



Christ the King and His Kingdom

Semester introduction:

Take turns reading the below excerpt out loud at your meeting.

*"I spent many years not knowing what Jesus meant when He used the terms kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven. I simply dismissed the terms as something related to the afterlife. When I became a Christ follower, the sad truth is that I transferred Christ into **my** kingdom, into the context of **my** life. My kingdom consisted of my desires and aspirations, namely, the future I hoped for, an agenda that allowed me to reign as I chose. It all sounds selfish. It was and it still is. Thinking back, I believe I had no category in my life through which to comprehend the kingdom of God. For eighteen years I had lived my own life and served myself. I assumed that sooner or later other people would realize the great reality of me. Of course, they'd then hop on the bandwagon and serve me too.*

I wasn't good at ruling my little kingdom, though. I ended up a failed king with a broken life. That's when Jesus did indeed break into my life. He accepted me as is, brokenness and all. He forgave my truckload of sins. Life was new.

I quickly put Jesus into service.

I learned, of course, the appropriate language to assure everyone that I was serving Him. Probably it was an ugly mix of the old and the new. I was serving Him, wanting to live my life for Him, but not too much. I still wanted to be in charge. Plus I held this amazing new grace card that let me get out of jail free.

Eventually my spiritual bubble burst. I realized that Jesus did not want to help me be a better king. Neither did He want to be king of my kingdom. Really, I was a lot like those patriotic crowds in Palestine who wanted Him to be king of their country. I was simply trying to get God to endorse my agenda. But He would have none of it.

At the time it felt like a crisis. God seemed to be stepping away from me, almost abandoning me. I was unsure what the problem was. Had God quit liking me? Didn't He appreciate the plans I was making for the two of us?

I took matters into my own hands. There's a wealth of information about how to get God back on track, you know. Go to any Christian bookstore. You'll find seven steps to the perfect life, quick fixes for deeper spirituality, self-help plans for godliness, success, health, wealth...All

for God's glory, of course. All written by deep, successful people with expensive teeth. Those books danced around like magic pills just waiting for me to swallow.

In the end, though, Jesus still would have none of it.....I realize now that God was not abandoning me. He just wanted nothing to do with my kingdom agenda....Had Jesus bowed to my agenda, He would not have been the true God. Instead of being in relationship with the living, untamable, dangerously loving God of Scripture who graciously made Himself known to me through His Son, Jesus, I would have gone away with little more than an imaginary pet....

Jesus' kingdom teaching is challenging. No doubt. It doesn't present the kind of meaningful measurements Western minds expect. Maybe that's why we'd rather systematize and recover some sense of control than live by what has proven to be hard. Even if Jesus preached it.

But consider the consequences of accepting a Savior while rejecting the King....

A self-based faith leads to dysfunction and disillusionment. For example, I've noticed that when things go wrong in my King-less kingdom, I'm often arrogant enough to blame God for my trouble. That's because my worldview is warped to begin with, so I end up twisting truths I "know" in order to support my own rule....'Christ in you, the hope of glory' gets turned into an assurance of our business successes instead of a promise that brings peace to our souls when all hell breaks loose.

At the community level, we see King-less errors creeping in all the time, twisting how Christians think and live and bringing dishonor to God. Take, for example, televangelists who trot out a Bible verse and tell you that God wants you to be rich, but somehow the whole get-rich system that 'God created' requires that you send them money.....

Here's the bottom line: even the best theologian in the world cannot get a kingdom-less God to work.....We end up living in a sea of chaos, where Jesus' kingdom people are chasing after anything that will get Him to work His magic on their behalf. In other words, get the King to serve the bricklayers and barmaids.

From personal experience I can tell you that He **will** let you live in your own construct, if you choose. But He'll **never** bow down to you or adapt Himself to your beliefs.

I'm grateful for that.

How, then, do we begin to make sense of any of this? What could our lives look like if we took up Jesus' invitation to reorient our lives to His kingdom revolution? What if we really took Him as our King and submitted to His rule? What if we organized our lives to be faithful to His kingdom culture?

What if...."

Excerpt taken from the third chapter of Rick McKinley's *This Beautiful Mess: Practicing the Presence of the Kingdom of God*

Discussion questions:

Does this reading excite you or scare you?

How does this reading relate to your past failures?

Is this message Good News to you? Why or why not?