

KINGDOM BREAKTHROUGH

SERMON SEVEN

KINGDOM LIFESTYLE

One of the more popular programmes screened on TV has been the “Lifestyle of the rich and famous” in which the viewer is afforded the opportunity of looking into the opulent and lavish lifestyles of the rich and famous and to bemoan one's lot that one has not been as fortunate as those living this kind of lifestyle. This type of lifestyle is looked to by the world as the benchmark of success and happiness and many people will go to any lengths to ensure the attainment of such a lifestyle.

When we however consider the fact that the Kingdom of God has broken into the experience of mankind, we discover a kingdom lifestyle that is associated with the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven. What we discover is that there is a radical difference between the lifestyles of the Kingdom of the world and the Kingdom of God. We have seen that when the

Kingdom of God breaks through, the power of God is demonstrated through signs and wonders and people's lives are changed radically. Some would therefore suggest that a kingdom lifestyle is about powerful people making things happen when in fact the reality is just the opposite. Join with me as we discover what kingdom lifestyle is all about and how through this lifestyle we can experience the blessing of the kingdom, a blessing that the kingdom of this world cannot offer.

1. A LIFESTYLE OF REPENTANCE

In Mark 1:15 Jesus begins his ministry with the radical statement, “The time has come he said, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news”. Kingdom lifestyle begins with repentance which involves turning our backs on the self sufficient ways in which we lived our lives apart from God and reaching out and accepting the good news of the

Kingdom of God. In the past we have had a very negative view of repentance which focused on what we had to give up rather than focusing on what we would embrace. For me repentance is simply choosing God and the kingdom lifestyle that he desires to bless us with. Yes we need to let go of the kingdom of the world but it is more about what we receive in the kingdom of God, forgiveness, restoration and God's blessing. It is about realising our need of God and his kingdom, being willing to give up all we have and are to receive him and then by faith receive the promises of forgiveness, restoration and blessing. It is a radical turning from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of God. Jesus highlighted this radical decision to reject the values of the world and receive the blessing of the Kingdom when he noted in Mark 9:47, "if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell..". This is radical stuff that Jesus is suggesting. There can

be no holding on to the lifestyle of the world if we are to experience the blessing of kingdom lifestyle. It was precisely because of this that Jesus observed after the rich young man who had come to him could not give up his riches for the kingdom in Matt 19:23, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". Repentance means a radical giving up of that we always thought was most important, what we always relied upon and embracing that which in the world's eyes seems so insignificant.

Have you made a choice for God and his kingdom this morning? As important as repentance is for entering the Kingdom, God's grace precedes our repentance.

2. A LIFESTYLE OF GRACE

In repentance we simply respond to God's grace of his kingdom drawing near to us. Without this grace we would be lost eternally. In many of the parables of Jesus about the

kingdom we see so many pictures of God's grace. In Matt 21:31 the tax collectors and harlots the sinners enter into the kingdom before the "holy" Pharisees. Jesus repeatedly stated in the Kingdom of God that the first would be last and the last first. In Matt 19:23-24 the rich who are first in this world will be the last to enter the Kingdom whereas the poor in Luke 6:20 are the beneficiaries of the kingdom. In Mark 2:17 we are told that Jesus came to call sinners and not the righteous. The Pharisees continually complained when Jesus ate with sinners and Jesus responded to telling the parables of the lost sheep, coin and the lost son. The kingdom of God is about grace and not merit.

Without God's grace none of us could enter the kingdom of God. Each morning we need to ask for and give thanks for this grace. We enjoy kingdom blessings each day because of God's grace in our lives.

3. A LIFESTYLE OF HUMILITY

Perhaps one of the significant characteristics of kingdom lifestyle is humility. Humility is needed for repentance as well as accepting God's grace. The picture of Kingdom humility that Jesus gives to us is the picture of a child in Matt 18:1-4. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven". Coming as a child speaks of receiving in simple trust, believing and receiving without understanding. Complete dependence and reliance. Here we begin to see the contrast of the kingdom of God. It is the weak dependant children who are the giants of the kingdom because the power of the kingdom is

released in them. It is those who repent, trust and rely on God's grace and give themselves completely without fully understanding what God is doing, who are the giants and the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Coming as a child also speaks of obedience. In Matt 7:21-23 Jesus makes a rather frightening statement when he notes, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven". Humility needs to be expressed in obedience to the will of the Father. When we submit as children to the Lordship of Christ in the kingdom of God then his blessings and power are released in our lives. Note what Jesus has to say about those who have become children in the kingdom of God in Luke 12:32, "Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor". This just speaks of God's kingdom blessings for those who trust like little children in humility and trust.

4. A LIFESTYLE OF RADICALLY DIFFERENT VALUES

The values of the Kingdom of God stand in direct opposition and contrast to the values of the Kingdom of this world and seek to turn the values of the world on their heads. Kingdom lifestyle therefore is a lifestyle which again stands in opposition and contrast to the lifestyle and the priorities of the kingdom of the world. This is particularly highlighted in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus spells out the lifestyle manifesto of the Kingdom of God that He had ushered in. The coming in of the kingdom has brought in a new era which differs from the past. Christ demonstrates this in Matt 5:17-48 when repeats the following statement in his sermon over and over again, "You have heard that it was said....But I say to you.." He was introducing a radically new kingdom lifestyle. Let's take a brief look at the characteristics of this lifestyle as

highlighted in the beatitudes which speak of a present lifestyle that releases both a present and future blessing in the Kingdom. Who are blessed in the Kingdom of God?

4.1 The poor in spirit

Those who are poor in spirit in the kingdom level are blessed. At a spiritual level this refers to those who are aware of their sinfulness their weakness and consequently their great need of God. It relates to a humble spirit. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14 is a wonderful picture of this. Those who are poor in spirit are acutely aware of their need of God's grace in their lives.

4.2 Those who mourn

Once again those who mourn relates to those who have a deep understanding of their desperate state and need of God's

forgiveness and healing in their lives. As we operate out of such a spirit the grace of God is released in our lives.

4.3 The meek

The meek man is not a weak man in worldly standards but a man who trusts in God for his cause and does not struggle in his own strength. Moses is a classic picture of meekness and yet was used powerfully of God in a leadership role. Jesus quotes Psalm 37:11, "The meek will inherit the earth". How this goes against the understanding of the kingdom of the world which says that the strong will inherit the world whilst the meek will be crushed. The parallel verse is 37:9, "those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth" The meek put their hope in the Lord and not themselves.

4.4 Those who hunger and thirst

Those who experience the blessing of the Kingdom are those who hunger and thirst for more of God and his righteousness in

their lives. The parable of the banquet highlights this. Those who were not hungry and thirsty had many excuses not to attend the banquet but the outcasts of society who were hungry and thirsty for more of God made it to the banquet. Kingdom lifestyle is about never getting to the place of satisfaction in our spiritual lives but always wanting more of God.

4.5 Merciful

Only those who show mercy can expect mercy and blessing from God, in Matt 6:14-15 we see that only those who forgive will be forgiven. Matt 7:2, “with the measure we judge, we will be judged”. Jesus told the parable of the man who was forgiven his debt and refused to forgive the debt of another was thrown into jail in Matt 18:23-35. Jesus judges the Pharisees because the one thing they consistently refused to do was to show mercy.

4.6 Pure in heart

The Pharisees who operated in terms of the kingdom of the world laid much emphasis on outward purity doing things to create the impression of holiness and purity. Jesus now comes and turns this on its head by noting that in the Kingdom of God it is about being pure in heart, allowing God to transform our hearts and cleanse us by his blood. He condemns the Pharisees in Matt 23 for cleaning the outside of the cup of their lives whilst the inside was dirty. Kingdom living is about transforming us from the inside out. It's not about doing religious things to impress others but having a right relationship with God.

4.7 Peacemakers

In the Kingdom of God a peacemaker is one who has within him the peace or the wholeness of the kingdom and imparts it to others.

4.8 Persecuted

Persecution in the Kingdom of God does not relate to suffering in general that it a normal part of our lives, but suffering for the kingdom for our relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Kingdom lifestyle is about a lifestyle of :-

Repentance – choosing God and his kingdom

Grace – accepting that all we need God gives to us

Humility – realising our deep need of God and that we cannot live this life without Him.

Different values – those who are blessed in the kingdom are,

The poor in spirit

Those who mourn

The meek

Those who hunger and thirst for more of God

The merciful

The pure in heart

The peacemakers

The persecuted

Are you living a kingdom lifestyle and experiencing kingdom blessing, or experiencing the frustration of a worldly lifestyle that promises much but produces little?