can we think in those sorts of terms? Can we see and agree that, if we're to be like Jesus...if we're to follow Jesus, then we can't...we simply won't ever align perfectly with any of the world's programs?

If we're to be followers of Jesus, sooner or later, we're going to be considered weirdos by the world...peculiar people...square pegs...just as Jesus was.

If we are in Christ, then that is our identity, you see? And it will cause us discomfort at times.

And people don't like discomfort; people try to avoid discomfort. That's understandable.

But that's not an option for Christ-followers.

We cannot take our worth...our identity... in what the world thinks of us.

Our identity, rather, lies in Jesus and in who we are in Him...in following Him...and in His Kingdom, and until we embrace *that*...

Until we embrace that our identity lies with Christ and beyond the confines and programs and values and expectations and -isms of this world...

Until we can embrace the fact that people are going to look at us like we're from Mars at times...

Until we're OK with never really, completely fitting in here...

Until we are good with saying, "Yes, I know that seems strange to you, but I follow this God who says 'X, Y, Z,' and so that's what I must say as well..."

Until we are OK with all of that, we will never really fulfill our potential to be the revolutionaries, in the line of Jesus, that God raised up the Church to be.

It's John 15:18, isn't it? Jesus told His disciples, *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."*

Until we embrace the truth of Jesus' words there and stop taking our worth and identity in the approval of the world, we will fall short of God's goal for us...we will never accomplish what God has for us to do.

But... if we will take our identity in being a Kingdom force...a revolutionary after Jesus' heart and example...for the sake of God's love for His world, if we can find our identity in Christ, then there will be no limit to what God can do with us.

There will be no new channel we cannot create.

There will be no mountain that cannot be moved.

There will be is no sinful momentum on earth that we won't be able to stop, and turn around, for His glory.

So even before we get into the principles of God's program, which we'll do next Sunday night and which, as I mentioned, we find in Luke chapter 4...before we even go there, we need to make a decision about commitment.

No program, whether earthly or heavenly, will ever succeed if those working it aren't committed to it, and I think that is the biggest challenge of the church today: lack of commitment.

Are we committed to the person of Jesus? Or, are we committed to a life of calm and ease?

Do we take our identity in Christ? Or, do we care too much what the world around us thinks of us?

Will we carve new channels in obedience to God's call? Or, are we too comfortable in the ruts of the world to even think about saying "yes" to the Spirit's voice and call?

You see, we have to declare ourselves wholly for Christ before we'll ever follow Christ's program for revolution...for world transformation.

Have you done that?

Will you do that?

Will you declare yourself for Jesus, no matter what the world around says...no matter how our society responds?

No matter what that declaration does to your former boxes and categories and conventional wisdoms?

Old people, will you declare yourselves for Jesus...and for no one else?

Young people, will you declare yourselves for Jesus...and for no one else?

Everyone in between old and young...will you declare yourselves for Jesus...and for no one else?

Those who will...you are the ones whom Jesus will use to cut new channels and even move mountains.