

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: "The Kingdom of God"



Message: "The Kingdom of God an Upside-down Kingdom"

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Dr. Mary Craig

May 23, 2021

Jesus came into a culture announcing the Kingdom of God. He sets forth a new order of things, a new way of looking at the Law of God. In contrast to the culture of the world, then and now, the culture of the KOG seems upside-down and inside-out. We are used to the stories and words of Jesus; but they were shocking, radical, and wild to the people who heard them first-hand.

Jesus spoke in parables. He let his listeners apply the meaning to their own setting. This is good, I think, because it doesn't lock things into a specific time frame and specific culture. Issues and events become dated. In local settings that change across time and around the globe from nation to nation, Jesus' followers need to discern what Jesus teaches under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to apply truth to the time in which we live and to the culture in which we find ourselves. The KOG may look different in different cultural settings. We live in a democracy (of sorts) in the USA; others live in persecution under the rule of brutal tyrants.

We have talked about John the Baptist announcing the coming KOG. Luke 3:4-6. This portrays a revolutionary new kingdom. There are four surprises: full valleys, flat mountains, straight curves, and level bumps. This pictures a radical shake-up, a shattering of things beyond recognition, a transformation of social patterns. We are talking about a "flat society" with Jesus as King.

Luke 1:49-53. We have looked at this as well. Mary sees five types of people startled and surprised. Those at the top of the ladder, the proud, the rich, and the mighty, topple. These are stripped of their thrones and scattered and sent away empty. The poor and hungry, at the bottom of the ladder, get a surprising ride to the top. The social world is to be flipped upside down. The expectation was that the Messiah would expel pagan invaders and establish the long-awaited kingdom and overthrow of Rome.

Something highly valued on one ladder in the old way ranks near the bottom of the other. It is an inversion. Jesus didn't call for some sort of marginal society, for social avoidance, or withdrawal. Believers are in the world but not of the world. Kingdom action takes place in the world but kingdom folks follow different rules and have a different king. Kingdom values challenge the system and can run against the grain of the dominant culture. These kingdom values are deeply rooted in Love and in the abiding grace of God. God seeds new ways of thinking and living into a world society of violence, greed, selfishness, etc. The coming of Jesus brings change and re-ordering.

The Kingdom speaks with authority. Jesus' words are relevant always, anywhere. He is setting the normal. He is saying how we ought to order and live our lives. We have seen that the KOG means the dynamic rule or reign of God. It is always becoming, spreading, and growing. It is a kingdom from heaven but one that thrives here and now. It appears

when men and women submit their hearts and lives to the will of God. The kingdom is something people enter, not something that enters them. It is not a state of mind, but a state of affairs. One must be born again, born out of God, to see and enter the KOG. As Jesus enters the heart of the elect one, a born-again person enters the KOG.

The mind is affected, but kingdom living is fundamentally social. There is citizenship, loyalties, and identity. Believers, holy ones, saints, are citizens of heaven even while living on earth. Jesus is owed their supreme loyalty. A believer's identity is in Christ. Living in a kingdom means sharing in its history as God builds His kingdom. Believers are to enter the KOG and stay there, abiding, dwelling there. They are to embrace the kingdom, serve in it and not mock it,

The kingdom is not a collection of people who happen to be together in time and space, like people waiting for the "Walk" light at an intersection. The KOG is an interdependent cluster of people who get together, influence each other, formulate common goals, and choose to live on the policies of their King. The KOG is a network of people who have yielded their hearts and relationships to the reign of God. God rules in their hearts and in their social relationships. King and citizens are bound together. True believers are co-heirs with Christ because they are "in Christ."

Jesus unveiled the secrets of God and the nature of the KOG. God spoke through the concrete acts of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus announced the arrival of the KOG. He described it in parables and sermons. The Lord's Prayer welcomes the advent of the kingdom on earth from heaven. The gospel of the kingdom goes forth.

Jesus' actions also teach us about the kingdom. They point us to God's kingdom. We often fail to ask why things are as they are. Why is social life so often a hierarchy, a ranking of people on some vertical social ladder? What are the assumptions of the world system? What are the values and norms that we have internalized? How do laws change culture and what is socially acceptable or unacceptable? Jesus presents teaching that breaks in upon and overturns old ways, old values, and old assumptions. The KOG is full of surprises, startling. Things are reversed. The least who serve are the greatest. The immoral receive forgiveness and blessing sooner than those who deem themselves moral and upstanding. Adults become like children with childlike faith. The religious miss the banquet. The pious living by outward rule receive "woes."

Detours. We may not want to hear what Jesus is saying. It's upsetting the "way things are." We may want to bypass the core of His message. We may find ourselves taking a few detours. Let's look at five such detours.

1. **Jesus is lost in history.** People say this, and that Jesus has many faces. He may have lived, but how do we know exactly what He said, when He was born, and exactly whether or not He was resurrected? If we can't verify all this, maybe we can turn our backs to His gospel of the kingdom.
2. **Jesus is wrapped in culture.** Can we understand the message? It seems to make little sense to us today. We're so far more advanced. Is the message relevant? Maybe we shouldn't be dragging Jesus' message from His day and culture into our own. How can we figure out the message until we first get it in its cultural context?

3. **Jesus' teachings were "interim" teachings and so irrelevant for enduring social relationships.** Maybe He goofed by thinking the world would soon end. Has the KOG come or do we wait for it? Are kingdom ethics meaningless today?
4. **Jesus only spoke of spiritual things.** Spiritual realities come from God. Social realities come from people. Are they separate realities? Or did God speak through the Son, which in itself was a social action? Splitting the spiritual and the social is a detour around kingdom ethics. God entered social affairs in human form. Jesus is God in the flesh. God didn't just speak words; He spoke through His Son. (Hebrews) The incarnation is a weaving together of spiritual and social realities. Faith in God is expressed in tangible acts. Jesus doesn't separate spiritual and social. Spiritual insights have social implications. The Incarnation moved the Holy of Holies right smack into the middle of Jerusalem streets and into the towns and villages of Israel.
5. **Jesus only addressed personal morality.** He spoke only to our personal character and not to social ethics. This is a detour designed to keep us from seeing how our personal beliefs affect or can affect society. We hear this from politicians who say they personally believe one way but won't try to influence social mores. Jesus cared about character, attitudes, motives, and emotions, inner feelings, and personal behavior. This is true. But all behavior is social and when we change, we affect everything around us. For example, if two people are dancing the dance of anger and one person stops dancing, that affects the dance. We live in relationship with other people, with animals, with the environment. The inner life yields social fruit and the fruit of righteousness. Who will bear the fruit of righteousness in the KOG? Who will bear fruit that remains?

Jesus gives us stories, pictures of the fruit of righteousness in the KOG. He doesn't spell out some program or check list. Jesus called for repentance. He attacked the evil core of human beings and institutions. Jesus called for love. He says it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. We won't receive the kingdom through violence and Jesus didn't bring in the kingdom through a violent overthrow. Jesus replaced force with suffering and violence with love, a suffering love. He challenged our values. What is the power of love? Do we take or do we receive? Are we self-serving or do we serve others? If indeed we have received the free gift of eternal life through Christ, how then should we live?

Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4. We have 5 key words—bread, devil, desert, mountain, and temple. The devil threatens holiness and wants utter destruction. Out in the desert the children of Israel ate bread (manna) from heaven. God revealed the Ten Commandments on a high mountain. God eventually dwelt in the holy temple. Jesus squared off against the political (mountain), the religious (temple), and the economic (bread) structures of society. He squared off against sin, the mountain of debt, bringing in a new and better worship system, a temple not made with hands. He squared off against Satan and the kingdom of darkness, the dryness void of the water of life. He is the Bread from heaven, sent by the Father to save.

Would Jesus use His position and power for personal gain? Would He take the kingdom by force and bypass the Cross? Would He worship Satan and serve another master, a created being, to get the prize? Would He take His destiny into His own hands? But the Devil had it wrong. The creature worships and serves the Creator. The Devil must bow to the Christ. Jesus will hold to His mission and message. He and the Father are one. It

is the Father's pleasure to give the Kingdom. In Him, Jesus, is life. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him. Listen to John 1:1-14 carefully.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. ⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light; that all through Him might believe. ⁸ He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. ⁹ That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-14 NKJV

Jesus would face trials designed to lure Him into some detour that would derail the whole thing. We will have the same. But know this: Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He had no iniquity in His heart, no bent marring the purity of His being. He is the Infinite God-Man. He is a Divine Person with a Divine nature who took on a human nature in a human body; one Person with two distinct natures, in hypostatic union. The two natures of Christ are without mixture/confusion, without separation, without change, without division. The Chalcedonian Creed, 451 A.D.

“We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the virgin Mary, the mother of God [Theotokos, God-bearer], according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us. [1]” <https://www.theopedia.com/chalcedonian-creed>

By God's grace we will come to understand, perceive, and comprehend the gospel of the Kingdom. We will do that when our hearts are turned by the Holy Spirit and we repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation (the Gospel of Christ, His atoning work on behalf of those for whom He lived, died, was buried, and rose again to sit at the right hand of the Almighty, King of kings and Lord of lords, and coming again).

By God's grace we will follow the Christ.

Mary Craig, D. Min.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into
The kingdom of the Son of His love. Colossians 1:13 NKJV

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Federal ID 65-0429517.