

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Unconditional & Sacrificial Love Changes the World”
(Part I of “Kingdom of God Citizens”)
September 14, 2025

Scripture

Isaiah 11:1-10
Revelation 5:1-10

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is the first sermon in the series

Core Idea: As followers of Christ, we use unconditional & sacrificial love to change the world for the better – not strength, violence, or coercion.

Challenge/purpose: To encourage and empower people to take the risk of using unconditional & sacrificial love to change the world.

The Sermon

When our Savior & Lord, Jesus, began his earthly ministry, he declared “The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of God started to become a reality here on earth. So, if we claim to be followers of Jesus, then we are automatically citizens of the Kingdom of God, and the Lord calls us to live our lives as Kingdom of God citizens. For the next 3 Sundays, I will talk about what it means to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Today, I will talk about how, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are to make a positive change in the world. When we die, we want people to say at our funerals that the world is a bit better because of our earthly lives. On tombstones, there are two dates – the date of birth and the date of death. In between is a dash and that dash stands for the person’s life on earth. How much of a positive impact do our dashes make?

So, how do we make a positive change in the world? Secular society gives some answers, but I don’t think they are the best answers. For example, there are many television shows and movies that glorify strength, violence, and even revenge as ways to make the world a better place. There are other movies and shows that teach us to rely on laws and law enforcement officers who sometimes use violence to make the world a better place.

Gunsmoke is one such television show. It ran from 1955 to 1975 and starred James Arnes as Matt Dillon, the U.S. Marshall who protected Dodge City. When I was a teenager and young adult, I loved to watch the reruns. Matt Dillon always

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apprehended or killed the bad guy. Now, however, I wonder...how much positive change did Matt Dillon actually bring to Dodge City and the surrounding area? Yes, he always got the bad guy, often killing him, but every week there were always new bad guys committing more violent crimes resulting in needless deaths. Nothing seemed to change in Dodge City.

Before I continue, I would like to make it clear that I understand the need for laws and law enforcement officers. I also understand that law enforcement officers sometimes need to use violence to defend themselves and other people. We should respect and appreciate law enforcement. However, the establishment of a criminal justice system is not the way citizens of the Kingdom of God bring about positive change in society. Citizens of the Kingdom of God practice the Jesus way of bringing about positive change.

The Jesus way uses unconditional & sacrificial love to bring about positive change. When the Son of God emptied himself to become a lowly human, he didn't become a mighty general, rich merchant, or powerful emperor. Instead, he became the son of a struggling carpenter and a member of the oppressed Jewish community. The Son of Man willingly placed himself under the cruel might of the Roman Empire. Also, instead of gathering a militant army and leading a violent revolution, Jesus allowed the Sanhedrin and Roman authorities to falsely arrest, ridicule, and torture him to death on a cross. He did this so he could conquer sin, death, and evil on our behalf. Through his death and resurrection, we can all receive God's forgiveness and have everlasting life. In other words, Jesus defeated death & evil with unconditional and sacrificial love. It's unconditional because Jesus died for everyone and offers everyone forgiveness and eternal life. It's sacrificial because Jesus had to sacrifice his dignity, strength, and life to make it happen.

This is what the vision in Revelation 5:1-10 is about. It is a symbolic depiction of Jesus using unconditional & sacrificial love to conquer sin, death, and evil.

In this vision, John, the author of Revelation, sees the throne room of God in heaven. He sees the splendor of heaven and the heavenly hosts worshipping God the Father on the throne. God the Father has a scroll with seven seals in his hand. This scroll symbolizes God's righteous judgments. Remember, God's judgments keep evil from becoming too powerful. It's good that God judges. But it looks as if there is no one worthy to break the seals and unleash God's judgments.

John begins to weep until one of the heavenly elders says to him, “Don't weep. Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has emerged victorious so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” The Lion of Judah is a reference

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to Jesus. So, John looks to where the angel is pointing, expecting to see a big, strong, mean-looking lion but, instead, he sees a little lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, standing as if it had been slain. Along with calling Jesus the Lion of Judah, Scripture, also calls Jesus the Lamb of God because, like the lamb in the Exodus, Jesus had to sacrifice himself so he could defeat sin and death on our behalf. In other words, Jesus conquered, not through force of arms, but through unconditional and sacrificial love. This is the example we are to follow.

Isaiah 11:6-9 paints a picture of the Kingdom of God on earth. As we follow the Jesus way of making positive change through unconditional & sacrificial love, the world will become more like the picture painted in Isaiah 11:6-9. It says, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” This is a picture of love, peace, and harmony with a little child, someone who is innocent & humble, maintaining the love, peace, and harmony.

This wonderful image will not be fully implemented until Jesus returns, but, in the meantime, we, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, demonstrate this image through our unconditional & sacrificial acts of love.

There is a book turned musical that illustrates the power of unconditional & sacrificial love. It is called, ‘Les Miserable’. In this story, the main character, Jean Valjean, is just released from 19 years imprisonment – 5 for stealing bread and 14 more years for many escape attempts. He can’t find shelter because his yellow passport marks him as a former convict. So, he wanders the streets, bitter, angry, and hateful.

Finally, someone tells him to go to the home of Bishop Myriel. The bishop takes him in, providing him dinner and shelter. However, during his first night with Bishop Myriel, he steals some very expensive silverware and runs off. The police capture him the next day and bring him back to the bishop’s house. Myriel pretends that he had given the silverware to Valjean and presses him to take two silver candlesticks as well, as if Valjean had forgotten to take them. The police accept his explanation and leave. Myriel tells Valjean that his soul has been purchased for God and that he should use money from the silver to make an honest man of himself.¹

¹ [Les Misérables - Wikipedia](#)

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Bishop Myriel committed an act of unconditional & sacrificial love. It was unconditional because Jean Valjean did not deserve this kindness. Myriel did not owe him anything. It was pure grace. It was sacrificial because Bishop Myriel gave up a large portion of his wealth to help him.

With this act of unconditional & sacrificial love, Bishop Myriel made a major, positive impact on the world. It changed Jean Valjean’s heart, and he became a new man. He used the money to become an honest & kind businessman who owned a factory. He never mistreated the workers and when he discovered that his manager mistreated a female worker named Fantine, he took it upon himself to care for that worker. When Fantine died, he adopted her daughter, Cosette, and raised her as his own. Cosette became a wonderful lady who married and raised kids of her own. This string of goodness started with Bishop Myriel’s one act of unconditional & sacrificial love.

God calls us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God and, as such, God expects us to commit acts of unconditional & sacrificial love. By doing that, we will be making this world a better place and showing people what the Kingdom of God is all about.

When do we have opportunities to commit acts of unconditional & sacrificial love? The first thing that comes to mind is the food pantry. It’s unconditional because we serve anyone in need. It’s sacrificial because we must sacrifice our time to serve in the pantry and the church must sacrifice its use of the Fellowship Hall when the pantry is open. Like Bishop Myriel, we may not see the chain of goodness that happens because we run a food pantry, but by faith we know it happens.

Yesterday, six of us from the congregation walked along US-1 to pick up trash. This was an act of unconditional and sacrificial love towards the Keys community. It was unconditional because we did not have to do it. It was sacrificial because we had to give up some of our time.

What about in our personal lives? We often commit acts of sacrificial love for our friends and families, but what about the opportunities to do so for strangers or people who may have hurt us?

Let’s Pray the following prayer:

Dear wonderful and awesome God, we recognize that we are citizens of your kingdom and, as such, you call us to demonstrate your kingdom to the world. One way to do that is to commit acts of unconditional and sacrificial love. Help us, O Lord, recognize opportunities to commit acts of unconditional and sacrificial

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love and then give us the strength & courage to take advantage of such opportunities. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. When our Savior & Lord, Jesus, began his earthly ministry, he declared
“The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and
believe the good news!”

- With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of God started to become a reality here on earth.
- So, if we claim to be followers of Jesus, then we are automatically citizens of the Kingdom of God and the Lord calls us to live our lives as Kingdom of God citizens.
- For the next 3 Sundays, I will talk about what it means to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

B. Today, I will talk about how, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are to make a positive change in the world.

- When we die, we want people to say at our funerals that the world is a bit better because of our earthly lives.
- On tombstones, there are two dates – the date of birth and the date of death.
 - In between is a dash and that dash stands for the person’s life on earth.
 - How much of a positive impact does our dashes make?
- So, how do we make a positive change in the world?

II. Secular society gives some answers, but I don’t think they are the best answers.

A. For example, there are many television shows and movies that glorify strength, violence, and even revenge as ways to make the world a better place.

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B. There are other movies and shows that teach us to rely on laws and law enforcement officers who sometimes use violence to make the world a better place.

C. Gunsmoke is one such television show.

- It ran from 1955 to 1975 and starred James Arnes as Matt Dillon, the U.S. Marshall who protected Dodge City.
- When I was a teenager and young adult, I loved to watch the reruns.
- Matt Dillon always apprehended or killed the bad guy.
- Now, however, I wonder...how much positive change did Matt Dillon actually bring to Dodge City and the surrounding area?
 - Yes, he always got the bad guy, often killing him, but every week there were more violent crimes resulting in gun fights.
 - Nothing seemed to change in Dodge City.

D. Before I continue, I would like to make it clear that I understand the need for laws and law enforcement officers.

- I also understand that law enforcement officers sometimes need to use violence to defend themselves and other people.
- We should respect and appreciate law enforcement.
- However, the establishment of a criminal justice system is not the way citizens of the Kingdom of God bring about positive change in society.
 - Citizens of the Kingdom of God practice the Jesus way of bringing about positive change.

III. The Jesus way of bringing about positive change

A. The Jesus way uses unconditional & sacrificial love to bring about positive change.

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- When the Son of God emptied himself to become a lowly human, he didn’t become a mighty general, rich merchant, or powerful emperor.
- Instead, he became the son of a struggling carpenter and a member of the oppressed Jewish community.
- The Son of Man willingly placed himself under the cruel might of the Roman Empire.
- Also, instead of gathering a militant army and leading a violent revolution, Jesus allowed the Sanhedrin and Roman authorities to falsely arrest, ridicule, and torture him to death on a cross.
 - He did this so he could conquer sin, death, and evil on our behalf.
 - Through his death and resurrection, we can all receive God’s forgiveness and have everlasting life.
- In other words, Jesus defeated death & evil with unconditional and sacrificial love.
 - It’s unconditional because Jesus died for everyone and offers everyone forgiveness and eternal life.
 - It’s sacrificial because Jesus had to sacrifice his dignity, strength, and life to make it happen.

B. This is what the vision in Revelation 5:1-10 is about.

- It is a symbolic depiction of Jesus using unconditional & sacrificial love to conquer sin, death, and evil.
- In this vision, John, the author of Revelation, sees the throne room of God in heaven.
 - He sees the splendor of heaven and the heavenly hosts worshipping God the Father on the throne.
 - God the Father has a scroll with seven seals in his hand.
 - ✓ This scroll symbolizes God’s righteous judgments.

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- ✓ Remember, God’s judgments keep evil from becoming too powerful.
- ✓ It’s good that God judges.
- But it looks as if there is no one worthy to break the seals and unleash God’s judgments.
- John begins to weep until one of the heavenly elders says to him, “Don’t weep. Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has emerged victorious so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”
 - The Lion of Judah is a reference to Jesus.
 - So, John looks to where the angel is pointing, expecting to see a big, strong, mean-looking lion but, instead, he sees a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, standing as if it had been slain.
 - Along with calling Jesus the Lion of Judah, Scripture, also calls Jesus the Lamb of God because, like the lamb in the Exodus, Jesus had to sacrifice himself so he could defeat sin and death on our behalf.
 - In other words, Jesus conquered, not through force of arms, but through unconditional and sacrificial love.
 - This is the example we are to follow.

IV. Isaiah 11:6-9 paints a picture of the Kingdom of God on earth.

- A. As we follow the Jesus way of making positive change through unconditional love & sacrifice, the world will become more like the picture painted in Isaiah 11:6-9.
- B. It says, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the

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cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters
cover the sea.”

- C. This is a picture of love, peace, harmony, and justice with a little child,
someone who is innocent & humble, maintaining the love, peace,
harmony, and justice.
- D. This wonderful image will not be fully implemented until Jesus returns, but,
in the meantime, we, as Kingdom of God citizens, demonstrate this image
through our unconditional & sacrificial acts of love.
- V. There is a story that started as a book but has become a well-known musical that
illustrates the power of unconditional & sacrificial love.
 - A. It is called, ‘Les Miserable’.
 - In this story, the main character, Jean Valjean, is just released from
19 years imprisonment – 5 for stealing bread and 14 more years for
many escape attempts.
 - He can’t find shelter because his yellow passport marks him as a
former convict.
 - So, he wanders the streets, bitter, angry, and hateful.
 - B. Finally, someone tells him to go to the home of Bishop Myriel.
 - The bishop takes him in, providing him dinner and shelter.
 - However, during his first night with Bishop Myriel, he steals some
very expensive silverware and runs off.
 - The police capture him the next day and bring him back to the
bishop’s house.
 - Myriel pretends that he has given the silverware to Valjean and
presses him to take two silver candlesticks as well, as if Valjean
had forgotten to take them.
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- Myriel tells Valjean that his soul has been purchased for God and that he should use money from the silver to make an honest man of himself.²

C. Bishop Myriel committed an act of unconditional & sacrificial love.

- It was unconditional because Jean Valjean did not deserve this kindness.
 - Myriel did not owe him anything.
 - It was pure grace.
- It was sacrificial because Bishop Myriel gave up a large part of his wealth to help him.

D. With this act of unconditional & sacrificial love, Bishop Myriel made a major, positive impact on the world.

- It changed Jean Valjean’s heart and he became a new man.
- He used the money to become an honest & kind businessman who owned a factory.
- He never mistreated the workers and when he discovered that his manager mistreated a female worker named Fantine, he took it upon himself to care for that worker.
- When Fantine died, he adopted her daughter, Cosette, and raised her as her own.
- Cosette became a wonderful lady who married and raised kids of her own.
- This string of goodness started with Bishop Myriel’s one act of unconditional & sacrificial love.

VI. God calls us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God and, as such, God expects us to commit acts of unconditional & sacrificial love.

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- A. By doing that, we will be making this world a better place and showing people what the Kingdom of God is all about.
- B. When do we have opportunities to commit acts of unconditional & sacrificial love?
 - The first thing that comes to mind is the food pantry.
 - It's unconditional because we serve anyone in need.
 - It's sacrificial because we must sacrifice our time to serve in the pantry.
 - Like Bishop Myriel, we may not see the chain of goodness that happens because we run a food pantry, but by faith we know it happens.
- C. What about in our personal lives? We often commit acts of sacrificial love for our friends and families, but what about the opportunities to do so for strangers or people who may have hurt us?
- D. Let's Pray the following prayer: Dear wonderful and awesome God, we recognize that we are citizens of your kingdom and, as such, you call us to demonstrate your kingdom to the world. One way to do that is to commit acts of unconditional and sacrificial love. Help us, O Lord, recognize opportunities to commit acts of unconditional and sacrificial love and then give us the strength & courage to take advantage of such opportunities. In Jesus' name. Amen.