



AGAINST THE RULES

Psalm 72:1-7; Isaiah 11:1-10; Matt 3:1-12; Rom 15:4-13

GETTING STARTED

What "rules" did you have follow growing up as a kid?

Are you more of a rule follower or a rule bender?

READ AND REFLECT

Read Isaiah 11:1-10 and Romans 15:4-13

Consider the Context of Isaiah (around 740 B.C.):

Israel was rapidly moving from a people of *interdependence* to one of *independence*. Over the years, a wider and wider chasm grew between people who had once seen themselves as members of one family. The wealthiest members of society became increasingly insulated from the vast majority of citizens who lived a hand-to-mouth existence. A growing class of poor people became increasingly hopeless, desperate, and violent. Gradually, profound resentments grew up between the segments of Israeli society.

In time, even religion no longer held people together. Israel's ancient faith became diluted by other belief systems which favored a personal spirituality that didn't require allegiance to any one god or regular involvement in a certain community of faith to be practiced. From top to bottom, Israel increasingly became a society of self-protecting, self-advancing people -- alienated from one another and from the God who'd given them life. The law of interdependence was replaced by a new rule: "*It's everyone for themselves.*"

Before jumping into 2013, how does the understanding of the context resonate with you?

Israel ultimately lead itself into ruin in 722 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians. It is here that Isaiah offers hope (Is 11:1). In this passage Isaiah challenges there “rules” of the day and looks forward to the Messiah that will usher in a different kind of Kingdom ethic.

How does the Romans passage (and consider Matt 3:1-3, 11—4:17) connect with the Isaiah passage?

ENGAGE AND DISCUSS

“At Christmas long ago, there came into this world One who was willing to take issue with the rules of earthly kingdoms, even if that meant being punished as a traitor. Jesus knew there was coming a Kingdom before which all the shallow rules of this world would pass away. In that kingdom the resentments, appearances, and enmities that rule this world will be no more. All we'll see then is a steadfast love, a community of brothers and sisters, a fellowship of former enemies, forever and ever, amen. Now and then, often around Christmas, someone wakes up to that reality. He or she realizes that it might just make more sense to live *now* by the *eternal* principles of God's kingdom than by the *passing* rules of this one.” -- Dan Meyer

Isaiah's passage reveal three “rules” that Christ ultimately shatters:

- Rule of Rejection (Is 11:5)
- Rule of Appearances (Is 11:3-4)
- Rule of Enmity (Is 11:6-9)

What “rules” of culture do you feel pressure to live by today (whether these or others)?

What “rules” of the Kingdom of God do see, that if lived out as Jesus Followers, would impact first the church and then the world around it?

NEXT STEPS

Prayer this prayer each day this week as you reflect on the Lectionary passages:

Great God, help us to believe more in the principles of your kingdom than in the rules of human society. Create in us a heart like Jesus has for the people from whom resentments, or appearance, or enmities may hitherto have kept us away. Then send us, your Body on earth, out into this Christmas season to remind our world what kind of King has truly come. Amen.