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Session 3 Outline: Ministry in the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is like leaven. It enters into a reality and it works away. It has a life of its own. And the thing that saved my faith in Christ was the teaching about the Kingdom of God that I found and began to see work in **Mark 4:26-29**: "...the seed sports up and grows. How, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself."

This means that as a minister and a Christian, **I** do not have to make it happen. I learned that the more I tried to make it happen, the less it would work. What I had to do was to speak the Word and live in the Kingdom and let the results take care of themselves. When I would do that, I would begin to see change in the people I was ministering to. **But I had to get out of God's way, and let the kingdom work, and count on the life that is in the Word of the Kingdom.** I learned not to try to get people to do anything. I could get out of the business of making things happen.

Do I still win souls? Yes. It is more in terms of putting the sickle in, of watching for people who need a little help at a certain transition. But most of what I'm doing is watching the seed grow. Plant the seed, watch it grow. Paul used the metaphor of watering and cultivating. **You don't make it happen.** That is one of the most important things for us to understand if we are to participate in The Divine Conspiracy as leaders and ministers, is to have confidence in the power of the Word of the Kingdom.

We need to convey the idea that there is a Kingdom of God that we can seek and find through Jesus Christ. If someone wants to find the Kingdom, I should present Jesus to them. I should talk about Him. I should speak about *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. I should magnify Him and lift Him up and say the wonderful things about Him that are true of Him, and keep that before people's minds. That is the way to bring people to the point of understanding the Kingdom and to bring them to the point where they are prepared to enter the Kingdom of God.

Jesus taught about the Kingdom constantly. *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else that you need will be added."* What a glorious promise! Now what does it mean?

The Nature of God

[7:30]

We must start with the nature of God because it is His kingdom. The Kingdom is a spiritual reality. The Word of the Kingdom is a spiritual reality - it has a life of its own. In John 6, Jesus insulted the Jewish people by saying they had to eat His flesh and drink His blood or there would be no life in them.

- **(John 6:63)**. "*The Words that I speak to you are spirit, they are life.*" Through the words He spoke, He communicated His substance as a person. He was the bread of life, the water... This means you participate in His *substance* by taking in His word. They are *spirit*, they are *life*.

Passages about what God is Like:

1. God is Spirit - Ex. 3:14

It's important to get this translation right. Not "I Am Who I Am."

"I Am *that* I Am" really means "My being rests on My being."

In other words, "I do not depend on anything else." God is a totally self-sufficient being. Without that, you don't have God. You have something *under* something else.

- Everything we know that is *physical* depends on something else.
- Being self-sufficing, is what characterizes God as Spirit.
- We have a little of this in our spirit. We call it freedom. This is our will – the part of us that relates us to God. By tying your will into God, you are in a position to carry out your responsibility before God to govern on His behalf. This element of spirit distinguishes you as an individual and *makes you count uniquely* for what God is doing in creating in the world and sustaining it.

Spirit is un-bodily, personal power. Your spirit is not bodily. That's why the learned world and professional world generally will not talk about 'freedom' today.

Example: It is rarely said that the high divorce rate is because people *choose* to get divorced. They think in terms of *causes*. Causation is the only category of analysis of human life. That is one reason why moral knowledge disappears, because moral knowledge has to do with the will and the character as coming out of the will. Whether or not you are a good person or a bad person, do what is right morally or do your duty, it is a matter of your *choice*, not a matter of *causation*. Of course some causation is involved, but an action requires more than just conditions which make it possible. It requires a choice.

The category of the *spirit* is a scandal to the modern world. This is a straight forward assault on the 1st and 2nd of the Ten Commandments in a world that does not acknowledge God.

Naturally, since God is self-sufficing...

2. God is Life Giving - John 5:26

[15:36]

- The Father has life in himself and the son also.
- Life comes from God. He gives it and sustains it.

Life is self initiating, self sustaining, self directing activity.

- God is the only one who has that kind of life.
- "God is in Himself a sweet society" - **John 17:5**
God is in Himself a being that is too Many to be One, and too One to be Many.

Personality is never meant to be individual as we understand it. All the categories of human relations are meant to go much deeper.

"Casual sex" is a perversion of what a person is. I can I be that close to a person and be "casual"? The way to get out of sexual temptation is by understanding what the other person is, and understanding the kind of relationship that is meant to hold between persons.

Our problem with the Trinity is not so much with the Trinity as it is with the of understanding persons.

John 17:22-26 - *"The glory which you have given me I have given them that they may be one just as we are one..."*

- The nature of God is love, and the mark of a disciple is love. - **John 13:34-35**

Do I really want that? How am I going to sustain *myself* if human relations are that tight?

Love comes from the Father, Son and Spirit into the life of the individual, and then can be experienced as perfect freedom. Not "freedom" in the atomistic and individualistic terms of our culture.

- The Trinity extends its kind of love through the redeemed community.

I Corinthians 13 – Love is an expression of the profundity of the Trinity. It requires that a person submit themselves to God and receive Agape from Him. This chapter talks about what *love* does, not what *you* do. You are not going to do this; Love is. You submit yourself to Love. Remember that "love" doesn't just mean desire.

- When we think about the Kingdom of God, we have to understand that out of God's operation He will bring a group of people who have the quality of the Trinity in terms of their unity in love. He will bring out of human history a community of every tongue, tribe and nation to play a major role in the future of the universe.

What does all this mean in the light of the nature of personality and the nature of God? [27:00]

Ephesians 3:8-10

v.8 - *"Unfathomable riches of Christ ... the mystery hidden in God."*

- A mystery in the New Testament is something that has been hidden and is now revealed. What has been hidden and revealed is God's world-wide plan of redemption to include *all* nations, tribes and tongues.

v. 10 - *"In order that the manifold wisdom of God now may be made known through the church (the called-out group) to the rulers and authorities in the Heavenly places (greater spiritual beings that have a place in the cosmos)."*

- These spiritual beings do not understand the greatness of God, they don't understand redemption, and what God is doing. But they will understand the manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God through the Church to the rulers in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 2:7, *"...in order that in the ages (eons, millennia) to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

- This means the Church is a revelation *to the universe* of the greatness of God.
- This is God's ultimate intention with the Kingdom of God and human beings' place in it.

I Corinthians 6:1-3

Paul is talking about the shame of a church not able to adjudicate disagreements among themselves.

- The church in the New Testament was very different from what it has become in other times.
- Paul says we shall "judge" angels. The concept of a judge in the Bible is much larger than in a trial where judgement is being passed, but also includes positions of government over the angels.
- This goes with **Revelation 22:5** *"Through ages of ages ...they shall reign for ever and ever."*

3. God's Ultimate Intentions and Things Yet Unknown [33:10]

We really don't know God's ultimate intention for us yet.

- Whoever made this earth and universe can make streets of gold. Just rearrange the elements that make up gold.
- Turning water into wine is not a problem. If you made the water in the first place, you can do wine.

If you have the assumption that God created the present universe, streets of gold or gates of pearl shouldn't trouble you. People who are bothered by the "fantastic" nature of the world to come are not long on logic, they are short on imagination, because there's really no logical problem with it *if you assume God*. If you don't assume God, forget it. Because then all that is left is human beings and nature as they know it.

Humans have tried to do things like this with no success. But the nature of the human will is never meant to run independently of God who made it and the world in which it lives.

We don't know all the details, but God's ultimate intention for us is declared and stands out, and that is a part of His Kingdom for us.

The Kingdom of God Throughout the Bible

[36:00]

The Bible hangs together around the progressive *with-ness* that you see in God's relation in His kingdom to human beings individually and in groups. Think about how God's with-ness proceeds from Genesis to Revelation.

- Adam and Eve - His intention was to be with them, but they chose to hide from Him and he allowed that.
- Noah - The destruction of living things on the earth, and a new covenant established.
- Isaac - God was with him in such a way that goodness was manifest in his life to such a degree that his neighbors were scared of him. He prospered to such an extent, that they asked him to move away. Then they wanted to make a covenant with him, "Because we see that God is with you."
- **Exodus 29:46** - The Tabernacle was so God could consecrate his people and be with them without destroying them. It was a means of mediation so people could come to and go from Him. Before the Tabernacle, they had altars, but this did not allow a people to come to God in a way that they could have a life together in His Kingdom.
- Think about how this developed throughout the history of Israel: Temple, Destruction, Exile. Transfer of mediation from a building the Tabernacle to the Temple to a written Word and the Rabbinic Judaism that dominates at the time of Jesus and now it is the Torah and the rituals of family and Temple that continues today.

Christ came to break God's kingdom out of cultural captivity. The big issue in the book of Acts is whether one can be a Christian and not a Jew. The word "Christian" emerged out of Antioch because of non-Jewish believers.

The system of mediation that had been present up to the time of Jesus was now set aside. The new system of mediation was one simple thing - Jesus. Paul says, "*There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.*" The whole thing is thrown open to all nations, and all that is required is simply the presence of Jesus. The Kingdom is present with Him. If you have Him, you have the Kingdom.

There was a whole battle that went on among the Jewish Christians about this, and there was a battle between Jesus and the Jews. He said things that would get him killed. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "*You compass land and sea to make one proselyte and when you got him you make him two-fold more a child of hell than you yourselves are.*" (**Matthew 23:24**)

This set me on my ear as a young Southern Baptist minister. How am I bringing people into the Kingdom of God? (It may turn out you're just trying to make Southern Baptists.) I had to think about how I am bringing people into the Kingdom of God. If you bring people into the Kingdom of God, that presupposes a different view of what disciple means. Frankly, there wasn't much said about being a "disciple" in that setting. That's a part of the whole idea that you can be a Christian without being a disciple. Certainly, you can be a Baptist without being a disciple. I knew a lot of them. I was clawing my way out of that position myself. That's a part of realizing that God now has opened the door in a new way, and He's taken the Kingdom of God out of a strictly cultural and institutional setting and put it on the basis of a personal relationship of being *with* God.

We cannot underestimate this. When we think about social issues and social justice, we have to remember that the real issue is "loving your neighbor as yourself," and what happens if your neighbor is not one of your kind.

Colossians 3:11-14, "*No Greek, no Jew, no Circumcision, no Barbarian, no Scythian, no Slave, no Free, but Christ is all and in all.*"

Distinctions are blotted out. God's intended "with-ness" goes beyond all human barriers. Human barriers continue to be among the things that cause the most evil and grief among human beings.

The Church itself is presented as the dwelling place of God. God has designed His people as His dwelling place and that is going to continue throughout eternity. **Rev. 22** takes you back to that.

The Problem of Meaning in Human Life [50:01]

Life in the Kingdom of God solves that problem. The problem of meaning in life is the problem of why things matter, of what they lead to, and whether or not they lead to anything that is of enduring worth.

If things are meaningful, they carry you. They give you life and strength. "Meaningful work" is work that counts for something.

The mark of the presence of meaning in life is precisely a kind of energy and direction that makes life not something you have to carry by willpower. You're able to more joyously, in a stronger way, do the things you need to do because they have meaning. They lead to something.

The Kingdom of God comes and says, "Enter the Kingdom, live in the Kingdom, allow your life to count for things that are good, permanent, enduring, lasting forever." That enables one to begin to live on a different plain.

That presupposes the Kingdom is real. It is not just imaginary. As you interact with the Kingdom, that carries you, gives you strength, gives you direction. And that means power that we must learn to deal with.

Luke 11:20 – Jesus says, *"If I cast out demons, know the Kingdom has come upon you."*

- That power and reality that is seen in His life should also be seen in the presence of His people.
- Signs and Wonders are not the gospel, but they are the natural expression of the presence of the Kingdom. They are given to Christ's people to meet real needs.

The Threefold Ministry of Jesus in the Kingdom [52:30]

There were three things Jesus did with reference to the kingdom: Preaching, Teaching and Manifesting the Kingdom.

He proclaimed it; announced it.

"The Kingdom is at hand." He did not bring it into existence, but He proclaimed the new availability of the Kingdom.

Matt 9:35 – Jesus went about Preaching, Teaching & Healing (Manifesting)

I Corinthians 4:20 – Paul says, *"The Kingdom is not in word but in power."* That is the capacity to do things. The Word of the Kingdom produces a kind of life or results. That's power.

- **Remember, spirit is un-bodily** (non physical) **personal** (consists of thoughts, feelings, will) **power**. You're dealing with a person. When Jesus goes about proclaiming, teaching and manifesting, he is living in relationship to a personal reality which is the Kingdom of God. That's why we don't have mechanical results; because it's a personal negotiation and a personal relationship. That gives you involvement in a meaningful life that is lived in the Kingdom of God, with results that last for eternity.

Meaningful Life for a Believer

[57:30]

The Love and Purpose of God for us. We are embedded in His eternal life. What makes our life eternal is involvement in His eternal life.

Romans 8:28ff

The hard things turn to our good when we have a vision of life in the Kingdom.

II Corinthians 4:16, *"outward man is perishing. Our inward man is being renewed day by day. We look not to the things that are temporal but to the eternal."*

We are carried forward by meaning. We should be living a *dramatic* life. This refers to the ups and downs of meaningful existence in the pursuit of good against opposition.

Jesus' Teaching on the Gospel of the Kingdom

[1:00:38]

- **Matthew 3** - John the Baptist, *"Repent, the Kingdom of Heavens is at hand."*
- **Mt. 4:17** - Same message, same words from Jesus
- **Mt. 5** - The order of the passage begins and ends with the Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes are basically a proclamation of the Kingdom of God.
- **Mt. 9:35-38** - What Jesus did when he went about teaching the Kingdom of God.
- **Mt. 13** - Parables are stories of the Kingdom (parallel passages in Luke) The transition into the Kingdom from the Jewish system.
- **Mt. 11** - Until John the Baptist, the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed as the officially appointed doorway into the Kingdom of God. Since John the Baptist, the gospel of the Kingdom is preached. People came by force into the Kingdom, meaning they didn't stand on Jewish proprieties.

Examples from **Matthew 8**:

- * Leper *"Jesus, if you would, you could make me clean."* Jesus touched him with a human touch. The leper did not stand on proprieties.
- * Roman Centurion - He understood that Jesus was working with Kingdom power.
- **Luke 16:16** - People are crowding into the Kingdom.
- **Matthew 21:43** - *The Kingdom shall be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it.* The book of **Acts** was a description of how Mt. 21:43 was carried out. The Kingdom of God was

no longer in the Jews' peculiar possession to make it available to the world.

- **John 3:5** - "You can't see the Kingdom unless you're born from above." Not just "born again," born from *above*. Now, entry into the Kingdom is not mediated through any human institution. The whole passage is an illustration of the gospel of the Kingdom of God and how it now bypasses human institutions entirely. "*Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (**Romans 10:13**)

The Church and the Kingdom

[1:09:00]

The church does not omit the kingdom; it is present in the church.

Romans 14:17 - "*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*"

What happens in the church that keeps us from being a discipling body of Christ? We are distracted. These people were distracted about eating.

Paul says, "Don't worry about that."

In church matters, we want to understand that the Kingdom of God is manifested by a kind of righteousness or goodness, peace and joy, that can only be supernaturally produced.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God is the announcement that God is here, that anyone who wants to find Him can come through Jesus Christ, and find the Kingdom of God.

Seek First the Kingdom of God

[1:11:23]

Matthew 6:33 - How do you seek the Kingdom of God?

Find out what God is doing, and do that.

How do you find out what God is doing?

Observe Jesus Christ. Look at Him. Listen to what He said. Watch what He did. That's what God is doing. Now do that where you are, and you will find the Kingdom of God and the kind of righteousness that God has. When you find that everything else you need will be provided. Look at the 23rd Psalm - "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not lack.*" It's the same thing. Now we have a person to point to and say, "that's where you can find it." We can't just rest in the name. We have to move to the reality and the presence of the Kingdom.