

Upside-Down Kingdom

John 18:33-38

Earthly kingdoms are temporary, but God's Kingdom is eternal

*Pray for Afghanistan (and Haiti)

-I have been studying Intercultural Studies the last several years. I spent time in Central America, Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.
Covid protocol in Belize, Mexico, India, etc.

-By the grace of God you were born in a free country or ended up here...but this is not our HOME

-Earthly kingdoms: The kingdoms of this world are broken. The history of the world is wrought with wars, bloodshed, and oppression.

Earthly kingdoms are temporary, but God's Kingdom is eternal.

-People today are so focused on the temporal. How can I make it to the top? How can I follow my dreams? How can I be great?

-We try to fill our lives with so many things in order to be happy, but this temporal world was never meant to make us happy.
We settle for so very little in order to give our lives meaning and purpose.

-We base our happiness on how many likes a social media post gets, or my favorite show is renewed for another season, or if my team wins. We are unhappy when a post doesn't receive any likes, my favorite show is cancelled, or my team loses.

- In this day and age, our desires are so misguided, not just with people out there but with people in here!

"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." –CS Lewis *The Weight of Glory*

-You see the earthly kingdoms we inhabit are finite and fleeting and so are the things we spend the majority of our time doing.

Text: John 18:33-38 - Jesus came to flip all of that on its head. (He came to seek and save the lost and to give us life to the full)

33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” **34** Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” **35** Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” **36** Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” **37** Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” **38** Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” (will come back to passage later)

Q. What is truth? (sarcastically, rhetorically, or seriously) Is there an objective standard of truth or is it just relative?

What is true, among the fake news, lies, stretching of the truth, and utter confusion of the last year and a half.

- Because of how much the truth has been muddled, we have become cynical and suspicious.

1. **When truth is hard to find, we must cling to the truths of Scripture.**

During the Summer Growth Group teaching with students, we have been studying the Kingdom parables - mustard seed/leaven, hidden treasure/pearl of great value, or the lost sheep/lost coin found in Matthew 13.

Matt. 13 ESV

31 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32** It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” **33** He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

Q. Why is the kingdom compared to a mustard seed and leaven? Because it goes from minuscule to mighty. There is gradual growth. Before you know it has become the largest thing around.

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**45** “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, **46** who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Q. Why is the kingdom compared to hidden treasure and a pearl of great value? Because it is hard to find but worth obtaining at all costs.

Matthew 7:13-14

13 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. **14** For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (this seems backwards or upside down)

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Matt. 10:39, 16:25, and Luke 17:33 all say, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Is this a contradiction or paradox?

paradox - a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.

Look up references: upside-down kingdom

1. The last will be first and first will be last (Matt. 20:16)
2. The greatest among you will be your servant (Matt. 23:11)
3. Blessed are the persecuted... (Matt. 5:10) Sermon on the mount - so counter cultural (don't seem to make sense with the way the world works)
4. He must increase but I must decrease (go down to go up) (John 3:30)
5. When I am weak, then am I strong (II Corinthians 12:10)
6. Die in order to truly live (Phil 1:21, Matthew 16:24-25)
7. God exalts the humble and humbles the exalted (I Peter 5:6, Ezekiel 21:26)

-Happening almost on a weekly basis (the meteoric rise and epic fall of leaders today)

*character over charisma (CT podcast)

Enter Jesus - the perfect, sinless leader

*Back to the text

- Most certainly Pilate had heard of Jesus but wanted to meet Him for himself to assess if He were an actual threat.

vv. 33-35 He questions Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews? What have you done?"

v. 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (*kosmos or cosmos*)

1. **When truth is hard to find, we must cling to the truths of Scripture.**
2. **The kingdom of God is not of this world.**

-Pilate must have been utterly confused. He was used to squashing rebellions and keeping order, but Jesus was not a threat to him.

Q. So why were the Jews so upset?

-Surely Pilate knew about the Maccabean revolt led by Judas Maccabeus, “the hammer,” less than 200 hundred years before when the Greeks were ruling over the Jews. (*Josephus - see Antiquities of the Jews)

Judas Maccabeus led thousands of Jews to fight against the Seleucid Empire after one of their kings sacrificed a pig to Zeus in the Jewish Temple. At this point, he and his followers had had enough. They fought to take the Temple back. They cleansed the temple and Judas was made high priest. He killed thousands, some believed he was the Messiah. Of course he died like every other man before him. But when Jews thought about what the Messiah looked like, I’m sure many of them had Judas Maccabeus in their minds, a fighting warrior type king.

-The Jewish people were looking for this kind of leadership in their king and Messiah.

You see with Jesus, “Pilate expected to meet a sullen or belligerent rebel and met instead the calm majesty of confident superiority” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary)

Some of Jesus’ followers wanted to make Him their earthly King after the feeding of the 5000. see John 6:14-15

14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” **15** Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

On the night Jesus was arrested, even Peter tried to use force and even violence to stop this from happening.

see John 18:10-11

10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) **11** So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (what was Jesus doing, why was he allowing Himself to be taken captive?)

-Simon the Zealot most certainly had these same violent inclinations.

-Violence and force is how earthly kingdoms are established.

v. 37 Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

1. **When truth is hard to find, we must cling to the truths of Scripture.**
2. **The kingdom of God is not of this world.**
3. **Followers of Jesus must bear witness to the truth.**

-Since Jesus is the Truth, we must be advocates for the truth (in a world drowning in lies, deception, and manipulation).

-We must do our part to share the truth.

He is a king, but His kingdom is not of this world.

-Connection to John 3: Jesus speaking to Nicodemus (unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God).

Q. What do we mean by the Kingdom of God?

Matthew is a favorite Gospel of mine. Here is a kingdom overview.

Kingdom of God - God's realm of rule in heaven and earth.

Matt 6:10 - Our Father....Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (bringing heaven to earth)

Matt 6:33 - But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"The person who does not seek the Kingdom first does not seek it at all, regardless of how worthy the idolatry that he or she has substituted for it." -Richard J Foster

Luke 9 - it's not easy to seek the kingdom first.

61 Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Luke 10 - to His disciples

8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. **9** Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' **10** But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, **11** 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that **the kingdom of God has come near.**'

Luke 17 - to the Pharisees

20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, **21** nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, **the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.**"

-The kingdom of God is not just something in the future, the kingdom of God is here...now.

Daniel speaks about an eternal kingdom.

Hebrews speaks of a kingdom that is not shaken.

-When we worship, fellowship, make disciples, and live on mission we are literally bringing heaven to earth.

***Emma interview - seeking to bring heaven to earth.**

Introduction

1. What did you do this summer in La Paz, Mexico?
2. What are some things that God taught you and how did you grow because of this experience? (challenges too)
3. How did God use you to live on mission in Mexico?
4. Could you share a specific story of this from the summer?

Earthly kingdoms are temporary but God's Kingdom is eternal.

Yet for many people today, what's going on in the world is their sole focus. Even many people in the church are caught up in fear of the virus or in fear of our freedom's being taken away that we have lost sight of the Kingdom of God. Do not be anxious.

We can take the pandemic seriously while not living in fear and we can fight for our rights and freedoms while still loving our neighbors. It doesn't have to be either/or it can be both/and.

1. **When truth is hard to find, we must cling to the truths of Scripture.**
2. **The kingdom of God is not of this world.**
3. **Followers of Jesus must bear witness to the truth.**
4. **It doesn't matter how bad things get, we are still called to faithfulness.**

***Action Steps:**

-As Christians we are called to bear witness to the truth: the truths of Scripture, sharing the Gospel but we are also called to tell the truth

1. **Don't confuse opinions and personal convictions with Biblical convictions and absolute truth.**

Ever since 2020, Christians have been spewing their opinions like they are Biblical truth and "these things ought not to be so."

Whether we want to believe it or not, our consciences are, in fact, affected by our culture, the voices we listen to, and the info we let in.

Yes, believers have the Holy Spirit of God, but discernment is still very much needed (this may sound vague).

Q. What do we do about masks, vaccines, who to vote for, etc.?

-My personal convictions and opinions. (You can always ask me about them later.)

-There is much going on in our culture today where we must apply Romans 14 to secondary issues while loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

-Sacrificial love for others trumps individual soul liberty (Phil 2, Eph. 5).

-At the same time, we must speak out on issues that Scripture is clear on, but part of our job is to be discerning and to know and understand the difference.

2. Because the kingdom of God is not of this world, our main focus should not be earthly things

-If it is true that every person who has ever lived will exist for eternity with God or apart from Him, then we must share that news with everyone around us. No, we do not just wait around until that happens.

-We are called to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. We are called to be good citizens and neighbors, to contribute to society and the greater good of our communities. We are called to teach our children about God and Jesus' sacrifice for them. We are called to make disciples of all nations and prepare ourselves and others for His return.

Quote:

"If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this." -CS Lewis

-Here again is a paradox and the Savior we serve is our prime example of this.

Paradox: the Son of God born in a manger and one day crucified on the cross.

"I find no guilt in him," he declared (John 18:38). But as it turns out, the Jews got their wish. Jesus received the death penalty for treason.

But (as one author puts it) "It is *through* being defeated by earthly powers that Jesus conquered the spiritual forces of evil and set up his kingdom. It's an upside-down kingdom where leaders are servants, neighbors and enemies are loved, and poor widows give away half their money. Under the Lordship of King Jesus, humility is exalted, the first shall be last,

offenders are forgiven 70 times 7, and ethnic outsiders kneel down to help ½ dead strangers lying in a ditch (as Jason Crosby shared last week).

The way of Jesus is countercultural. It is upside-down and inside-out—a kingdom, where weakness is power, power is weakness, and suffering leads to glory.”

-The kingdoms of this world are fleeting, but the kingdom of God will last forever.

-And just as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ’s first coming, we are **forerunners** to Christ’s second coming (a kingdom fully realized).

Upside-down Kingdom

*This doesn’t make sense...and that’s the point!

Q. Do you want to be great in the Kingdom of God?

***Randy Matya Story** (served for 25 years as deacon and 36 years as the financial secretary) “If you want to be somebody, if you want to be great in the kingdom of God, then serve as Jesus did.”

3. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, then serve like Jesus did.

Special Prayer Time

Closing Song

Closing Prayer