month ago set off a series of protests and riots not only in the United States, but around the world. Those riots have led to the deaths of multiple police officers and even some citizens. Floyd’s death briefly interrupted the otherwise endless political bickering that has become normal. The lines have been drawn and people have taken sides and for the most part, the church has not been much different. So, what would it look like to live out kingdom principles in our current environment? Here are some ideas.

To live out kingdom values, we would first and foremost truly and deeply mourn our own spiritual poverty as we look at our lives, and the life of our nation, compared to God’s standard of righteousness recorded in the Bible. We would ask the Holy Spirit to show us our spiritual poverty, whether the attitudes God reveals in us that are displeasing to him, or because of our apathy to the suffering of other people, no matter who they are—no matter their profession, their race, their socio-economic status—no matter what. If we don’t mourn our own spiritual poverty, we’ve adopted the religion of the Pharisees, not the prophets.

As citizens of the heavenly kingdom AND citizens of this country, we would second mourn the spiritual poverty of our tribe or party or nation, or declare it altogether worthless is as ridiculous as it is unbiblical. If we are going to live and long to see righteousness done especially for those who are unable to defend themselves. That is the religion of the prophets.

To live out kingdom values in this time we must be people of a humble spirit. That means, among other things that we’re willing to listen to others and really try to understand them, which of course helps with peace-making as well. It means that we’re willing to try to understand where other people are coming from. It means that we don’t take the very worst arguments and soundbites from those who disagree with us and pretend that’s what everyone on the other side thinks. It means that we don’t treat every person with any given category as though they represent the whole. It means that not everyone with dark skin thinks or acts the same way. It means that not everyone who wears a uniform thinks and acts the same way. Just because there are priests or pastors who are pedophiles doesn’t mean I’m one. If we’re unwilling to humbly listen to others, and try to be fair to them, we’ve adopted the religion of the Pharisees, not the prophets.

To live out kingdom values in this time we must be people who are merciful. That cannot happen unless we are aware of the mercy we’ve received and that can only happen by mourning our own spiritual poverty. The lack of mercy people show on both sides of whatever issue you’re talking about is stunning. Showing mercy to those who are suffering is the religion of the prophets. Showing disregard for the suffering of others because they are different or because we think they deserve it the religion of the Pharisees. You know why I should be merciful? Because if God didn’t show me mercy, I’d be destroyed and sent to hell straightway. So to think that I would look at another person and fail to show them mercy because they deserve the pain they are enduring is evidence that I don’t really think I’ve received mercy at all and that is the religion of the Pharisees.

To live out kingdom values in this time we must be people who hunger and thirst and call for righteousness to be done. I realize the issues we face are complicated, but there are times when it’s pretty clear what’s right and what’s wrong. It’s wrong to pin a man to the ground and choke him in the process. It’s wrong to shoot a 77 year old man. If we respond the same way everyone else does, then everything Jesus said is useless to us because it doesn’t really make a difference unless we do something with it.

Conclusion
If you know me at all, I pray that you know my heart. I’m grieved not just because of the issues we’re facing as a nation, but because it seems like all too often we as Christians respond the same way everyone else does who don’t claim to be citizens of the kingdom. If we respond to these issues the same way everyone else does, then we have adopted the religion of the Pharisees and completely failed to be salt and light in the world. If we respond the same way everyone else does, then everything Jesus said is useless to us because it doesn’t really make a difference unless we do something with it.
Good morning! It’s great to see you all here. This is the fifth message in our series working our way through the Sermon on the Mount. This morning I’m going to do something different. Rather than looking at Matthew 5:21-26, in which Jesus addresses hatred and murder, I want to take a one-week break and apply what we’ve already talked about in the Sermon on the Mount. You might remember when we started this series that I asked you to be thinking about what it would look like for us to live out the Sermon on the Mount in kingdoms of this world. That’s what we’re going to do this week.

There are at least a couple of reasons I want to do this. One, I’ve received a number of questions from people related to current events. To this point, I’ve not said anything specifically related to the issues that have taken our nation and world by storm. To be perfectly honest, I’m sick almost to death of the torrent of endless words being lobbed back and forth like grenades between people who are far more interested in talking than listening. So, be very clear, I’m not going to tell you what I personally think about all of these issues. Instead, I’d like to try to apply some of the truths of the Sermon on the Mount to the issues around us with the understanding that Bible-believing Christians can disagree on some of these things.

Two, I began this series with the last passage in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven,” and “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord’ did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers’ (Matthew 7:21-23).” Jesus went on to tell his listeners that unless they actually did what he said, then none of what he said would be of no use to them at all. If we don’t apply the Sermon on the Mount to the way we think about and engage with issues like racism, violence, and politics, then the Sermon on the Mount does absolutely no good whatsoever. I’d like to pray before we get started.

**Right vs. Righteousness**

Since I want to stick to the passages of the Sermon on the Mount that we’ve already talked about, I’d like to anchor my comments to the three places Jesus talks about righteousness and I’ll reference Jesus’ other teaching as needed. First, in Matthew 5:6, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Second, in Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because you are mine. 12Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Third, in Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, “I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The beatitudes, and in general the Sermon on the Mount, is in many ways about righteousness. First, it’s about being righteous before God, which is a gift given to us through faith in Jesus, who kept the law for us (Romans 3:21). Second, it’s about living a righteous life and seeking righteousness in the world around us. The gift of righteousness leads to a life of righteousness described in the beatitudes or in the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5. What’s fascinating is that in these few short verses, Jesus gives us an example of biblical righteousness and an example of counterfeit righteousness, both of which help to bring clarity to a somewhat thorny issue.

In verses 10-12, where Jesus talks about being persecuted because of righteousness, he tells his followers to rejoice when they are persecuted because the same thing happened to the prophets. In other words, the prophets modeled true righteousness. They modeled what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Likewise, in verse 20, where Jesus talks about what’s required to enter the kingdom of heaven, he tells his listeners that their righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. In other words, if our righteousness is no better than the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, we won’t enter the kingdom of heaven. The prophets hungered and thirsted for righteousness. The Pharisees and teachers of the law hungered and thirsted to be right, and to be seen to be right. What’s the difference?

**Prophets & Pharisees**

First, let’s talk about biblical righteousness as exemplified by the prophets. True biblical and prophetic righteousness begins by mourning our own spiritual poverty, which Jesus saw when he compared ourselves to God’s law. It’s true that the prophets decried the lack of righteousness in the people and nations around them, but that’s not where it started. Isaiah 1 begins with a word spoken against God’s people. Isaiah 6:5 records Isaiah’s recognition of his own sin. He sees when we compare ourselves to God’s law. “I am so ashamed! I am so disgraced! I, a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” The first oracle against any nation other than Israel comes in Isaiah 10. Ezekiel was called to prophesy both to the people of Israel and to Ezekiel. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” The first oracle against any nation is not until 2:3. The first oracle against the nations is not until Ezekiel 25. Daniel 9 contains a lengthy prayer of repentance for Daniel and God’s people and although he prophesies about the nations, he doesn’t offer any oracles against them. The prophets were sent to the people of God because, as Peter says, “It’s time for judgment to begin with the house of God (1 Peter 4:7).”

Second, there are the Pharisees. You know what you never read in all of the New Testament? You never read about the Pharisees repenting of their sin. They pray to God and thank God they’re not like other people (Luke 18:9-14). They told people who were suffering that their suffering was because of their sin, when Jesus said otherwise (John 9:34). They claimed to be leaders, but were actually blind (Matthew 23:16). They made sure everyone knew they were right in all of the ways that people could see. In fact, Jesus said, they were like tombs that looked nice on the outside but were full of death on the inside (Matthew 23:27). They found a way to do what they wanted to do, what benefited them, and make it look right as well, so that instead of helping their parents as they were supposed to do, they declared that the help they would have given to their parents was devoted to God (Mark 7:11). They could quote God’s word as well or better than anyone else, but they weren’t interested in righteousness as God saw it. They were interested in preserving their status and influence and were happy to use God’s word to help in the process.

True righteousness, the religion of the prophets, leads to humility. That leads us to listen rather than just talk. That leads us to see and point out and repent of our failures before we look to anyone else to be merciful rather than judgmental, or apathetic or mean-spirited. It leads us to work to alleviate the suffering of those around us. It led Amos to say, “let justice roll down like waters (Amos 5:24)”! It led him to call for change as it related to the treatment of the poor (Amos 5:11), dishonesty, and exploitation. It led Micah to call for righteousness instead of building “Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong (Micah 3:3, 9, 10).” The prophets cried out against unfair labor practices, coercion, bribery, dishonesty, legal technicalities, and violence. What’s more, the prophets cried out against their own people—their tribe! They didn’t spare any one just because that person was on their team. The prophet Nathan cried out against the greatest king in Israel’s history—David himself—when David acted wickedly.

**Racism, Policing, Politics**

So, if I can, let me just offer some thoughts about what our nation and world is facing in light of these truths. The death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer just over a