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Session 4 Outline: Kingdom Gospel

What the Kingdom Is

The great problem that faces people who try to talk about the gospel and especially about the Kingdom is that "Kingdom" talk invariably becomes enmeshed in social and political issues. This is the same as it was in Jesus' day. They could not conceptualize what it would mean for Jesus to be King other than as the king of a political order.

In the first chapter of Acts, Jesus is preparing to ascend to the right hand of the Father. (Side note: This is an actual place in the universe. Jesus is still there, and he is still here.) The disciples were still asking Jesus, "*Will you restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (**Acts 1:6**) They meant, "Are you going to get a government in Israel that is capable of whipping everybody?" Having observed what he could do, they had reason to believe that if he wanted to do that he could. Think of what he could have done with his powers in terms of weapons. But he knew nothing could be gained that way. Just to reassert himself in a human kingdom would have done nothing for the project of history that God had put afoot in the Divine Conspiracy.

You have to be an *ontologist*, in a certain manner, if you're going to understand the scripture. An ontologist understands "being" – what it is to be, and what kinds of things there are.

The Kingdom of God is simply God's ruling - His governing.

What Jesus came to preach was not *that there is* a Kingdom of God. What he came to make available was *entry into* the Kingdom of God. Everyone knew there was a Kingdom of God, and they were looking for it to become a political reality on earth where the promises of God to the Jewish nation would be fulfilled.

Three Kingdoms

[7:00]

1. The Kingdom of God is simply the Person of God and the instrumentalities by which He rules. These instrumentalities include God's own direct action, His Spirit, His Son, His Word, angels, the Church, godly people.
2. There's also your kingdom and mine. And the biggest threat to the Kingdom of God in my life is my kingdom.

3. And there's a kingdom of darkness.

These three kingdoms are what make up the scene of human life. 2 and 3 are kingdoms that are carrying out the will of human beings and of darker agents, all of whom are against the will of God.

Let that soak in: The Kingdom of God is God acting.

Some of His actions are not things He has to attend to all the time. God's will is expressed in arrangements – laws that he has laid down so things behave in certain ways, and creation runs by those. The responsibility we have as human beings is to learn those laws, how to live by them and how to be responsible in the production of good that is appropriate to human beings given the nature and place that we have.

The only thing outside of the will of God are rebellious human and angelic wills. Everything else conforms to the will of God.

Another thing we need to say about the Kingdom of God is that it is not "in your heart." It is *in reality* and your heart is *in it*. It's not a political order, and it's not a warm thought in your heart; it is God reigning, God ruling.

We don't want to be sticklers about the language. Many times in the church we've had the reality of the Kingdom without the language. What is essential is not the language, but the reality.

- Puritans and Pietists understood the offer in Christ to be something that included your whole life. That is the crucial point.
- *If you're preaching a gospel that does not mean redemption for your whole life, you haven't got the right one.* [10:43]
- Paul - "*Above all things put on love which is the bond of perfection.*" (**Col. 3:1-17**) There are wonderful progressions here and in Romans 5, and 2 Peter 1 - all culminating in Agape love - the bond of perfectness. Wouldn't you like to go to a church like that? Why don't we do these things? "*Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father in him.*"
 - "In the name of..." means do it on his behalf and from his resources.

That's the vision of the Kingdom. We don't need to get sticky about the words. We want the reality.

Trust the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is all inclusive. It means we can trust God with everything. Whatever we let Him have charge of in our lives, He will take into the Kingdom of God. *He will take it into His ruling and reigning.* What Jesus talks about in **Matthew 6** is not just "pretty," it is sober reality. You wonder could this guy possibly be real?

Matthew 6:25-34: Jesus says, *"Don't be concerned about tomorrow. My advice to you is to just trust God. Don't worry about things...anything."* To trust Jesus means to believe he's in charge of everything you let him be in charge of. If something happens you don't like, he'll bring good out of it. If something happens that injures you, he'll turn it into something good. You can sum it up with this phrase I think the Lord gave me a long time ago—what he's really saying is:

"This world is a perfectly safe place for you to be."

How can you say that to someone who's suffering? Well, that's how big the Kingdom is. The important thing is to realize that wholeness. But don't worry about the language – if you have a better way to say it, that's fine *if you get the reality* that I am invited to take everything that pertains to me, bring it to Jesus, put it at his feet and leave it there. When you worry, you don't *leave* it there.

This is what Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:25ff – How would you price someone in "birds."

God has an order in which things fit, and you're part of that order, and you can trust that.

Matthew 6:31ff – Don't be anxious. People who don't know God are the ones who spend their time worrying about what they will eat and drink. But seek first His Kingdom: Find out what God is doing and do it with Him.

What meaning do we normally associate with *"Seek first the Kingdom of God"*? I think most folks don't associate anything with it. Maybe thinking pretty thoughts. I'm suggesting this means to find what God is doing and do it with Him. A key to that is to look at the Law and what comes forth in Jesus, and when you do this, all other things will be added.

- **Joshua 1:8** and **Psalms 1** run parallel with Matt. 6:33 [21:00]
Meditating on the Law day and night.

"Then you will make your way prosperous and have good success."

Why? Because by doing that you have aligned yourself with the Kingdom of God.

The whole human project is to get the human being aligned with what God is doing. So we do everything in the name of Jesus.

You can teach yourself to pray without ceasing by using the word of God. Try training yourself to say "Hallowed be Thy name" as you go along.

Jesus said, *"Seek first the Kingdom and everything else will be added."* And he adds a little humor: *"Don't be anxious for tomorrow, because tomorrow will have enough evil to provide for tomorrow, and you won't have to borrow any for today because you'll have enough for today to last you until tomorrow."* Don't borrow trouble from the future because you have enough for today. Turn it loose; you're living in the Kingdom of God.

Forgiveness

After the Reformation, "Forgiveness of Sins" included everything. [26:10]

This wasn't thought of in terms of just getting the guilt off, but of getting the sin off. Full redemption in Christ means you walk away from it; you don't need it anymore. "He breaks the power of *cancelled* sin and sets the prisoner free."

That understanding was something that really was "Kingdom," even though they didn't use the word, because it was all inclusive of life. That's what we're aiming for. Every moment can be holy.

II. Paul and the Gospel - "The Riches of Christ"

[28:30]

Paul saw his work as involving the proclamation of Christ.

If we proclaim Christ rightly, the effect will be to ravish people with the reality of the Kingdom. That's how you make a disciple.

- The parable of the treasure in the field.
- The parable of the Pearl of Great Price.

Once you understand who Jesus is and what it means for your life, you realize that discipleship to Jesus is the greatest opportunity you will ever have in life.

It seems very often people who profess the name of Christ do not understand the greatness of what they've been given.

- **Ephesians 3:8:** "The unsearchable riches of Christ" ("unfathomable" means you can't reach the bottom)
- In *Your God is Too Small*, JB Philips laid his finger on a chronic problem: the failure to think God is as big as He is and also the failure to understand the greatness of Christ.
- Sometimes my USC Students ask, *Why are you a disciple of Jesus?* And my answer is to ask, *Who else did you have in mind?* And I mean this seriously. Who is to be compared to Christ? Now, everyone is following somebody—important people we find as life progresses—but often people don't look much above that. People are not thinking about what is determining their lives. A good question for each of us to ask is, *"Who am I really following?"* The goodness of people ordinarily is quite fathomable, but you can't get to the bottom of Christ. There's no end to the riches.

Paul's personal standing with Christ was exceptional:

- He was nurtured on Israel and the glory of the unique covenant people (example Philippians 3), which started him out in an exalted position as a Jew.
- He had a personal encounter with Jesus that was history-making.
- He had special responsibility in teaching.
- He was the first one who "got it." He got the message of Jesus. When you look at him in contrast to the other disciples, he was distinctive.

He understood the lowliness of Jesus, the humility, that Jesus came to be a servant and not to be served, and he followed in that path.

- He experienced the glorious reality of Jesus Christ post-resurrection. He met him. After that, there were long periods of time before his public ministry where he was personally tutored by Jesus Christ, but not with Jesus in the flesh.
 - **I Cor. 15:10** – Even though he was like one born out of due season, the grace of God had worked more effectively in him than in all of them.
- He understood the hope and intention of God for to all the people on the earth. That's why he says, "this grace is given that I should preach among the Gentiles." He carried the battle of the Church beyond Judaism and enabled the church to say, "*You can be Jesus' person without being Jewish.*"

What are the Riches of Christ?

[41:25]

1. The physical cosmos belongs to Christ and is totally at his disposal.

This is one of the things where you come in contact with today's prevailing ideology. Carl Sagan opens *The Cosmos* by saying the *physical* cosmos is all there is.

Mark 6:35-44 Jesus manifested His power over matter. What does that mean about who he was?

We can turn matter into energy, but we find it very difficult to turn energy into matter. Understanding the greatness of God helps you understand why "nothing is impossible."

The disciples had not gained any insight from the incident with the loaves, and they were astonished that the storm stopped. It says their heart was hard, and that means *the stuff didn't sink in*. They should have said, "Jesus is in charge of this stuff. That's the way it should be."

Jesus is the one who holds it all together. (Colossians 1)

The early disciples believed that the physical cosmos belonged to Christ and was totally at his disposal because they had seen his power over nature and death. One of the things that was the most telling to them about the unfathomable riches of Christ was that he was resurrected.

- There are no laws of physics that can prove that the resurrection is impossible. Physics does not deal with reality as a whole, it deals with physical reality from a particular point of view.
- There's often an impression that somehow something has been found out that shows the reality of God and His power over the universe to be wrong. Nothing has been "found out."

When we are talking about the Kingdom of God, we are talking about reality. The spiritual world is real. It is a field of energy in that it does work – in fact, it's the greatest energy in the universe. The Word which God spoke to express His creative action is power beyond any comprehension, and that power is still working.

2. Christ is the Master of the Moral Life

[54:20]

Jesus is the one who understands moral reality and order and is able to bring people to moral goodness. He doesn't just talk about it, he knows how it works. He talks about moral reality in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:20 - *"Unless your moral goodness goes beyond the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you can't make contact with the Kingdom of the Heavens."*

- Real goodness means real love. All the parts of the self being permeated with agape love - body, soul, social relations, mind (thoughts/feelings), your will itself, all set in love. To do that, you'll have to be in touch with something that enables you to do it. But if you're not going to move to that level, you can't contact what will enable you to do it.
- The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees consisted of what you did or didn't do.

Jesus begins his illustration with "Thou Shall not Kill" and then he talks about adultery. "Sex and Violence." Why did Jesus start there? Because he knew that the root of murder is anger and contempt.

Murder

Jesus understands the roots of moral evil. It is rooted in self-will that is thwarted and frustrated, and it gives rise to murderous rage. So instead of talking about not killing people, let's talk about not being governed by anger. Let's deal with the root of the situation. That's why Jesus is the master of the moral world. He knows what to deal with.

Most people are not pushed to the level of murder, but still have something in them. So James says, *"If you hate your brother, you're already are a murderer in your heart."* You want to get the murder out of the heart.

Adultery

[1:01:00]

In the same way, you want to get the adultery out of the heart.

- If you're not into cultivating lusting, you're probably not going to have a problem with adultery.
- There's a difference between thought, temptation and deed.
- Jesus understood that you don't try to *not* do what is wrong. You don't go there because you're not even in temptation. To stay out of temptation, you have to deal with the heart.

- The focus of early philosophy was how to lead a good life, how to be a good person. It was thought that in order to lead a good life you had to be a good person. But these early thinkers totally failed in bringing people to moral goodness. They didn't understand moral reality.
 - Plato's *Republic* is one of the most beautiful books in the world besides the Bible. It's a study of the human soul and how the soul works. It's devoted to the question of how *we can train people so their soul works as it should*.
 - Plato's view was that the good person is one with a balanced soul - reason, appetites and emotions are all doing their job. Emotions are supposed to align with reason to govern the appetites. To get this, you develop an education system in which people who are able to reason well rise to the top, they then are able to get their emotions in order, so that will handle their appetites. The State also would reflect that same order.
 - Aristotle had the same view, but said you get this by legislation: Organize the government to establish institutions that will shape souls that are good, and then people will do the things they should. It didn't work.
 - The world in which the people before and during Christ's time existed was one where people were striving to somehow get ahold of moral reality. They never could do it.

That's why the Christian teaching won the hearts of the ancient world. It presented the beauty of Christ and the goodness of Christ, and showed people to actually have it.

We don't undertake this seriously. Moral education is a non-entity. In High School, kids hit a moral wilderness, if not a moral sewer, nothing steadies them and nothing is taught to them except a brand of secular legalism, secular Phariseeism. Diversity and other catch words are used to express this kind of secular legalism in our educational system. But you can obey all of that and still be a despicable person.

The track record of the Christian church (although spotty) makes it clear that there is a way of being a genuine person, and that is in following the way of Christ and becoming his disciple and accepting his teachings.

This is problematic: People seriously consider whether they would be willing to give up anger or contempt. I often ask groups, "If I had a pill I could give you, and you would never be unkind again, would you take it? If there was an operation to remove your anger, would you do it?" People seriously hesitate.

Suppose I had an operation to make it impossible to lie? You never know when you'll need to lie! That would undermine our strategy for living.

Jesus Christ stands for a kind of purity in life that most people today would be very hesitant to embrace.

- Business Ethics isn't ethics, it's how to stay out of trouble. The one thing you will not see is teaching on how I can use my professional status to be a good person. But that's really the only issue. If you're not interested in being a good person, when the pressure comes down, you'll be able to find ways of avoiding the regulations. That's the failure that's implicit in all forms of legalism. That's why Jesus doesn't deal with actions. He understands the order in the moral life, and that you have to bring people to moral goodness through repentance for what they have done. That's a sound psychological truth.
- In the 12 Steps of AA, confession, repentance and restitution play a big role. This program was a gift of God to people that the church should have been helping but could not because it was caught up in self-righteousness. It did not want to deal honestly with people who were having problems with alcohol.
- The curse of the church is to gather respectable people and put on a good front, set a good example, have money... But what about the people Jesus hung out with? Many churches in America have gone down the drain because their neighborhood has changed and they don't want to minister to the people living right under their windows.

We need to minister to the ones who are there. That was Jesus' way. He took people where they were. That was part of his moral vision and that's why people were drawn to him.

3. The Security and Glorious Future of the Individual Human Being in Christ [1:13:25]

Philipians 4:6ff - *"Be anxious for nothing...Let your requests be made known unto God and the peace of God will set a guard around your hearts and minds...What you seen in me, do those things and the God of peace will be with you."* Paul is saying, "Watch me. I do it that way."

Matthew 18:10 – Jesus warned people about hurting children. God assigns angels to attend to each child. Everything that happens to a child is attended to by God. He has individuals personally responsible to see to it that children are cared for in the Kingdom of God, on this side of death or the other side.

If you are to believe in the goodness of God, you are to believe that He not only takes care of sparrows, but He takes care of children. How can this be when you see what happens to them in this world? It is because no matter what happens to them in this world, the goodness of God sees to it that those children continue to exist, and in conditions that

make them thankful to be, no matter what happens to them. You have to go beyond death. And Jesus says you will never experience death:

John 11 – *He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

John 8:51-52 – *Those who keep my word will never see death. Will never experience death.*

Are the riches of Christ so great as to include that?

The Gold Cord by Amy Carmichael

[1:18:40-1:22:00]

“Three Tender Mercies”

Did this child see death?

What’s death going to be like?

You won’t know that you have died until much later.

That is the basis upon which the early church understood Jesus had abolished death. But the ordinary rule of Christian churches today is to avoid the topic of death.

II Timothy 1:10 - Jesus destroyed death and brought life and immortality.

So for the first time, we understand what life and immortality are.

4. The Future of the Created Cosmos

[1:23:45]

The incredible beauty and greatness of the physical cosmos is something that will never pass away. It is not a self-contained system. It is sustained by the power of God.

Astronomers tell us that roughly 92% of the universe is cold, dark, matter. They have no reason to believe in dark matter except it will explain how the universe that is visible, warm, light matter behaves.

The truth is, we know almost nothing about the ultimate nature of the physical universe. I want to suggest to you that the cold, dark matter which explains the behavior of the physical universe in this way is actually God. That this is the Jesus who upholds all things by the word of his power.

You say, “How do you know that?” I’m open to anything that can be scientifically demonstrated, but one thing that is not going to be scientifically demonstrated is the ultimate nature of the universe. We have to go at it through the laws that can be discerned from the behavior of things we can observe. But no one is able to explain why we have the laws we do. Any cosmologist will tell you that. Even if they could explain the laws we do have, they would never be able explain the origin or the initial condition in which the laws begin to apply.

The greatness and beauty and the future of the universe is secure and it will get greater and greater. I say that because I believe in the God who made the universe. I believe that because He has intruded on this universe in the form of Jesus Christ. There will be a new heaven and new earth and New Jerusalem. Look at **Revelation 21** and following. That's a part of the riches of Christ.

The 4 Ultimate Questions that Face Human Beings [1:27:50] We are faced with these just by the fact that we live.

#1 - What is the nature of reality?

What is real and what is not? What do you have to deal with in life? Knowledge and truth help us come to terms with reality. Being Christ's people means we affirm the reality of the Kingdom of God. What is reality?

Answer - **God and everything that comes from His hand.**

#2 - Who is well off? Who has the good life? Who is blessed?

Answer - **Anyone alive in the Kingdom of God.**

What about the poor? Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, for they too can have the Kingdom of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit..." (people who don't have any religious things going for them). Jesus' apostles were poor in spirit. It's interesting that he chose people like that as His messengers to the world. It is certainly because he did not want anyone to take a human "fix" to the world as the gospel. He wanted people who understand that the cure for the world is life in the Kingdom of God.

#3 - Who is a really good person?

Answer - **Anyone who is permeated with agape love**

Love comes forward out of the nature of God, brought to human beings, Christ shows you how to realize it, what it is.

#4 - How do you become a really good person?

Answer - **By becoming a disciple of Jesus**

Jesus answers each of these far superior than anyone else. Just compare. You look at Jesus, and you say, "Who else?" Peter said, "To whom shall we go?" That's the real question, isn't it? How does Christ compare to Krishna? To Buddha? To L. Ron Hubbard? That's the issue we face. And to us this grace is given, that we should preach to a pagan world the unsearchable riches of Christ.

So what is the one mistake above all that we can make?

Fail to present Jesus Christ adequately.

If we present Jesus adequately, then what *can* be done for human beings *will* be done. But if you present Christ in a deficient way or just as a sacrifice for sin, you will fail to present the *Unsearchable Riches of Christ*. And, except in a world which is keyed to the issue of the forgiveness of sins as the whole thing to be dealt with by human beings, the message you present will fail to make disciples.

Does the gospel I preach have a natural tendency to produce disciples to Jesus Christ, or does it just produce more consumers of religious goods and services? [1:34:05]

We have a nonparticipant, spectator, consumer version of Christianity in this country. That's why people go from church to church to find a better service to consume. Not rooted in the body of Christ. Not focused on discipleship and personal transformation. Not focused on living in the power of God in a way that you can bring to bear on circumstances where you can stand as Christ's person and expect the Kingdom of God to make a difference you yourself could never make if your life depended upon it.

Simone Weil said, *"You could not have wished to be born at a better time than this. When everything has been lost."*

That means that if we want to do something, we have to start with ground zero planning. We have to think about the job to be done without regard to the people who are already on the ground, taking care of those people and making sure they turn out right.

What is the Job to be Done? - The Great Commission [1:36:20]

You have to include the bookends on the Great Commission. The disciples had really taken a beating. They hitched their wagon to a star and their star got himself crucified. In his last meeting with them, Jesus says,

"I have been given say over everything in heaven and earth."

That's Kingship. This is the risen Christ saying this. And...

"As you go, make disciples."

We're talking about "Ground Zero Planning." What are we gonna do now?

1. The first thing we are going to do is make disciples.
2. As we make disciples, they are going to be brought into the Trinitarian presence. *"Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* This does not mean to get them wet while you say over them, *"In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* It means to immerse them in the Trinitarian reality.

That means that when these disciples come together, they are watching for the hand of God to move in their midst.

3. Last Stage - Teach them to do everything Jesus said.

Jesus book ends it with, *"And look, I am with you every minute until the job is done."*

He starts with "I have been given say over everything."

Ends with, "I am with you every minute."

In between is the plan.

What I've just given you is Jesus' plan for church growth. It is the most successful plan for church growth that has ever been on the earth and, in fact, it is the most successful plan for any kind of growth.

If we preach the unsearchable riches of Christ rightly, we are ready to move into that plan. If we do not, we can never go there, and we will have to do something else. That is the history of the church: very largely, doing something else. Go down through the ages and watch the ebb and the flow. And when you come to the present, what are we doing today?