

The Upside-Down Kingdom

As we reflect this morning on God's word, I want to bring to your attention a common theme found in the biblical passages of Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 and Revelation 1:4b-8. We read these accounts earlier this morning. In them, we heard of the reign of God over all creation.

Only to remind you, we heard how Daniel described the vision of "one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven" to receive "dominion and glory and kingship, [over] all peoples, nations, and languages." In Revelation, John describes, with language similar to that of Daniel, Jesus Christ "the ruler of the kings of the earth... the One who made us to be a kingdom" for the glory of God the Father. When we put one passage next to the other, it is more than obvious that the imageries of throne, reign, and dominion are central to both biblical accounts.

Today, I want to talk about the kingship of Christ and the kingdom Jesus came to establish. As we begin our conversation this morning, we cannot overlook the dialogue that took place in the palace of the Roman governor, between Pilate and Jesus, just moments before the crucifixion. Here is what happened:

²⁸Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor...

*³³Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "**Are you the king of the Jews?**"*

³⁴"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

*³⁶Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now **my kingdom is from another place.**"*

As we talk about the kingship of Christ and the kingdom Jesus came to establish, I want us to focus on the words of Jesus, "**My kingdom is not of this world ...**" What did Jesus mean when he made such statement?

First, it is important to note what Jesus is actually saying. With his answer, Jesus is declaring that he is king. "**My kingdom...**" – Jesus has a kingdom; therefore, he is king. Yet, his kingdom is not of this world.

Now, it is important to note what Jesus is NOT saying. We need to clearly understand that "*not of this world*" does not refer to an abstract reality, something unknown, invisible, in a faraway distance. "*Not of this world*" is not a call for escapism, exclusivism or isolationism. In its

simplest form, “*not of this world*” means that the reign of God is not based on violence, instilling fears, exploitation, greed, manipulation, etc.

The reign of Christ is not life-sucking, but life-giving. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world, but it has real implications in the world we know and live in. The reign of Christ disrupts the way we interact with each other. It alters the way we engage in economic, political, and social issues. The reign of Jesus has transformational effects in our personal lives and, through us, in the larger community.

Very often, I recall a childhood rhyme that tells about the dream of a child. The title of this song is, *The Upside-Down World*. The song says that in his dreams, a boy sees a good wolf being mistreated by lambs. He also saw an evil princess, a beautiful witch, and an honest pirate. This song is one of the few childhood songs I still remember. The reason I remember the song is because everything it says contradicts what we commonly know as real.

One day I was reading the Scriptures and I saw something very similar. Jesus taught about some things that contradict what is commonly known. Let me provide some examples to help you understand what I am trying to say. For instance, Jesus said,

“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” **Mark 9:35**
NIV

“...those who humble themselves will be exalted.” **Luke 14:11** **NIV**

“... The Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” **Acts 20:35**
NIV

“... Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” **Matthew 16:24-25** **NIV**

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **Luke 6:27-28** **NIV**

Comparing to the standards of this world, it seems that a good name for the kingdom that Jesus preached and came to establish would be “*The Upside-Down Kingdom*.” The reason I said that is because Jesus’ teachings are quite the opposite of what the world around us is telling us.

The world tells us that if we want to be first we better rush to get people out of the way and climb to the next position in the ladder of command. The world is telling us that if we want a life of abundance we must accumulate assets. The world around us is sending us the message that if we want to be exalted, we need to work on our self-esteem, earn as many academic degrees as possible, make money, and try to be the “boss.” The world is telling us that if we want to find life we must go after our “dreams,” and enjoy this life because no one has sent a note yet from the hereafter.

We don't love our enemies; we make war with our enemies. We make sure to keep under control those who hate us or are suspects of hating us. In a sense, we are still living in the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth era.

However, we are called to a higher standard. We are in the business of importing heaven to earth. That's what we say every time we pray, "Thy Kingdom come..."

The Bible calls us to be the light of the world, and the only way we can make a difference is by *being* the difference. Being the difference means that we don't live according to the standards of this world, but instead we live according to the norms of *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, or what it seems to be, from our broken and distorted perspectives.

Actually, I don't believe God's kingdom is upside-down. I believe God's Kingdom is right side up. I believe the reign of Jesus calls us to live right side up in an upside-down world. When we celebrate the reign of Christ, we are celebrating that our existence is ruled by an out-of-this-world king, that has come to the world to make all things right.

There is a story in the books of Acts chapter 17 that tells of the missionary efforts of Paul and his friend Silas. The missionary duo arrived at the city of Thessalonica and began to preach the Kingdom of God. Many people accepted Christ as their king. However, there were locals who were not persuaded and became envious. These people began to search for Paul and Silas. They wanted to beat them and perhaps even kill the disciples. Here is what happened...

*⁵ But the Jews ^(a)who were not persuaded, ^(b)becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "**These who have turned the world upside down have come here too ...**"*

I love the fact that the first Christians were considered people who turned the world upside down. This is a reminder of who we are. Having Jesus as our king calls us to turn our world upside-down, or better said, right side up. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to turn lust into love, hostility into friendliness, greed into generosity, apathy into compassion, carelessness into care, opposition into cooperation, etc.

What are you going to do? Are you ready to turn the world upside-down, or better said, right side up? Amen.