

**Kingdom Series - Autumn 2005 - King's Centre Church**  
**Week 5 – Upside Down Kingdom 1 (09.10.05)**  
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Reading – 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

<sup>26</sup>Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup>But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup>He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup>It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup>Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Intro – the ‘upside-down’ idea

This week – speak about the ‘upside-down’ kingdom.

Have you ever noticed that the Christian world, and the life of a follower of Jesus is full of unexpected things? Full of surprises. Full of contradictions sometimes?

- This week I’ve heard a testimony from one of our members who had a pretty bad week by all accounts, struggling against outside odds to live the Christian life with integrity
- yet in the middle of the week they heard some news from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party which could potentially be life changing and very much in line with God’s plan for them and the desires of their heart
  - that sort of thing – when you are down suddenly God lifts you up – happens all the time as a follower of Jesus
  - When you think you are the least, when you are just stumbling along obeying God in the small things – often out of the blue God intervenes with more than you could possibly have hoped or imagined for

Its an upside-down situation. This is because we serve a God whose priorities are radically different to the world’s at times.

Isaiah 55:8-9 - <sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Out of the low place we bear fruit

Tell you a story. We travelled in 2004 to South America.

- Marjorie had heard of a famous church in Buenos Aires, Argentina which some of her Irish friends had actually travelled to Argentina to attend. The church is famous for seeing local revival, as a base for the Holy Spirit breaking out. The centre of the Argentinean revival
- The pastor there is famous around the world for hosting stadiums full of people and preaching the gospel with power – seeing miracles break-out and people come to faith in Jesus
- He is also famous as being the person who prayed for John & Carol Arnott to be filled with the Holy Spirit – and you may be familiar that they are the couple of lead the Airport Church in Toronto – and the anointing which is still being poured out there was passed on from this guy from Argentina.

- So we went to his church – Rey de Reyes (King of Kings) in a suburb of BA and it was a fantastic experience. In fact, we went as often as we possibly could in the 2 weeks we were in BA, and I made sure that the leader of that church Claudio prayed for me because I wanted some of that anointing!
  - The church always have queues to get in running around the block outside.
  - TV screens in the reception – people singing the songs *outside* while waiting
  - They seat 1000 people and its always full. They run back-to-back services where one set of people file out, and the next set file straight into their seats – while the worship just keeps being played over the top. The services basically run into each other.
  - They have cell groups meeting at the same time in other parts of the building – dotted around the nooks and crannies – following a set discipleship course
  - Its an amazing church and an amazing experience to be there. And the worship is amazing too.

Now I'm going to tell you another story

- We both read a book while we were in Argentina about an Assemblies of God pastor, also from Buenos Aires. He told of how he was quite a cocky young lad, and went off to Seminary ready to change the world for God, and thinking he knew it all.
  - When that pastor graduated he began leading a church in Buenos Aires with his wife. And it failed. I think a number of people left soon after they arrived. Either way, he soon found that he had a congregation of 7 people. And 1 of them was his faithful wife!
  - And that pastor stayed in that church and tried everything he had learnt in Seminary to try and change it, to turn it around. And still, the only congregation he had to preach to were a few old grannies and his wife – and she only stayed out of duty.
  - And that situation lasted for 7 years
  - By the end of that time – understandably – that pastor was at the end of his tether. He was a broken man. He had tried all he knew of. He had struggled on in the face of empty seats. He had endured the embarrassment amongst his fellow AOG pastors in Argentina who were seeing much bigger stuff going on
  - Finally he was ready to resign. His pride was broken. He realised he couldn't do it by himself.
    - **And that's when God was able to begin to use him powerfully**
    - Finally – he had got his heart into the right place. Through force of circumstance, **he humbled himself before his God** – and in due course, **God lifted him up again.**
- It may surprise you to hear that this pastor whose story I've just told is the same pastor who went on to plant the King of Kings church in Buenos Aires – and to be instrumental in the revival of literally millions of people.

Why? Because that's often the way that God's upside down kingdom works.

- Takes the lowly things and makes them great
- He uses those who are broken before him and he lifts them up
- He takes the seemly insignificant – in this case a penniless pastor from South America – to affect millions (me included)
- Thru our frailty, our brokenness – God can use us – if we are humble of heart

Isaiah 55:8-9 - <sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

## My ways aren't your ways

Lets look at some of the paradoxes of the upside-down kingdom:

### ***Society's messages***

'Society' tells us that to be 'good' equals to be wealthy and/or influential. The adverts scream out at us that a beautiful face and a toned body are what is necessary to get ahead in the world. And that if you buy a shiny new car along the way, that will add to your kudos too.

- The Times publishes its '100 most influential people in Britain' list – and most of them are wealthy, or run big businesses, or are TV personalities – they all have status
- We are taught that to be significant means to have status (like a judge) – to have position (like a mayor) – to have wealth (like a lottery winner) – to have fame (like a football star) – to have influence (like a business person) – to have intelligence (like a university professor) – to have beauty (like a super model)
- Society tells as that these **status** are what is **worthwhile**

I'm not saying that these things are necessarily wrong in themselves.

- Some of these things are good in themselves, and we can and should enjoy them. There is nothing *wrong* with being rich or famous – or being intelligent or attractive.
- **What's different is how we handle these things.**
  - Its about the attitude of your heart
  - Its about where your security lies
  - Where your priorities are placed – in amongst the 'stuff' of our world

God's priorities are often different to ours, and to societies' as a whole

- In fact the phrase 'upside down' is only 'upside down' to us! Its actually the 'right way up' – its God's original plan, His perfect way – and it's the humans who've got it the wrong way up!

### ***Jesus' approach***

- Jesus' teaching makes it clear again and again that the kingdom of God is open to those people who deliberately choose NOT to look at situations through the world's eyes – through the filters of what society calls 'success' and what society deems to be a 'good person'
  - Jesus said we need to come like children – not worldly-wise adults
  - Jesus welcomed social outcasts like the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the foreigners, the disabled, those with learning difficulties, the working class fishermen and so on
  - The beatitudes are a great example of the upside-down priorities of God's kingdom
- So Jesus explained that the kingdom life is most likely **a counter-cultural life.**
  - Not only did Jesus speak to and eat with Levi the tax collector [Mark 2:13-17], he invited him to a life of radical discipleship – giving up his well paid career, turning his back on his paymasters the Romans (who were hardly likely ever to offer him a job again), and suddenly being thrown into a nomadic life with a bunch Jews who last week he had been knowingly defrauding!

## What is different in the kingdom?

God makes the most significant things to attain – **attainable to all, freely**  
(rather than hard to attain – like wealth or beauty or influence)

- Grace
- Hope
- Life in all its fullness
- Knowing your creator

## **God sets priorities in a long-term perspective**

- not the flash-in-the-pan short human life (3 score years & 10) but the eternal perspective
  - Psalm 37:1-3 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.”
  - Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.”
- **Treasure in heaven**
  - Don’t stock-up ‘stuff’ on earth, and in doing so put your faith in yourself.
    - Bc if you do, you will stop putting your faith in God for provide for all your needs
  - This long-term perspective can actually look pretty foolish to us
    - Trials and persecutions
    - Simple living and giving money away
    - Basically denying your *self now* in order to sow to the eternal life

## If you want to go high – you’ve got to go low

So let’s look at a few of **Jesus’ provocative statements** in more detail.

### ***Servant of all***

Mark 9:34-36 - <sup>33</sup>They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" <sup>34</sup>But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about **who was the greatest**. <sup>35</sup>Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

- Anyone who remembers the Heidi Baker conference in Sheffield earlier this year may remember that the title was ‘How low can you go?’
  - Very appropriate response to being a disciple of Jesus in his kingdom
  - One of the greatest paradoxes of the kingdom is that if you want to be ‘great’ – if you want to be part of something special – if you really want significance in God’s eyes – it means humbling yourself and getting down low
- **Humble yourself**
  - <sup>James 4:10</sup> - Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
  - That is the appropriate response to being allowed to be in relationship with our awesome God
    - Yes we can celebrate it
    - But grace truly is so amazing that actually if you sit down and think what it truly means, the result is humility – realising that we are not worthy of the good things God lavishes upon his children, and being very grateful for them

## Jesus' – the ultimate upside-down act

What is the primary example of God's upside-down priorities?

- Jesus – his incarnation (coming to earth), his life and example, his death on the cross, and his resurrection
- God came to earth – the word Immanuel means 'God with us' – that is a pretty unusual thing for the supreme being to do, and it's the stumbling block to many Muslims who can't understand why God would ever lower Himself to become a human
- Jesus' life is chock full of teaching and example on the alternative way of life – God's approach to living 'the good life' in this world by His standards

God sent his son – part of Himself the Trinity – to die on our behalf. He was innocent and holy, but he was sacrificed so that you and I and all our neighbours might be reconciled again to relationship with God

- Jesus chose to die for our sins. It was His Father's will for him, but he didn't have to do it. He chose to. That is a very abnormal thing to do.
- Finally – in the most astounding upside-down act I can imagine, Jesus broke the power of death – the only thing humans can be sure of in life...that one day their life will end – and he took away its power, so that we need no longer fear the end – because it is no longer the end for those who follow Jesus!

## Good news – encouragement for you

I want you to hear those stories with **ears of faith**.

- Remember what Nike said last week – we can choose how to hear these messages. We can choose whether to feel condemned by them or encouraged onwards.....

Here's why:

Not only **in spite** of your circumstances God can use you – but **in** your circumstances! In that broken place, the reality of our lives, God can use you – if you let Him.

Let me encourage you. Jesus doesn't make life to the full – living in his kingdom - too difficult for us to attain.

- <sup>Luke 12:32</sup> "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

**SO:**

- The story I told at the start of Claudio the Argentinian pastor is one of grace – God lifting him up from a lowly place
  - But it was because Claudio recognised his brokenness before God and humbled himself that God was able to lift him up – that's the biblical principle to take away from the story.
- I can't stand here and promise that if your circumstances are currently really bad, or sinful, then God is therefore going to start using you mightily
- I'm saying that the bible and Christian experience shows us that in your circumstances – be they terrible or terrific – if your attitude of heart is lowly, and yielded to God - **then** God can use you
- So I'll end with the question from the conference earlier this year
  - **How low can you go?**

Recommended reading – Isaiah 55 is a portrait of the upside down nature of God – so is Psalm 37