

Mark 1:14-2:17

Intro:

People are always building a kingdom. There is no person who is not laying foundations, building walls, protecting those walls, and hoping that this castle of control will bring them joy and peace and security. Every person also relates to God in such a way. David Powlison puts it this way:

“Human beings either love God – or despise him and love something else. We take refuge in God – or flee from him and find refuge in something else. We set our hope in God – or we turn from him and hope in something else. We fear God – or we ignore him and fear something else.” (David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes*)

The question of stewardship is not merely a question of how we use our money or possessions, but it goes even deeper into how we view the very nature of what is eternal and trustworthy. Whom or what do we love above everything else? Whom or what do we turn for refuge and security? To whom do we turn in hope of good? What do we fear? What is ultimately real and eternal? What has supreme worth and value to our souls? In short, which kingdom is eternal and what King, among all these claiming authority in this world, is supremely trustworthy and infinitely good?

When the Son of God came into the world He brought the proclamation of the coming of a new Kingdom, an eternal kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Biblical stewardship is founded upon our understanding that we have a King, and that His Kingdom is eternal, and He has called us to serve Him, gladly working out and working for His purposes in the cosmos. As we look to the Kingdom which He brought, let us honor the King with our praise.

The Kingdom of God is found in powerless dependence in the King

1. The Gospel is about the Kingdom of God (1:14-15).
 - a. Jesus preached that the gospel (or good news) is the nearness of Kingdom of God
 - b. Jesus is proclaiming Himself as the King of this Kingdom. There can be no kingdom without its king and Jesus is saying that He is restoring the Kingdom because He is its King (see 2:5, Matt 27:11; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16).
2. One doesn't enter this Kingdom or come to this King by doing great things of self-power or accomplishment, but by admitting one's own sin and weakness, coming undone of your own power and self-rule, and by depending in the message (“Repent and believe the gospel.” – v15).
 - a. The people were not looking for this kind of King! They were expecting a Messiah who was powerful to crush their political enemies and build Israel up into a powerful and supreme nation of many blessings. This preaching of a Kingdom of the powerless was quite unknown to them.
 - b. This kind of “salvation” would have been for the strong. To be part of this kingdom would have required only boldness, confidence and might.
 - c. However, Jesus proclaims a kingdom that requires a loss of one's strength and power in a confession of weakness, guilt and sin. How completely strange!
3. Jesus is going to do something greater that will establish the Kingdom.
 - a. Why is the kingdom only “near” if Jesus is the king? Why didn't Jesus say, “The kingdom of God is here because I am here!”
 - b. Something still has to happen in order for the Kingdom of God to be established. Jesus has to do something as the King to see it fulfilled. Something has to be done if his kingdom power and rule is going to be established and do its great liberating work.
 - i. Daniel's interpretation of the uncut stone smashing the kingdoms of the world (Dan 2:25ff, esp. v38-45)
 - ii. This stone then grows to overtake the entire earth and is called an eternal kingdom (v44)
 - iii. Jesus is saying, “Look! Here comes the stone that will smash the kingdoms of the world and set up the eternal kingdom of God! It's rolling down the hill right now!”

- c. Of course, this something is the death and resurrection of Christ. The actual presence of King Jesus was not enough. The king had to die for his subjects in order to save them. He had to be raised from the dead in order to heal them from their corruption.

The Kingdom of God is a Reordering of Our Entire Lives to Revolve Around Christ and His Purposes

1. The calling of the disciples shows us that Jesus' kingly authority restructures *every* area of our lives (vv16-20).
 - a) In 1:16-17, when Jesus calls, two men leave their vocations (as fishermen). In 1:19-20, when Jesus calls, two men leave their father and friends (a shocking incident in such a family-oriented, patriarchal society!)
 - b) The Bible is not teaching here that all Christians must leave their jobs or their families and go into "full-time Christian work." (It is very possible that the disciples continued to fish, just as Paul continued his own trade after beginning ministry.)
 - c) Rather, here we learn that Jesus is a King whose authority alters the priorities in every area of our lives. He must come first in our work lives, our family lives — in every area.
 - d) Notice that Jesus says to the disciples (in essence): "I have a fishing beyond your fishing; I have a family beyond your family." What this means is not that we stop working or stop relating to our family, but that Jesus is now our ultimate value, hope, significance, or security.
 - e) We look to him for the things we would ordinarily look to our careers and families for.

What does this mean?

- a) It means we are not as frightened, controlled, or driven in these areas.
 - i. All our emotional and psychological eggs are not in these baskets. When we lose in this life we are not as paralyzed with fear or anger or despair because we have a Savior who is true to His Word (never fails) and is generous in His goodness (loves me deeply).
 - ii. We can give these things to the Lord, for His purposes and for His reputation, and *not concern ourselves with the grandeur of our reputation or power* at work or in the family.
 1. We are right with God because Jesus died for us, removing the condemnation that we deserved, and He lives for us to give us His righteousness by grace.
 2. We do not look down on those who are not as successful as us, but neither do we look up to those who are more successful than us (bold humility).
 - b) It means we must put Christ first in every area of life.
 - i. The salvation of Jesus itself brings new values, based on the cross and the pattern of gospel-salvation.
 - ii. Jesus' way is based not on taking power but on serving people.
 - iii. We are free to do this because of our acceptance and relationship to the Father through the Son.
 1. We serve because we have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies through Christ (Eph 1)
 2. We forgive because God has forgiven us through the blood of Jesus Christ (Col 1:20; Eph 2:13; 4:32; Heb 9:12)
 3. We love because He has loved us so greatly that He sent the Son to die in our place so that we would become children of God (Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 3:18; John 1:12)
 - iv. This radically changes the way we use money, relate to parents, run our businesses, use our influence — in short, everything!
2. The casting out of demons shows us that Jesus' authority as King brings internal, spiritual freedom from the powers of this world (vv21-28)
 - a) In 1:23-26 we see Jesus exorcizing a demon-possessed man.
 - b) In Jesus' ministry of exorcism we see a pattern for how the kingdom works. Here we begin to see how Jesus' kingdom is more than *simply* my individual obedience to his will.
 - i. Jesus bursts into my life not *simply* as a rule-giver, but also as a liberator and a healer. He doesn't simply bring rules, but a new realm of his kingly, healing power within the spirit.

1. New Birth (John 3)
 2. Regeneration (Titus 3:5)
 3. New Life and Fruit (Gal 5:22-25; Rom 6:4; 7:6; 2 Cor 5:17)
 - ii. "The hands of the King are healing hands, and thus shall the rightful King be known." (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*)
 - c) The text implies that the alternative to having Jesus as a master is to have some other false and enslaving power as a master.
 - i. Most people are not personally possessed by a demon like this man (v.23-24) who has lost complete psychological control.
 - ii. But Paul speaks in Eph 6 and elsewhere that, in another sense, we are fighting demonic "principalities" all the time.
 - iii. Anything we make into an ultimate value (like our career) becomes a master and begins to exercise enslaving power over us (idolatry).
 1. We are all under some form of power, there is no absolute freedom
 - a. Whatever determines our affections and obedience controls us
 - b. "Whomever commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34)
 - d) As I submit to Jesus' Lordship, I become free from the control of any other lords or gods.
 - i. The Son remains forever in the house. "If the Son makes you free, you will indeed be free." (John 8:36)
 - ii. Jesus rules over all powers
 1. Ephesians 1:21
 2. Colossians 1:16
 3. Hebrews 1:8-12; 7:26
3. Jesus' miracles of healing bodies and of feeding people show that King Jesus is concerned not only with taking control and therefore healing the spiritual world, but also recreating and restoring the physical (vv29-34).
- a) The concept of the kingdom of God moves us away from over-spiritualizing salvation.
 - i. When Jesus' kingdom is fully present in the world there will be no more sickness, death, poverty, crime, war or injustice.
 - ii. When God returns to rule, there will again be complete health, peace and justice in the world (Psalm 96, 98), just as there was in the beginning (Genesis 1-2)
 - b) It means that King is working toward physical restoration, recreating what has been de-created by sin (see Genesis 3:14ff).
 - i. Caring for the sick with the powerful hope that the Savior-King gives is part of a reordered life of stewardship for the King
 - ii. Caring for the creation with the powerful hope that the Savior-King gives is part of a reordered life of stewardship for the King.
4. The way that King Jesus went to pray amidst his bringing of the Kingdom shows us that we also need to be depending upon the Father through prayer (v35)
- a) If Jesus relied on the Father through prayer, then how much more do we need to pray?
 - b) If Jesus relied upon the Holy Spirit for power, then how much more do we need to depend on Him?
 - c) It is not the details of "how" Jesus prayed here (into the wilderness), but rather the principle that he did go and spend time with the Father alone in prayer.
5. The healing of the leper shows us that Jesus' kingly rule brings social justice, inclusion and change (vv40-45).
- a) Because of the fear of contagion, in all ancient cultures lepers were forbidden to be part of society. They were considered "untouchables," and were reduced to the most destitute poverty, emotional isolation and loneliness, and social marginalization.
 - b) All three gospel writers who write down this event note how Jesus "reached out his hand and touched the man" (1:41).
 - i. Imagine what it felt like for the man who hadn't been touched since he received leprosy, to have another person touch him!

- ii. Jesus didn't need to touch him in order to heal him, so the touch must instead be Jesus' effort to heal him emotionally and socially as well.
 - iii. He commands the man to show himself to the priest and get re-instated into the community (1:44).
 - c) Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus reaching out to lepers, tax collectors, Gentiles, "fallen" women, and the poor — all people whom the world excluded from the centers of power, respectability and influence.
 - d) But Jesus brings such people into the center of his new community that he forms — the church. He is especially warm toward people the world considers losers, the unimportant, the outcasts, the fools.
 - i. Why? The salvation of Jesus was achieved not by taking power but through weakness and service (the incarnation and the cross).
 - ii. And the salvation of Jesus is received not by those who are accomplished and spiritually strong or intellectual but by those who admit that they are weak and spiritually bankrupt.
 - e) So the pattern of Jesus' salvation — the cross, the irony of the Gospel— leads us to look at power, recognition, status, wealth and accomplishment in a completely different way from the way the world looks at them.
 - f) Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition — all these are marks of living in the world, and the opposite of the mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26).
 - g) The gospel creates a people with an alternate way of being human, a new, alternate "city" (Matt. 5:14-16), a new humanity of humbly bold servants of the King.
- 6. The healing of the paralytic shows us that Jesus' kingly rule brings, first and foremost, a reconciled relationship with God (2:1-12).
 - a) The last healing miracle in this section shows us a group of friends bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus.
 - b) They obviously expect a physical healing, but first Jesus says to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (2:5).
 - i. This is Jesus saying, in effect, "Your physical paralysis is not, ultimately, your main problem. If you don't get your sins pardoned and your alienation from God removed, then a physical healing will ultimately be fruitless."
 - ii. Your sins are the major problem, for in them we have chosen to be enemies of God. To have them forgiven is to have the animosity removed between us and God (Rom 5).
 - c) In light of the social justice message of the healing of the leper, this is amazing.
 - i. Jesus is saying that, though physical and social healing is important, nothing is more important than having our sins taken away, getting right with God.
 - ii. As he said in 1:15, the kingdom of God is not entered by simply doing good deeds for others. No — it is only entered through conversion. You must "repent and believe the gospel" (1:15).
 - iii. Jesus says that we must be born again to see the kingdom (John 3:3) and to enter the kingdom (John 3:5).
- 7. The kingdom of God means decisive personal submission to the Lordship of Christ.
 - a) Notice the language throughout the Mark 1 passage — "at once they left..." (v.18); "without delay he called them, and they left..." (v.20).
 - b) Jesus bursts into people's lives, ruptures the status quo and calls for change and decisive action. He breaks in and makes people choose (Matt 9:16-17).
 - c) All of this shows that entering the kingdom of God takes a decisive act of radical, exclusive commitment to Jesus as the Savior and King.

Conclusion:

We are all starved for the glory of God, not self. No one goes to the Grand Canyon to increase self-esteem. Why do we go? Because there is greater healing for the soul in beholding splendor than there is in beholding self... The point is this: We were made to know and treasure the glory of God above all things; and when we trade that treasure for images, everything is disordered. The sun of God's glory was made to shine at the center of the solar system of our soul. And when it does, all the planets of our life are held in their proper orbit. But when the sun is displaced, everything flies apart. The healing of the soul begins by restoring the glory of God to its flaming, all-attracting place at the center.

– John Piper

Let us return the desire and pursuit of the glory of God to the center of our lives. The Kingly rule of Jesus Christ means that we are not the kings or queens of our own domain. Our purpose and passions in this life are not to build up our own castles of comfort and security, but to live in the light of the great Servant-King, giving for the sake of God and for the sake of others. Do we have the eyes to see the eternal Kingdom that has arrived? Are we stewarding for the King in the gospel proclamation, in physical restoration, in spiritual and inward healing, in prayer, in the offer of forgiveness through the King's blood, and in the appeal to personal submission to Him? Is the Kingdom of God our central and underlying foundation of our life's purposes?

Brothers and sisters, let us live consistently with what we say that we believe! Let us turn from living for our own self, by our own wisdom, and trust the King. Let us cease the building of our own castles, with our own designs and reimagining of God, trying to control our worlds from the turrets of our self-righteous pride, and let us enter into the deep, humbly, joyful love of our great Redeemer. Let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, our Savior from sin and our Eternal King, for it is only in Him that our souls are healed and our world is restored and our joy is filled up. This is what it means to be a steward of the Lord: His Kingdom glory is my pursuit, for His presence is my desire.