

A. W. Tozer once said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." The same could be said about Jesus. Our view of Jesus informs everything we do.

If I see Jesus as a countercultural rebel with a cause, He becomes the Lord of my cause.

If you I Jesus as a divine delivery boy standing by 24/7 to wait upon me and deliver upon demand, then He becomes the Lord of my comfort.

If I see Jesus as the solution to all my problems then He becomes Lord of my problems.

The Bible provides us with a lot of names for Jesus; The Good Shepherd, the Vine, The Alpha and Omega, but none is more important than the one we are going to consider for the next few weeks; Jesus Christ is King of Kings. If Jesus is not your King then you will never enter His kingdom. He promised that a kingdom is coming where there is no injustice, no disease, no divorce, no death, no pain, no tears, no disappointment. Jesus promised His kingdom would come. But if Jesus is not your king, you will never see His kingdom. I want to invite you to join a small group or form one and follow along in the curriculum (see worship guide).

**Everyone is looking for a king.** Human nature is a curious thing; even though we are born with a rebel heart there remains a natural inclination in every human heart to be led. The wise old Benjamin Franklin knew that one of the threats to the New Republic was this desire and dependence upon human rulers. He stood before the Constitutional Convention on June 2, 1787, and said: "There is scarce a king in a hundred who would not, if he could, follow the example of Pharaoh – get first all the people's money, then all their lands, and then make them and their children servants forever. It will be said that we do not propose to establish kings. I know it. **But there is a natural inclination in mankind to kingly government.** It sometimes relieves them from aristocratic domination. They had rather have one tyrant than 500."

Everyone wants a king. The Bible records that the people of Israel were looking for a king. God promised to be their king but they wanted one with skin on so they appealed to Samuel the priest, "'Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'<sup>6</sup> But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." **1 Samuel 8:5-6**

The Israelites wanted what people have always wanted from a king; peace and prosperity, a chicken in every pot, lower taxes, full employment, and especially a strong military to keep the bad guys out and protect the good guys. (And we are always the good guys.) God warned the people to be careful what they wished for:

"He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and *some* to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give *them* to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use *them* for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you

yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.” **1 Samuel 8:12-18**

God warned His people that human leaders have feet of clay and will always disappoint us. When will we learn that? We pick up the paper and read the newest revelations about our leaders and wonder, “Is everyone messing around? Does every CEO have his hand in the till? Are there any politicians left who are truly ‘public servants’ or is everyone in it for themselves? Is anyone worthy of our respect and esteem?” Even pastors disappoint us and let us down. I tell young seminarians that they are about to make their living disappointing people. I know that sounds cynical but we have to face the fact that we all have feet of clay and we disappoint and are disappointed. Still the need to have someone lead is strong: “Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, ‘No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.’” 1 Samuel 8:19-20

Well there is a King who will never disappoint us and a Kingdom that will never disappear. The Kingdom was the one-course curriculum taught by Jesus. He was captivated by the kingdom. His first recorded words, “Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” Matthew 4:17. His final words to His disciples were about the kingdom, “appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the **things concerning the kingdom of God.**” Acts 1:3.

From the time he began His ministry on earth until the time He ascended to the right hand of the Father, Jesus talked about the Kingdom.  
He said it is the basis of repentance (Mt. 4:17).  
It is to be sought above all else – even happiness (Mt. 6:33).  
It is priceless (Mt. 13:44).  
It is to be our highest priority (Lk. 18:29-30).  
It is the purpose for His coming (Lk. 4:43).

When Jesus returned to Galilee after His resurrection he taught “things concerning the kingdom of God” for a period of forty days. As we read about the kingdom in the NT Jesus never really offers a clear definition but He describes it in detail in many of His stories. He taught using parables that began with, “The kingdom of God is like...” We will be exploring twelve of these parables in an effort to align our priorities with the priorities of the Kingdom of God as we grow in our understanding of what the kingdom is and how it works.

What is the Kingdom of God? In simple terms the kingdom is the dynamic reign of God manifested on earth through Jesus the Messiah. The kingdom is “already here but not yet fully come.” The kingdom of God is wherever what He wants done is done. It can be rejected and resisted for now until He returns and rules with a rod of iron. As we get started on this new series let me begin by pointing out three characteristics of those who are kingdom-minded people.

**Kingdom-minded people declare allegiance to the King.** The Christian life is not about

being a good person and paying your dues to God. It is not just about getting a pardon from God so we can someday go to the “sweet bye and bye” when we die. Jesus’ picture of a life of faith is subjects of a King living in total devotion to their Sovereign Ruler. We honor the King, obey the King, and subject every part of our lives to do His bidding.

Many people reject Jesus’ claim to be King. Remember Pilate’s cynical response when Jesus stood before Him? On the way to the cross Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore Pilate said to Him, ‘So You are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’” **John 18:36-37** Pilate responded with contempt displayed on a scornful sign fixed above Jesus’ head on the cross, “This is Jesus, King of the Jews.” No doubt, a little dark, cynical Roman humor but God will have the last laugh.

Who could blame Pilate for his confusion over one who calls Himself “King” but has no army, no royal entourage, no crown or throne or scepter? Whoever heard of a king who seeks an audience with His subjects, a king who recruits his army from sycamore trees and fishing boats and tax booths? What king seeks a friendship with a man behind the cash register at a department store or a woman behind a computer terminal on the 27<sup>th</sup> floor of a downtown office building? What king cares to visit the single mom rocking her feverish infant in the pale light of dawn? Whoever heard of a king who gives everything He has, including the blood in His own veins to spare the lives of His subjects? Is He your king? Or is He merely an acquaintance?

**Kingdom-minded people fully embrace the authority of the King. Lk. 7:1-10.** Here was a man who knew nothing about the OT prophecies about a coming king, but who knew something about Jesus. He knew Jesus had authority over sickness and disease. He also knew that the only proper response to authority is obedience. Jesus called this response, “faith.” Faith is not believing in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Faith is obeying in spite of all inclination to rebel against authority.

Contrast the response of the centurion with the response in an interview I saw with a woman who claims to have been one of Tiger Woods’ trophies. In the interview she was asked to respond to a rumor that she had been involved in prostitution. She adamantly denied the claim and said, “I was raised a Christian and I wouldn’t do that.” She slept with a married man, contributed to his pending divorce, destroyed a family but I’m no prostitute. She may have a fading memory of an ancient moral code but she has no king. Jesus has no authority in her life.

**Kingdom-minded people are preoccupied with His Kingdom.** In Mt. 6 Jesus tells us that sparrows and lilies are smarter than we are. They aren’t consumed with the logistics of life. “Be anxious for nothing” because worrying only wearies and all our anxious thoughts have no power to change a thing. But “seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.” What “things?” All the things necessary to sustain life.

In a world of car payments and career moves the Kingdom of God is the only thing that must dominate our thought life and decision-making. Kingdom people have their hearts set on one thing; what matters to God matters to them. No matter what happens to them, nothing is more important than the kingdom.

I won't soon forget last week's National Championship game between Alabama and Texas. Colt McCoy, the winningest quarterback in the history of college football, threw two passes and was knocked out of the game. He had worked for four years to get here. His team was primed and ready and Colt watched from the sidelines as Alabama won the game 38-21. He was interviewed after the game and asked how hard it was to just stand on the sidelines and watch. He paused, fought back tears and said, "I always give God glory. I never question why things happen the way they do. I know God is in control of my life. I'm standing on a rock."

Just before Christmas I received a letter in the mail...

What has first place in your life? Who has the last word? Your rights? Your comfort? Your career? Your success? Your pleasure? It's His kingdom and He makes the rules. We had a lot of guests in our house over the holidays. We really enjoyed those who came into our home. At least the two-legged guests! It seems our three children have all purchased dogs within the past 6 months. All of our children wanted to bring their dogs over to our house. We tried to be accommodating but these dogs had no respect for my kingdom or my carpet! Puppy love! Jana and I wrestled with telling our kids that they couldn't bring their dogs over. Then it dawned on me - my house is my kingdom. You are welcome to come into my kingdom - unless you want to smoke in my house. Then you can stay outside. You are welcome to come into my kingdom - unless you want to leave with whatever valuables we have in the house. Then you're not welcome in my kingdom. That's the way it is in God's kingdom. If you want in you play by His rules - He's the King and it's His kingdom. If you have never done so, declare your allegiance to the king and submit to His rule. You can demonstrate your allegiance through baptism.

Join the company of the King. The King has called us as His subjects to announce that His kingdom is coming and to create an alternative community **If Jesus does not rule over this church then we are just another religious organization. We are called to be a "sign, foretaste, and witness"** of the coming Kingdom of God. We are called by God to demonstrate for the world what the reign of God looks like. When we welcome people from all races and walks of life, when we love one another, when we stand for justice and righteousness in a world enamored with selfishness and decadence, we are demonstrating God's rule in our lives.

Is He your King? For now, God's kingdom exists alongside a competing kingdom but one day, at His second coming, the Kingdom will appear in all its fullness. Bow your head and close your eyes. Listen and try to visualize this passage. John the beloved disciple of Jesus, the last man standing at the foot of the cross who witnessed the agony of Jesus also witnessed the power of His resurrection. He would not shut up about it and was banished to an island in the Aegean Sea. It was there that the old man received a gift from God, a telegram from the King in

the form of a vision. He describes it this way: **Revelation 19:11-16** <sup>11</sup> And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. <sup>13</sup> *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."