



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

MAY 27, 2018

Discussion Guide

KINGDOM LIVING

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.)

- AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, WE ARE CALLED TO CARRY ON THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF CHRIST (JOHN 20.21-22). HOWEVER, THE SHAPE THIS TAKES DEPENDS HEAVILY UPON HOW WE UNDERSTAND JESUS' GOSPEL. READ MARK 1.14-15 ALOUD. HOW DO YOU HEAR JESUS DEFINING "GOSPEL?" WHAT ARE THE TWO ASPECTS OF HIS GOSPEL?
- IF HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL SHAPES HOW WE

CARRY OUT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS, WHAT SHAPE MIGHT JESUS' GOSPEL GIVE TO THESE EFFORTS? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

- IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT JESUS' GOSPEL IS BOTH PROCLAMATION AND INVITATION. JESUS DECLARED THAT ONE COULD NOW SEE AND ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND THAT THE CHURCH WAS CENTRAL TO BOTH SEEING AND ENTERING (MATTHEW 16.13-20). THIS IMPLIES THAT OUR CARRYING OUT OF THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS BEGINS BY FORMING A COMMUNITY CALLED THE CHURCH IN AND THROUGH WHICH THE KINGDOM OF GOD CAN BE SEEN. IN OTHER WORDS, THE CHURCH CONSISTS OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. WHAT MIGHT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS UNDERSTANDING BE FOR THE CHURCH? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- DO YOU THINK THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE UP THE CHURCH HAVE THIS UNDERSTANDING OF WHO THEY ARE AND THEIR ROLE IN CARRYING OUT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- PEOPLE WHO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS ARE PEOPLE WHO INTENTIONALLY LIVE BY JESUS' LAW. READ MATTHEW 22.34-40 AND JOHN 13.34-35. WHAT IS JESUS' LAW? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE JESUS' LAW AS THE CHURCH? DO YOU FEEL THIS IS EASY OR DIFFICULT? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTINUALLY CALLED THE CHURCH TO LIVE BY JESUS' LAW, LOVING GOD AND ONE ANOTHER, BUT PEOPLE FOUND THIS DIFFICULT. THEREFORE, THESE AUTHORS ENCOURAGED THE CHURCH TO REGULARLY GATHER TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER IN THIS PURSUIT. READ HEBREWS 10.23-25. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THESE

INSTRUCTIONS HELP THE CHURCH LIVE BY JESUS' LAW?

- WHAT ADDITIONAL WEIGHT, IF ANY, DO THESE INSTRUCTIONS PLACE UPON THE REGULAR GATHERING OF THE CHURCH? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE OUT THESE INSTRUCTIONS AS A GROUP?
- YOU MIGHT CONCLUDE BY DISCUSSING PRACTICAL OUTWORKINGS OF GATHERING TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO PURSUE A LIFE OF LOVING GOD AND ONE ANOTHER. YOU MIGHT DISCUSS THE DIFFICULTIES TO THIS AND WHAT MIGHT BE REQUIRED OF YOU, INCLUDING HOW THIS MAKES YOU FEEL.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

KINGDOM OF GOD, THE GOSPEL, AND THE CHURCH

THE HEART OF JESUS' TEACHING AND MINISTRY CENTERED UPON THE KINGDOM OF GOD. THIS TERM OR ITS COGNATES APPEAR EIGHTY-FIVE TIMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, SIXTY-ONE TIMES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS ALONE (MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE). JESUS ROOTED HIS PROCLAMATION CONCERNING THE KINGDOM IN A LARGER NARRATIVE ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM, CREATED AND REESTABLISHED. AS CREATOR, GOD WAS THE RIGHTFUL KING OVER ALL OF CREATION. HE DESIRED TO EXPRESS HIS REIGN THROUGH HUMANITY WHO WOULD LIVE AS A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS—A KINGDOM CONSISTS OF SUBJECTS AND THEIR SOVEREIGN RULER—REFLECTING GOD'S IMAGE AND REIGN TO THE REST OF CREATION (GENESIS 1.26-28). HOWEVER, HUMANITY REBELLED AGAINST THEIR KING (GENESIS 3), REFUSING TO LIVE AS PRIESTS WHO EXTENDED THE RIGHTFUL REIGN OF GOD IN HIS CREATION. THEREFORE, GOD CHOSE TO CALL OUT A GROUP OF PEOPLE (ISRAEL) WHO WOULD FUNCTION AS A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE WORLD THE LIFE HE INTENDED AND TO INVITE HUMANITY TO ONCE AGAIN SUBMIT TO HIS REIGN (EXODUS 19.4-6). HOWEVER, AS HUMANITY HAD ONCE BEFORE, ISRAEL REBELLED, THROWING OFF GOD'S RIGHTFUL CLAIM AS SOVEREIGN AND THEIR ROLE AS HIS IMAGE-BEARERS TO CREATION (1 SAMUEL 8). RATHER THAN RESPONDING IN ANGER, GOD SHOWED MERCY TO THOSE WHO REBELLED AND PROMISED THAT ONE DAY HE WOULD COME THROUGH HIS MESSIAH TO REESTABLISH HIS PHYSICAL KINGDOM ON EARTH (ISAIAH 9.1-7). WHEN JESUS CAME PROCLAIMING HIS GOSPEL MESSAGE ABOUT THE KINGDOM, HE WAS STATING THAT GOD'S PROMISE MADE THROUGH ISAIAH WAS BEING FULFILLED THROUGH HIM (MARK 1.14-15). IN JESUS, GOD HAD ARRIVED TO REESTABLISH HIS PHYSICAL KINGDOM SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT SEE THE LIFE HE ORIGINALLY INTENDED FOR PEOPLE AS HIS PRIESTS, EXTENDING HIS REIGN TO CREATION, AND SO PEOPLE MIGHT ONCE

AGAIN SUBMIT TO HIS REIGN. JESUS CALLED THIS NOW PRESENT KINGDOM THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20), THOSE PEOPLE WHO WILLINGLY LIVED UNDER THE RIGHTFUL REIGN OF KING JESUS.

AS A REAL KINGDOM CONSISTING OF PEOPLE AND THEIR SOVEREIGN RULER, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A POLITICAL REALITY, A REALITY FORETOLD BY ISAIAH (ISAIAH 9.1-7). THE DISCIPLES AND FOLLOWERS CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD JESUS TO BE PROCLAIMING A PRESENT KINGDOM WITH POLITICAL CLOUT IN THEIR QUESTIONS CONCERNING POWER (ACTS 1.6; MARK 10.35-45) AND IN THEIR RESPONSE TO HIS ENTERING JERUSALEM SHORTLY BEFORE HIS CRUCIFIXION (MATTHEW 21.1-11). EVEN JESUS' ENEMIES UNDERSTOOD HIM AS A POLITICAL THREAT AND CRUCIFIED HIM AS A POLITICAL REBEL WHO CLAIMED KINGSHIP FOR HIMSELF (MARK 15.26; MATTHEW 27.11). HOWEVER, THE KINGDOM JESUS PROCLAIMED WENT BEYOND THE POLITICAL REALM TO INCLUDE THE SPIRITUAL REALM. JESUS NOTED THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS PRESENT WITHIN THE HEARTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS (LUKE 17.20-21), A SPIRITUAL REIGN WHICH CREATED A NEW MORAL CODE (MATTHEW 22.34-40) WHICH PLACED GOD ABOVE ALL OTHERS (MATTHEW 22.15-22).

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT AS MUCH AS JESUS' PREACHING FOCUSED ON THE VERY REAL PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE PRESENT, HE ALSO STRESSED THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHICH WAS PRESENT WAS NOT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ITS FULLNESS. SOMETIMES THIS REALITY HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS A "NOW-NOT-YET" ESCHATOLOGY; THAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS BOTH NOW AND NOT YET PRESENT IN ITS FULLNESS. WHILE THE KINGDOM OF GOD TRULY HAD COME, ITS PRESENCE SEEN IN THE MIRACLES OF JESUS (LUKE 11.20) AND THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20), HIS DISCIPLES WERE TO PRAY FOR THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM TO COME (LUKE 11.2). JESUS ASSOCIATED THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ITS FULLNESS WITH JUDGMENT (MATTHEW 5.19-20; 7.21-23; 25.1-46; LUKE 13.22-30) WHICH LATER AUTHORS NOTED WOULD INVOLVE THE RESTORATION OF ALL OF CREATION AND A RETURN TO LIFE AS GOD INTENDED (ROMANS 8.18-30; REVELATION 21-22), A LIFE WHICH MAINTAINED THE CHURCH AT ITS CENTER.

WHEN JESUS PROCLAIMED HIS GOSPEL ABOUT THE KINGDOM, HE WAS BASICALLY STATING THAT PEOPLE COULD NOW SEE AND BECOME PART OF THE LIFE GOD ORIGINALLY INTENDED (MARK 1.14-15), AND THAT THIS LIFE COULD BE SEEN AND JOINED IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH (MATTHEW 16.13-20). THEREFORE, THE CHURCH IS CENTRAL TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, STANDING AS BOTH A WITNESS TO ITS TRUTH AND A MEANS OF RESPONDING TO IT. HOWEVER, THIS CREATES IMPORTANT REALITIES TO WHICH THE CHURCH MUST NOW PAY ATTENTION. IF THE CHURCH IS TO SERVE AS A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL AND A MEANS OF

RESPONDING TO IT, THE CHURCH MUST BE MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO THEMSELVES HAVE RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL. THE CHURCH CAN ONLY BE THE CHURCH WHEN IT IS MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE FIRST WITNESSED THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS PRESENT IN THE CHURCH, AND SECOND, CHOSEN TO RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL BY LIVING UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS IN AND THROUGH THE COMMUNITY CALLED THE CHURCH.

AS A PEOPLE WHO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS, THE CHURCH CONSISTS OF A PEOPLE WHO WILLINGLY LIVE UNDER JESUS' LAW. ACCORDING TO JESUS, THIS LAW HAS STOOD AND WILL STAND FOR ALL TIME (MATTHEW 5.17-20) AND CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS SEEKING TO DEVOTE ONESELF FULLY TO GOD IN LOVE AND TO LOVE ONE'S FELLOW PERSON AS THEMSELVES (MATTHEW 22.36-40). THEREFORE, AS A COMMUNITY WHICH REPRESENTS THE KINGDOM OF GOD NOW PRESENT ON EARTH, THE CHURCH IS A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY WHICH SEEKS TO EXPRESS SELFLESS DEVOTION TO THEIR FELLOW PERSON, THE LATTER BEGINNING WITHIN THEIR OWN MIDST. SIMPLY PUT, THE CHURCH IS A COMMUNITY IN WHICH GOD'S STORY IS PURPOSEFULLY TOLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE PURSUE LOVING DEVOTION WITH ONE ANOTHER. THE PRACTICAL REALITIES OF THIS SHOULD BE OBVIOUS. THE COMMUNITY CALLED THE CHURCH SHOULD BE THE ONE PLACE WHERE THE TRUTH OF GOD AND LIFE HE INTENDED IS FOUND. IN THIS COMMUNITY ONE SHOULD WITNESS WHAT IT IS TO HONOR GOD AS SOVEREIGN AND TO HONOR ONE ANOTHER AS PRECIOUS BEINGS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, A COMMUNITY OF TRUTH, LOVE, PEACE, JUSTICE, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. IT IS NO MISTAKE THAT JESUS WARNED THAT THOSE WHO CLAIMED TO BE HIS FOLLOWERS BUT DID NOT PURSUE THIS FORM OF COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY MARKED BY TRUTH, LOVE, PEACE, JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR ALL OF ITS MEMBERS, WERE NOT IN FACT HIS FOLLOWERS (MATTHEW 23.1-46; esp. VERSES 40 AND 45-46).

LATER AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES CONSISTENTLY FOCUSED ON THESE TWO REALITIES, CHURCHES BECOMING COMMUNITIES WHICH WERE DEVOTED TO GOD AND ONE ANOTHER. PAUL REGULARLY PROVIDED GUIDANCE FOR THE PRACTICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REALITIES WHICH WOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE CREATION OF THIS KIND OF COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, IT WAS THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS WHO NOTED THAT IT WAS THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY ITSELF, THE REGULAR GATHERING WHICH WAS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE IN BECOMING A COMMUNITY WHICH STOOD AS A WITNESS TO THE NOW PRESENT KINGDOM. HE NOTED THAT IN THE REGULAR GATHERING OF THE CHURCH, ENCOURAGEMENT WAS FOUND TO BE A PEOPLE WHO LOVED BOTH GOD AND PEOPLE (HEBREWS 10.24-25).

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT JESUS' GOSPEL MESSAGE

INVOLVED NOT JUST THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT ONE COULD SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE CHURCH THEREBY REQUIRING THOSE WHO RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL TO CREATE SUCH COMMUNITIES, BUT HIS GOSPEL ANNOUNCED THAT PEOPLE COULD ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS THEY BECAME PART OF THESE COMMUNITIES. WHEN PEOPLE CHOSE TO BECOME PART OF THE CHURCH AND WILLINGLY LIVED WITH OTHERS UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS, THEY TOO BECAME CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM (PHILIPPIAN 3.15-21). HOWEVER, THIS BEGS THE QUESTION AS TO WHY PEOPLE WOULD WISH TO RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL BY BECOMING PART OF THE CHURCH STEPPING INTO THE KINGDOM AND ITS LIFE. THE CONSTANT WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT SEEMS TO BE THAT THE CHURCH REACHED OUT BY PROCLAIMING THE PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM, THE REIGN OF JESUS, BUT WOODED PEOPLE TOWARD RESPONDING WITH THE EXPRESSION OF GOOD WORKS, THE EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM LIFE OF LOVING ONE ANOTHER (GALATIANS 6.9-10; HEBREWS 10.24-25; 1 PETER 2.11-12). THE JUSTICE, LOVE, MERCY AND PEACE SOUGHT IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH WAS TO BE EXTENDED TO THOSE NOT WITHIN THIS COMMUNITY. THE PURPOSE OF THIS WAS NOT TO RECREATE THE COMMUNITY OUTSIDE THE CHURCH BUT TO SHOW PEOPLE WHAT LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH WAS LIKE, AN INVITATION WHICH THEN INVITED PEOPLE TO RESPOND BY RESPONDING TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (1 PETER 2.12).

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

HOW ARE WE TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD? THIS IS THE ONE QUESTION EVERY COMMUNITY OF FAITH MUST ANSWER IF IT IS TO BE FAITHFUL TO ITS CALLING TO CARRY ON THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS. IT IS THE ONE QUESTION WHICH MANY SEEM TO BE UNABLE TO ANSWER BECAUSE, THEIR ENERGIES FOCUSED UPON SURVIVING THE TRAGIC OUTWORKINGS OF A DISAGREEMENT OVER THE GOSPEL. HOWEVER, ALL IS NOT LOST. THE CHURCH CAN RETURN TO THE QUESTION OF THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL AND WORK ITS WAY TOWARD WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO ENGAGE ITS WORLD.

JESUS' GOSPEL WAS BOTH PROCLAMATION AND INVITATION. JESUS PROCLAIMED PEOPLE COULD NOW SEE AND JOIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD; THAT IS, PEOPLE COULD SEE AND JOIN THE LIFE HE ALWAYS INTENDED FOR THEM IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH. SIMPLY PUT, THE CHURCH IS CENTRAL TO PEOPLE SEEING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL. THEREFORE, IF THE CHURCH IS TO FULFILL ITS ROLE IN CARRYING ON THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS, IT MUST FIRST ITSELF RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL IS ABOUT MORE THAN RECEIVING FORGIVENESS OR CHOOSING TO ACT FOR JUSTICE. RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL BEGINS BY CHOOSING TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS AND TO DO SO IN A COMMUNITY MADE UP OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE. THIS COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE (THE CHURCH) CHOOSES TO

LIVE UNDER JESUS' LAW WHICH STATES THEY ARE TO SEEK TO LOVE GOD AND THEIR FELLOW PERSON, WHICH MEANS THE CHURCH IS A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH LOVE, RESPECT, AND JUSTICE AS THEY SEEK RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER. IN OTHER WORDS, WHEN THE CHURCH RESPONDS TO THE GOSPEL THEY FORM A COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE MIGHT DISCOVER AND ENCOUNTER THE TRUE GOD AND WHERE THEY MIGHT WITNESS AND EXPERIENCE THE RIGHTEOUS LIFE GOD HAS ALWAYS INTENDED. THE CHURCH SHOULD BE THE ONE PLACE ON EARTH WHERE ALL ARE LOVED, ALL ARE RESPECTED, ALL ARE SERVED, ALL ARE CHERISHED AND PROTECTED, ALL ARE AFFORDED THE WORTH THEY DESERVE AS PEOPLE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. THEN AND ONLY THEN CAN THE CHURCH REACH OUT AND ENGAGE ITS WORLD.

TRAGICALLY, THE CHURCH STRUGGLES TO ENGAGE ITS WORLD BECAUSE IT HAS NOT FIRST RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL ITSELF. THE CHURCH IS FULL OF STRIFE. IT FOMENTS HATRED. IT AFFORDS SOME PEOPLE MORE HONOR THAN OTHERS BASED ON THINGS LIKE GENDER OR RACE. IT SEEKS THE PROTECTION OF SOME AT THE COST OF OTHERS SO THAT WHEN THE WORLD SEES US IT SEES ANYTHING BUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD, LIFE AS IT IS MEANT TO BE. SOME OF THIS EXISTS BECAUSE WE ARE A PEOPLE IN PROCESS, BUT MOST OF IT EXISTS BECAUSE WE ARE NOT A PEOPLE WHO ARE SEEKING TO RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL, NOT THE GOSPEL JESUS PROCLAIMED. BUT WHAT IF WE WERE? WHAT IF WE WERE THAT PEOPLE? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO SEEK TO BECOME THAT PEOPLE?

THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS OFFERS US GUIDANCE IN HOW TO BECOME THAT PEOPLE, A PEOPLE WHO HAVE RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL. HE NOTED THAT THE CHURCH BECOMES A GOSPEL-ORIENTED PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR GATHERING AND INTENTIONAL FOSTERING OF A GOSPEL COMMUNITY. IT IS WHEN WE GATHER FOR THE PURPOSE OF BECOMING A GOSPEL PEOPLE WE BECOME THAT GOSPEL PEOPLE. IT IS WHEN WE GATHER AND ADMIT WE DO NOT LOVE, DO NOT CARE, DO NOT CHERISH BUT SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON TO THIS LIFE, CHEERING, ADMONISHING, AND ENCOURAGING THAT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WE BECOME THAT PEOPLE, AND THE WORLD BEGINS TO SEE THE KINGDOM. . .IN AND AMONG US.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO ENGAGE OUR WORLD, TO CARRY FORTH THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS? WHATEVER THE ANSWER IS, IT IS ROOTED IN HOW WE DEFINE THE GOSPEL, BECAUSE THE GOSPEL WAS CENTRAL TO JESUS' REDEMPTIVE MISSION. THEREFORE, HOWEVER WE DEFINE THE GOSPEL WILL GIVE SHAPE TO HOW WE CARRY OUT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS. AS WE CONSIDER HOW JESUS DEFINED THE GOSPEL, WE SEE THAT IT WAS BOTH PROCLAMATION AND INVITATION. IT

WAS A MESSAGE THAT PEOPLE COULD NOW SEE AND ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND THAT THE CHURCH WAS CENTRAL TO BOTH THE SEEING AND ENTERING. WHEN WE STEP BACK AND CONSIDER THIS REALITY, IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT THE FIRST STEP IN CARRYING ON THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS IS CREATING A COMMUNITY (THE CHURCH) IN WHICH PEOPLE CAN SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD, A PEOPLE LIVING UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS.

PEOPLE WHO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS WILLINGLY LIVE BY HIS LAW, SEEKING TO LOVE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER COMPLETELY. THUS, ANY COMMUNITY WHICH SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A COMMUNITY WHICH PURSUES GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE AND SEEKS TO LAVISH SELFLESS LOVE UPON ONE ANOTHER. THIS LEADS TO A COMMUNITY WHERE GOD AND HIS LIFE MIGHT BE FOUND AND WHERE PEOPLE ARE CARED FOR COMPLETELY. IN OTHER WORDS, THIS COMMUNITY WOULD BECOME THE MOST JUST, MOST CARING, MOST RIGHTEOUS, MOST UPLIFTING COMMUNITY ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. SO, IS THIS WHO THE CHURCH IS? IS THIS WHO WE ARE? HONESTLY, THE ANSWER IS "NO." THE CHURCH IS OFTEN THE LAST PLACE TO WHICH WE WOULD POINT AS A LOVING, CARING, RIGHTEOUS COMMUNITY. OFTEN THE CHURCH IS A DANGEROUS COMMUNITY FULL OF FACTITIOUS PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEMSELVES MORE THAN ANY OTHER. NOT QUITE HOW WE WOULD DEFINE THE KINGDOM OF GOD. SOME OF THIS IS BECAUSE WE ARE A PEOPLE IN PROCESS. HOWEVER, SOME OF IT IS BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY WHAT IT IS TO BE THE CHURCH. BEING THE CHURCH MEANS WE ARE A PEOPLE WHO HAVE RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL. WE ARE A PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS AND TAKE THIS VERY SERIOUSLY. SECOND, IN OUR PURSUIT OF THIS GOSPEL LIFE, WE CONTINUALLY GATHER FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENCOURAGING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER TOWARD THIS GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE, A LIFE UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JESUS. IN TIME, AS WE RESPOND AND GATHER TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TOWARD THE GOSPEL, WE WILL SEE A NEW WAY OF BEING BLOSSOM AMONG US. THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER THIS CAN HAPPEN BUT WHETHER IT WILL HAPPEN, AND THIS, IN LARGE PART, HINGES UPON US. DO WE WISH TO BE THAT PEOPLE, A PEOPLE WHO ARE CALLED THE CHURCH?



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp

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