



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

MAY 20, 2018

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## Discussion Guide

### **KINGDOM COME**

#### **CONNECTING:**

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

#### **GETTING STARTED:**

10 MINUTES

- WHAT EVENTS IN OR AREAS OF OUR WORLD WOULD YOU SAY ARE IN NEED OF BEING ADDRESSED BY THE CHURCH? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?

#### **DIVING INTO THE TEXT:**

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE USE OF THE TERM "GOSPEL" IN ANTIQUITY AND HOW THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT USED THIS TERM.
- ENGAGING THIS WORLD IS PART OF BECOMING LIKE JESUS, TAKING UP HIS REDEMPTIVE MINISTRY (JOHN 20.21-22; LUKE 19.10; MARK 6.12-13). HOWEVER, THE CHURCH TODAY IS STRUGGLING TO AGREE UPON THE BEST WAYS TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO YOU SEE

THIS STRUGGLE?

- A LARGE PART OF THE STRUGGLE THE CHURCH IS HAVING IN DECIDING HOW TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD RESTS ON THE DIFFERING UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE GOSPEL, THE MESSAGE WHICH GUIDES OUR ENGAGEMENT OF THE WORLD. WHAT ARE SOME VARIOUS WAYS YOU HAVE HEARD THE GOSPEL DEFINED?
- READ MARK 1.14-15 ALOUD. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, IMAGINING YOU ARE LISTENING TO JESUS.
- ACCORDING TO MARK, WHAT WAS THE GOSPEL MESSAGE OF JESUS? IS THIS MESSAGE THE SAME OR DIFFERENT FROM HOW WE HAVE DEFINED THE GOSPEL? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- ACCORDING TO JESUS, THE GOSPEL CONTAINS THE MESSAGE THAT GOD HAD ARRIVED TO TAKE UP HIS RIGHTFUL ROLE AS KING IN THE PERSON OF JESUS AS WELL AS THE INVITATION TO BE PART OF THIS KINGDOM, TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF JESUS. ACCORDING TO JESUS, PEOPLE WHO LIVE UNDER HIS REIGN, ACKNOWLEDGING HIM AS KING (MESSIAH), ARE CALLED THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20). WHAT IMPLICATIONS, IF ANY, DOES THIS HAVE ON HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHILE THERE ARE CERTAINLY THEOLOGICAL REALITIES UNDERPINNING HOW WE ARE ABLE TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THE DISTILLED TRUTH ABOUT THE KINGDOM IS THAT IT NOW IS PRESENT AS THE CHURCH. THEREFORE, THE GOSPEL FORMS THE CHURCH AS PEOPLE RESPOND TO IT BY BECOMING PEOPLE WHO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. IT IS THIS UNDERSTANDING THAT BELIEVERS FORM THE KINGDOM AS THEY LIVE WITH AND UNDER THE REIGN OF JESUS WHICH IS THE BEGINNING OF UNDERSTANDING HOW THE CHURCH IS TO ENGAGE THE WORLD. WHAT REALITIES, IF ANY, MIGHT BE THE RESULT OF THE KINGDOM BEING NOW PRESENT AS THE CHURCH?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

BEING NOW PRESENT AS THE CHURCH FORM A BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING MISSION? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?

- YOU MIGHT TAKE SOME TIME AS A GROUP TO PRAY THAT GOD'S KINGDOM WOULD COME BY PRAYING FOR THE CHURCH. YOU CAN USE THE WORLD WATCH LIST OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH TO GUIDE YOU OR PRAY AS YOUR GROUP SEES FIT.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### GOSPEL

THE GREEK WORD "GOSPEL" IS CENTRAL TO THE MESSAGE OF JESUS, A TERM WHICH IS GIVEN MEANING BY THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. HOWEVER, THE MEANING WHICH THEY GAVE THE TERM WAS BUILT UPON THE COMMON USE OF THE WORD IN THEIR DAY. IN ANTIQUITY, THE TERM "GOSPEL" WAS USED TO REFERENCE A MESSAGE OF GOOD NEWS WHICH ANNOUNCED BENEFITS TO A POPULACE. THE TERM ITSELF IS MADE UP OF TWO PARTS, THE FIRST PART MEANING "GOOD" AND THE SECOND, "ANNOUNCEMENT" OR "MESSENGER."

THROUGHOUT ANTIQUITY, GOSPEL MESSAGES WERE ANNOUNCED BY HERALDS. THESE MESSAGES TYPICALLY CONTAINED NEWS ABOUT VICTORIES WON IN BATTLE, THE FULFILLMENT OF A PROMISE MADE BY A RULER, OR EVEN THE ASCENSION OF A NEW KING. HOWEVER, OVER TIME, THE TERM BEGAN TO ALSO BE USED TO REFER TO ORACLES GIVEN BY THE GODS. THESE ORACLES WERE UNDERSTOOD TO BE GIFTS FROM THE GODS ANNOUNCING WHAT THEY PLANNED TO DO AS THEY INTERACTED WITH HUMANITY. IT IS THIS LATTER RELIGIOUS USAGE THAT THE ROMANS PICKED UP AND BEGAN TO USE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE IMPERIAL CULT. THE IMPERIAL CULT WAS THE LOOSELY ORGANIZED BELIEF THAT THE CAESARS WERE DIVINE AND THEREFORE WORTHY OF WORSHIP. WHILE THE IMPERIAL CULT IN ITS FULLNESS IS NOT SEEN UNTIL THE LATER FIRST-CENTURY, IT IS NONETHELESS PRESENT IN AN IDENTIFIABLE FORM WITH AUGUSTUS (27 B.C.E TO 14 C.E.). THE GOSPEL OF THE IMPERIAL CULT WAS THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF A DIVINE RULER, THE COMING AGE OF HIS REIGN, AND THE HAPPINESS AND PEACE WHICH WOULD BE THE RESULT.

WHETHER JESUS EVER USED THIS SPECIFIC GREEK WORD IS UNCERTAIN. HE MAY HAVE USED AN ARAMAIC TERM SIMILAR TO THE GREEK WORD "GOSPEL" (MARK 1.14; MATTHEW 24.14). HOWEVER, THE USE OF ANY SUCH WORD DOES NOT SEEM TO BE IMPORTANT TO HIS MINISTRY OR MESSAGE, BUT RATHER USED DESCRIPTIVELY OF HIS MINISTRY AND MESSAGE. THE WORD ONLY BECAME IMPORTANT AS THE FIRST BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BEGAN TO BE PENNED. THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT NEEDED A WORD BY WHICH TO IDENTIFY WHAT HAD TRANSPIRED AND BEEN PROCLAIMED IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS. THEY CHOSE THE WORD "GOSPEL."

HISTORICALLY, THE FIRST CONSISTENT AND INTENTIONAL USAGE OF THE

WORD AND ITS COGNATES APPEARS IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL AS THESE ARE THE EARLIEST WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. ACCORDING TO PAUL, THE "GOSPEL" WAS A MESSAGE WHICH ORIGINATED WITH GOD (GALATIANS 1.11) AND IT INVOLVED THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF JESUS (1 CORINTHIANS 15.3-7). PAUL NOTED THAT THE GOSPEL WAS CHARGED WITH POWER. THIS POWER CREATED FAITH (ROMANS 1.16-17), BROUGHT LIFE (1 CORINTHIANS 15.2; ROMANS 1.16) AND JUDGMENT (ROMANS 2.16), AND FILLED PEOPLE WITH HOPE (COLOSSIANS 1.5, 23). WHILE IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE TO DESCRIBE PAUL'S USE OF THE TERM AS INCONSISTENT, IT WOULD NOT BE FAR OFF THE MARK TO SPEAK OF IT AS DEVELOPING. NOWHERE IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL DOES ONE FIND A CONSISTENT DEFINITION OF THE TERM OTHER THAN IT IS USED TO LOOSELY REFER TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF JESUS WHICH CLIMAXED IN THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION, A LIFE AND MINISTRY WHICH PAUL PROCLAIMED AS THE CRUX OF HIS EVANGELISM. PAUL'S USE OF THE TERM MOST LIKELY INDICATES EARLY CHRISTIAN USE OF THE TERM BECAUSE HE SEEMS TO ASSUME THE CHURCHES TO WHOM HE IS WRITING, SOME WHICH HE HAS NEVER VISITED, UNDERSTAND THE TERM. IT IS NOT UNTIL THE WRITING OF MARK'S GOSPEL THAT THE TERM EMERGES WITH A CLEAR DEFINITION.

MARK WAS A MISSION COMPANION OF PAUL (ACTS 13.1; 2 TIMOTHY 4.11; PHILEMON 24) AND PETER. CHURCH HISTORY INDICATES THAT MARK BASED HIS GOSPEL ON THE PREACHING OF PETER IN ROME. MARK CHOSE THE TERM "GOSPEL" TO IDENTIFY BOTH THE NATURE OF HIS LITERARY WORK, A WORK ABOUT THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS (MARK 1.1), AND THE NATURE OF JESUS' MESSAGE (MARK 1.14). IN SO DOING, IT IS FAIRLY CLEAR THAT MARK HAD THE ROMAN USAGE OF THE TERM, TIED WITH THE IMPERIAL CULT, IN MIND, BECAUSE HIS BOOK AND THE MESSAGE HE IDENTIFIES AS JESUS' GOSPEL PROCLAIM THE BIRTH OF A DIVINE RULER, THE COMING OF HIS REIGN, AND THE HAPPINESS AND PEACE WHICH COME TO THOSE OVER WHOM HE REIGNS. OTHER NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS SEEM TO HAVE FOLLOWED MARK'S USAGE OF THE TERM. THIS SPEAKS OF THE INCREDIBLE INFLUENCE MARK'S GOSPEL HAD ON THE SUBSEQUENT GOSPELS WRITTEN BY LUKE AND MATTHEW AND THEREFORE UPON THE CHURCH THROUGHOUT THE AGES. (BOTH LUKE AND MATTHEW NOT ONLY USED THE TERM "GOSPEL" BUT USED MARK'S GOSPEL AS THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH THEY WROTE THEIR OWN GOSPELS, OFTEN INCLUDING HIS EXACT WORDING AND ORDER.)

WHILE PAUL MAKES THE GREATEST USE OF THE TERM, IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS MARK WHO IMBUED THE TERM WITH ITS NEW TESTAMENT MEANING, MOST LIKELY COALESCING THE THINKING OF THE CHURCH AND COMMON USAGE OF THE TERM HANDED DOWN TO HIM THROUGH BOTH PAUL AND PETER. THEREFORE, IT IS BEST TO TURN TO HIM WHEN DEFINING THE TERM AND THEN READ OTHER USES OF THE TERM THROUGHOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH MARK'S MEANING AS THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING RATHER THAN USING ONE OF PAUL'S VARIOUS USES AS OUR WORKING DEFINITION AS THESE SEEM TO INDICATE A GROWING USAGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM IN

THE EARLY CHURCH. ACCORDING TO MARK, THE GOSPEL IS DIRECTLY TIED TO THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS (MARK 1.1). FURTHER, THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS THE MESSAGE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM HAD DRAWN NEAR THROUGH THE PERSON OF JESUS, AND THAT ALL WERE INVITED TO ENTER AND LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF GOD. WITH THIS FOUNDATION IN MIND, WE CAN SEE PAUL TEASE OUT ASPECTS OF THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS AS HE DOES IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15.3-7. HOWEVER, WE WOULD BE WRONG TO REDUCE THE GOSPEL TO THESE INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS FOR THEY MISS THE LARGER CONTEXT OF WHICH THESE EVENTS ARE A PART, THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD THROUGH THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF JESUS.

## THE TEXT

### MARK 1.14-15: JESUS' GOSPEL

MARK'S GOSPEL IS HIS PROCLAMATION OF THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH. BUT WHAT ABOUT JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY IS THE GOSPEL? IN OTHER WORDS, HOW MIGHT WE DEFINE "GOSPEL"? MARK PROVIDES A CLUE WITH HIS USE OF THE TERMS "MESSIAH" AND "KINGDOM" IN CONNECTION WITH THE TERM "GOSPEL" (MARK 1.1, 14). THE TERMS "MESSIAH" AND "KINGDOM" WERE PART OF A LARGER STORY ABOUT GOD'S REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT, A STORY WHICH FORMED THE CRUX OF JESUS' MESSAGE.

MARK INDICATES THAT JESUS BEGAN HIS MINISTRY AFTER JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS PUT IN PRISON IN THE REGION OF GALILEE. AS HE BEGAN HIS MINISTRY, JESUS PROCLAIMED A GOSPEL OR MESSAGE OF GOOD NEWS. ACCORDING TO MARK, THE GOOD NEWS MESSAGE OF JESUS WAS GOD'S KINGDOM HAD ARRIVED. THE ARRIVAL OF THIS KINGDOM MARKED THE BEGINNING OF A SPECIAL TIME DURING WHICH PEOPLE WERE TO RESPOND BY REPENTANCE AND FAITH. AS A PEOPLE WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH KINGS AND KINGDOMS, SOME CARE IS NEEDED IN UNPACKING JESUS' GOSPEL MESSAGE.

IN ANTIQUITY, KINGDOMS CONSISTED OF TWO PRIMARY ELEMENTS: A KING AND HIS SUBJECTS. APART FROM THESE TWO ELEMENTS, A KINGDOM CANNOT EXIST. THEREFORE, WHEN JESUS ANNOUNCED THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM, HE WAS ANNOUNCING THE ARRIVAL OF GOD AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD'S SUBJECTS IN LITERAL SPACE AND TIME. THESE SUBJECTS WERE TO CONSIST OF PEOPLE WHO HEARD GOD WAS COMING AND CHOSE TO GIVE UP THEIR LIVES UNDER OTHER RULERS (REPENTANCE) SO THAT THEY MIGHT ORIENT THEIR LIVES UNDER THE REIGN OF GOD (BELIEVE/FAITH). HOWEVER, ONE MUST NOT MISS JESUS' STATEMENT THAT THE TIME HAD COME. NOW WAS A SPECIAL TIME. IT IS THESE WORDS WHICH PROVIDE CONTEXT NOT ONLY FOR UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD BUT JESUS' ROLE IN IT AS MESSIAH.

THE LARGER STORY OF GOD'S KINGDOM BEGINS WITH CREATION (GENESIS 1-2). AS SOVEREIGN CREATOR, GOD STOOD AS KING OVER HIS CREATION, A REIGN WHICH HE INTENDED TO EXPRESS THROUGH HIS SPECIAL CREATION, PEOPLE (GENESIS 1.26-28). GOD INTENDED

TO REIGN WITH PEOPLE AS HIS SUBJECTS FOR ETERNITY, BUT PEOPLE REBELLED AND THREW OFF HIS RIGHTFUL RULE OVER THEM (GENESIS 3). HOWEVER, GOD, AS RIGHTFUL RULER, INTENDED TO REESTABLISH HIS REIGN OVER CREATION AND PEOPLE. THEREFORE, HE CHOSE TO CALL ASIDE A PEOPLE FROM ALL PEOPLE TO LIVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT WAS TO LIVE AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM, A PEOPLE WHO WOULD THEN REACH OUT TO OTHERS INVITING THEM INTO THIS KINGDOM LIFE WITH GOD. AS THOSE WHO LIVED WITH GOD AND REACHED OUT TO OTHERS, THESE CITIZENS FILLED THE ROLE OF A PRIEST (EXODUS 19.4-6). HOWEVER, THESE KINGDOM PEOPLE WHO SERVED AS PRIESTS ALSO THREW OFF GOD'S RIGHTFUL REIGN (1 SAMUEL 8.4-7), BUT GOD WAS UNDETERRED. HE PROCLAIMED THROUGH THE PROPHETS THAT HE WOULD ONE DAY COME AND REESTABLISH HIS RIGHTFUL REIGN (ISAIAH 9.1-7). THE ONE GOD WOULD SEND IN HIS STEAD WAS UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE MESSIAH.

WHEN JESUS BEGAN TO PROCLAIM THE TIME HAD COME, HE WAS IDENTIFYING THE PRESENT MOMENT AS THE TIME GOD HAD SET TO REESTABLISH HIS RIGHTFUL REIGN ON EARTH. GOD WAS MOVING TO CALL PEOPLE OUT TO LIVE UNDER HIS REIGN AND SERVE AS HIS PRIESTS IN THE PRESENT. IN KEEPING WITH THE PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH AND OTHERS, JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH, OR THE ONE WHO STOOD IN GOD'S STEAD AS RIGHTFUL RULER. THEREFORE, JESUS' GOSPEL WAS NOTHING LESS THAN GOD WAS REASSERTING HIS RIGHTS AS SOVEREIGN RULER AND CALLING PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER THIS REIGN BY LIVING UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS ON EARTH. JESUS STATED THAT PEOPLE WHO RESPONDED TO GOD'S REIGN BY LIVING UNDER HIM AS KING WOULD BE CALLED THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20), THE PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH.

IT IS NECESSARY TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE CHURCH IS NOT SOMETHING SEPARATE FROM ISRAEL BUT IS ISRAEL WITH GENTILES GRAFTED IN (ROMANS 9-11), A CALLED OUT PEOPLE INTENDED TO SERVE AS GOD'S PRIESTS CALLING ALL PEOPLE TO LIVE UNDER GOD'S REIGN THROUGH JESUS (1 PETER 2.9-10). WHILE JESUS PROCLAIMED THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS NOW PHYSICALLY PRESENT, SEEN IN THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH, THE FULLNESS OF THIS KINGDOM WAS NOT YET PRESENT. THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM WOULD COME IN THE FUTURE WHEN THE CHURCH TOOK ITS FULLNESS, A PEOPLE CONSISTING OF BOTH ISRAEL AND THOSE WHO RESPONDED TO THE APOSTLES (REVELATION 21.10-14) WHO WOULD THEN LIVE IN A RE-CREATED GARDEN OF EDEN (REVELATION 22.1-2) WITH GOD FULFILLING THEIR ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF REFLECTING THE RIGHTFUL REIGN OF GOD TO THE REST OF CREATION (GENESIS 1.26-28; REVELATION 22.5).

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? THIS IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FACING THE MODERN CHURCH AS WE SEEK TO LIVE INTO THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS. HOW WE DEFINE THE GOSPEL WILL SHAPE HOW WE ENGAGE OUR WORLD IN WORD AND DEED, AND OUR WORLD DESPERATELY NEEDS US TO ENGAGE IT. I AM NOT ONE WHO

BELIEVES THE WORLD IS GETTING WORSE AND WORSE. THE STATE OF OUR WORLD SEEMS TO EBB AND FLOW. THERE HAVE BEEN PERIODS OF RELATIVE CALM AND THERE HAVE BEEN PERIODS OF UNTOLD HORROR AND EVIL. IN OUR PRESENT, IT DOES SEEM THAT WE ARE FLOWING BACK TOWARD ONE OF THOSE PERIODS OF HORROR AND EVIL. FAMINE IS ON THE RISE IN EAST AFRICA. WAR ENGULFS SYRIA AND IS SPILLING OUT INTO THE WIDER MIDDLE-EAST CREATING ONE OF THE GREATEST HUMANITARIAN CRISES OF OUR TIME. IN OUR OWN COUNTRY, RACIAL TENSIONS AND UNSPEAKABLE PHYSICAL AND VERBAL VIOLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC SPACES SEEM TO BE ALMOST DAILY OCCURRENCES. IF THERE WAS EVER A TIME OUR WORLD NEEDED THE CHURCH'S ENGAGEMENT, IT IS NOW. AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD, WE ENGAGE WITH THE GOSPEL. OUR LIVES AND OUR WORDS SPEAK THIS MESSAGE OF HOPE, BUT WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

IT SEEMS THAT TWO MAIN CAMPS/DEFINITIONS ARE EMERGING. SOME PEOPLE DEFINE THE GOSPEL AS THE MESSAGE THAT WE NEED TO BE SAVED SO THAT WE CAN GO TO HEAVEN WHEN WE DIE. OTHERS DEFINE THE GOSPEL AS A CALL FOR SOCIAL ACTION, THE SEEKING OF JUSTICE. PEOPLE WHO HOLD TO THE FORMER DEFINITION OFTEN WITHDRAW INTO SAFE COMMUNITIES AND MAKE FORAYS INTO THE WORLD WHERE THEY TELL PEOPLE THEY ARE SINNERS IN NEED OF THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD. PEOPLE WHO HOLD TO THE LATTER DEFINITION STEP OUT TO ENGAGE THE WORLD. THEY DIG WATER WELLS, TAKE IN REFUGEES, WORK FOR PEACE, AND MUCH MORE. BOTH BELIEVE THEY ARE RIGHT IN THEIR THINKING AND ACTIONS, AND THE OTHER IS WRONG, OR AT LEAST A GOOD BIT OFF THE MARK. I WAS RAISED IN A CONTEXT WHICH BELIEVED THE FORMER. I AM OF A GENERATION WHICH BELIEVES THE LATTER. I AM COMING TO DISCOVER THAT THE TRUTH IS SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE.

WHEN JESUS BEGAN HIS MINISTRY, HE PROCLAIMED THE GOSPEL, AND HIS MESSAGE WASN'T ABOUT GETTING SAVED AND GOING TO HEAVEN OR FEEDING STARVING PEOPLE IN AFRICA. HIS MESSAGE WAS ABOUT THE PRESENT KINGDOM OF GOD AND A CALL FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE AS CITIZENS OF THAT KINGDOM, NOT ONE DAY IN THE FUTURE BUT TO LIVE AS CITIZENS OF THAT KINGDOM IN THE PRESENT. HE CALLED THIS NOW PRESENT KINGDOM OF GOD THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20), A PEOPLE WHO LIVED UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. IT WAS CITIZENS OF THIS KINGDOM WHO WERE TO CREATE A TRULY JUST SOCIETY AS THEY LIVED UNDER THE LAW OF KING JESUS (MATTHEW 22.36-40), AND IT WOULD BE THESE CITIZENS WHO WOULD ONE DAY EXPERIENCE A FULLNESS OF LIFE IN GOD'S PRESENCE YET TO BE REVEALED (REVELATION 21-22). THIS WAS JESUS' GOSPEL, A MESSAGE ABOUT KINGDOM, A MESSAGE ABOUT THE FORMATION OF A PEOPLE WE CALL THE CHURCH.

PROCLAIMING AND LIVING THIS MESSAGE IS ABOUT MORE THAN WITHDRAWING AND PERIODICALLY SENDING OUT MESSENGERS. IT IS ALSO ABOUT MORE THAN DIGGING WELLS OR FEEDING PEOPLE, AND YET IT INVOLVES A LITTLE BIT OF BOTH OF THESE. PROCLAIMING AND LIVING THIS MESSAGE HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH BEING THE CHURCH, THE PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION OF GOD'S NOW-PRESENT KINGDOM, A PEOPLE LIVING UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS WITH ALL THAT

INVOLVES. WHILE I AM STILL DISCOVERING AND WRESTLING WITH ALL THAT IS INVOLVED IN BEING THE CHURCH, I AM CONFRONTED WITH THE REALITY THAT I MUST FIRST CHOOSE HOW I WILL RESPOND TO THIS GOSPEL, THIS INVITATION TO BE PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM UNDER JESUS. I MUST FIRST CHOOSE WHETHER I WILL BE PART OF THIS PEOPLE JESUS CALLS CHURCH. THEN AND ONLY THEN CAN I BEGIN TO SEE WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE AND PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? HOW WE ANSWER THIS QUESTION SHAPES NOT JUST THE MESSAGE WE PROCLAIM BUT WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE LIVE AS THE CHURCH. UNFORTUNATELY, AS OUR WORLD STAGGERS TOWARD A PERIOD OF INCREDIBLE STRUGGLE, A TIME IN WHICH THE NEED FOR THE CHURCH GROWS INCREASINGLY CLEAR, A GROWING DISPUTE IS ARISING ABOUT THE GOSPEL WHICH IS RESULTING IN THE ABSENCE OF THE CHURCH AT ITS WORST AND THE PRESENCE OF A POWERLESS AND INEFFECTIVE CHURCH AT BEST. IN THIS DEBATE ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL, VARIOUS TEXTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS ARE PROFFERED, BUT FEW TURN TO JESUS HIMSELF.

JESUS CLEARLY PROCLAIMED THE GOSPEL, AND HIS GOSPEL WAS ABOUT THE ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD THROUGH HIS PERSON (MARK 1.14-16). ACCORDING TO JESUS, THOSE WHO CHOSE TO LIVE AS CITIZENS OF THIS KINGDOM WERE CALLED THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20), THE PRESENT REPRESENTATION OF GOD'S KINGDOM, A PEOPLE WHO LIVED UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. THIS WAS JESUS' GOSPEL, AND IT IS TO BE OUR OWN. ONLY WHEN WE CHOOSE TO RESPOND TO JESUS' MESSAGE, WHEN WE CHOOSE TO LIVE UNDER HIS REIGN AS THE CHURCH CAN WE THEN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD.

SO, HOW DO WE RESPOND TO JESUS' GOSPEL? ACCORDING TO JESUS, WE RESPOND BY MAKING THE CHOICE TO GIVE HIM HIS RIGHTFUL ROLE AS SOVEREIGN LEADER IN OUR LIVES. WE CHOOSE TO ORIENT OUR LIVES UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP AND CARE, BECOMING CITIZENS OF HIS KINGDOM, THE CHURCH. CERTAINLY, THERE ARE THEOLOGICAL REALITIES WHICH UNDERGIRD THIS CHOICE AND OUR ABILITY TO MAKE IT BUT THE CHOICE REMAINS THE SAME. WILL WE CHOOSE TO CAST OFF THE SHACKLES OF ALL THAT RULES US SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF JESUS? ONLY IN ANSWERING THIS QUESTION CAN WE THEN GRASP WHAT IT IS TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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