

KINGDOM LIVING TODAY

1. In the prior four talks, we sketched the long story of the Kingdom of God in human history.
 - a. We saw that the essence of what Jesus had to say was this: *Follow me, into the Kingdom.*
 - b. But what does living under the rule of God's Kingdom actually mean, in practical day-to-day terms, for us, here and now? To answer his question, we need to translate all of this Biblical and theological and 1st century type of language into the world of today. That is what we are going to do that in this talk. And in doing so, we will see that Kingdom living is not at all fantastical or bizarre. Quite the opposite. It is a flight into reality. Not away from it.
2. Let's start out by clearing away two misunderstandings.
 - a. The first is this: living in the Kingdom does not mean abandoning our ordinary human instincts and interests.
 - i. For some reason, we tend to assume that because the gospels are short on the more mundane details of Jesus's life, that His life had no mundane details. We tend to forget Jesus was fully human. And in doing so, we end up with a very odd idea about the type of life that He lived, and that He is calling us to live.
 1. We can see this in many of the movies that have been made about Jesus. Most of them depict Him roaming around and healing people, spouting off King James Version sounding lines at them here and there, and really not ever doing much of anything else. For instance, He doesn't spend much time listening to anyone in these movies, does He? Or just chatting with folks about the weather.
 2. Jesus was a real person. He had a job, He had a family, He had a hometown, a personality. I would imagine maybe even a hobby or two. He seemed to like storytelling, for one thing. Probably He liked listening to stories around a fire. Or singing, or gardening, or swimming...who knows?
 3. What did He look like? How was His childhood? We don't know. But those things were there, and they are a critical backdrop to have in mind when we look at Him, so that we are prevented from seeing Him as a sort of idealized stained glass looking bearded fellow, completely disconnected from the way that human beings actually live, the way that they feel, or the way that they relate to others. For Him, and for us today, Kingdom living always takes place in the real world of human concerns and limitations.
 - ii. And not just in regards to His personal life, but especially in regards to His professional work, we seem to have all sorts of particularly strange ideas about the way that Jesus went about things.
 1. The popular impression seems to be that, Jesus didn't need to think things through for Himself as He went along. That everything He was

supposed to do was constantly made crystal clear to Him by God and He just did that.

2. And what is more, people seem to have gotten the even more extreme idea that, Jesus lived a life of complete and radical detachment from all worldly concerns. That, for instance, He undertook voluntary poverty, living minute-by-minute in dependence on God to provide for His basic needs, without having made any prior arrangements Himself.
3. But none of this is true. Jesus had to work His way through things, make decisions, take risks, and navigate the thorny and complex issues of life, as we all must. In fact, that is what Kingdom living is all about...a person learning to be able to do that well.
4. Read them through more carefully and you will see that the gospels say or show all of the following things:
 - a. First of all, Jesus was brilliant. Dallas Willard observed that Jesus was the smartest person who ever lived. Observe that prior to beginning His public ministry, Jesus had taken a major amount of time and studied the Scriptures with the utmost diligence, and had considered other views of the world as well. As a result, He was an expert, He was the expert, in the most crucial concerns of human existence.
 - b. And He used all of this insight and background as He went about carefully overseeing and running His important and well thought out operation.
 - i. Funds were raised ahead of time, and were then used as needed. Enough funds were raised, actually, that even though some of the money was being embezzled by Judas, there was still enough for Jesus and His followers to live on, and for the projects at hand.
 - ii. And you will notice that He selected the disciples after considerable contemplation and prayer. Out of the all the folks wanting to be involved Him, those twelve were the best fit for the job. And He required that things in His Kingdom community were done in the context of instructions and oversight by Him, in an organized fashion. He was very self-disciplined, and required the same of His followers.
 - iii. Further, the disciples were given substantial training and then specific directions, as they went about their work. Feedback was given them based on their performance.
 - iv. Far from just winging it, Jesus was exquisitely careful in His approach to the crowds, the Romans, his followers, the religious leaders, and the other

exceedingly tricky and tense situations He was constantly navigating. He walked through those multiple overlapping minefields oh so delicately and mindfully.

- v. Because of the complexity involved in the work that He was doing, we see that rather than aimlessly wandering about, Jesus went specific places at specific times for specific reasons. And here and there we see Him explaining to His disciples the rationale for the strategies that He was employing.
- c. So please don't think that the truly godly life is a sort of aimless life of poverty, detachment, spontaneity, and checking our brains out the window. Things just don't tend to get done that way. Instead, plan, coordinate, and make well thought out efforts for the Kingdom using the resources, your wealth, your talents, and the connections at your disposal. Build your life around a thoughtful and realistic plan of service to the Kingdom based on what God has given you, who He has made you, and where He has placed you. That is what Kingdom living looks like.
- b. Now we will move onto the other area of major confusion that needs to be dealt with in Kingdom living today.
 - i. When Jesus was living out of the power of the Kingdom, He was casting out demons. Calming storms. Multiplying food. His disciples did miracles as well. Does that mean that we, today, if we are truly living in the Kingdom, will work miracles?
 - ii. Well, on the one hand, clearly God has chosen to act, at times, through His people in this way. And so, we should not rule miracles out in every instance today. But, on the other hand, it is obvious that miracles are not a common happening among us today, as they were for Jesus and His disciples.
 - 1. And why is that?
 - a. Because we don't have enough faith?
 - i. No. Look at the disciples. Their lack of faith was often of profound frustration to Jesus, all the way through His ministry.
 - 1. For instance, here He is interacting with them after the resurrection, *Mark 16:14. He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.*
 - 2. The situation was not that they were heroes of faith. The situation was that when they did reach out in imperfect faith here and there, God,

- at certain times, would work miracles through them.
 - b. Well, couldn't God still have this same arrangement with Christians today? Sure, He could have. And if it was good and helpful for there to be frequent miracles today, He would have set things up like that.
 - c. So, the question that we should be asking is "why, isn't it good for things to be that way today?"
 - i. Another way of asking that is this...what was the purpose of the miracles in the New Testament?
 - iii. Was the purpose of the miracles to eliminate sickness and suffering? To meet human need?
 - 1. Yes and no.
 - a. Yes, in the sense that the people of Jesus's day lived before modern medicine. And before public health and sanitation practices. Life was, in many ways, very brutal then. Some of these people were really suffering, physically. And was Jesus hard hearted? No, He was soft-hearted. The gospels say He was moved by their suffering. It got to Him. He was moved to heal them. And He was moved to gladness when they were healed. It was a beautiful thing.
 - 2. But did you ever consider the fact that everyone who was healed, in not too long, got sick again with something else? And after that, they all died. From that perspective, in the big picture, these healings really did not solve anything for those people, did they?
 - 3. Or did you ever consider the fact that there are all sorts of sick people that Jesus came across that He didn't heal?
 - a. If the primary purpose of miracles was to substantially relieve people's suffering, then they did a pretty poor job.
 - i. But God never does a poor job. Which means that was not the job He was accomplishing at that time.
 - b. So, we can clearly see that the primary purpose of these miracles was not to relieve physical suffering.
 - i. Well, if it didn't do them much long term good, then why did Jesus heal people at all? Jesus healed people, rather than doing random miracles like causing glowing balls to spin around in the sky, because His miracles were not arbitrary displays of power. God is not into that. Instead, Jesus's miracles are the kinds of thing that always happen when God shows up on the scene. They reveal the priorities and heart of God in renewing and restoring this broken world. In addressing the pain and suffering of His precious creatures.

- ii. When He came to Earth for the first time, it was not yet the time for the setting right of all things once and for all. When He comes to Earth for the second time, then it will be it. Jesus's miracles were a foretaste of things to come.
- iv. Well, then what was the primary purpose of Jesus's miracles?
 - 1. *Jesus performed many other [miracles] in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written [so] that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John (20:30-31).*
 - a. Two things to note from this passage.
 - i. Number One: the miracles were to serve as evidence of the Kingdom at work in the person of Jesus. For the express purpose of:
 - ii. Number Two: to help with the process of getting people out of the Kingdom of Darkness, and into the Kingdom of God.
 - 2. What does Jesus tell the paralyzed man who he has just healed? *"Look, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to you." John 5:15.*
 - a. He tells Him, "You know what's worse than being sick with disease? Being sick with sin."
 - b. Which of the two is more important to fix? Which one was Jesus more concerned with in the people He came across? The inside or the outside? Jesus's real work was much trickier and more difficult than calming a storm or healing leprosy, because it was all about fixing people on the inside. And, anyway, as we have already discussed in this curriculum, that type of change does not come about by an instantaneous miracle, but rather the in the diligent and long pursuit of holiness across the span of our lives. As Dallas Willard pointed out, we never see Jesus snap His fingers and cure someone of greed, anger, or lust in the gospels, do we?
- v. And so, let me ask you, did the miracles of Jesus accomplish this? Were they successful in getting people in the Kingdom, in starting off that inside-out transformation? Did the evidence of the miracles convince people that Jesus was who He said He was?
 - 1. Again, yes and no.
 - 2. You see, one of the mistakes that people make is that people tend to have an extremely elevated opinion of miracles. Both Christians and non-Christians. They assume that a genuine, dramatic miracle would be an undeniably powerful and effective evidence of the truth of Christianity.

3. But when we read through the gospels, we see that, sadly, this is not the case.
 - a. We see that first of all, a lot of times people were terribly excited about the physical healings, and the multiplication of food, and that kind of thing, but had no interest at all in the bigger message that Jesus was trying to share with them. They had no interest in changing their lives or in joining God's Kingdom. They treated Him like a vending machine, in order to fulfill their own self-centered wants.
 - b. What was Jesus to do with people like this?
 - i. He time and time again challenged them to not only enjoy the wonderful gift of physical healing but to open themselves to the much more important gift of spiritual healing.
 1. *"Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. John 6:26-27.*
 - ii. He also challenged these folks to really stop and consider the broader implications of these miracles they were witnessing and experiencing.
 1. *"If it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk 11:20)*
 2. He pointed out that the miracles were evidence that the rightful King had finally come back to take back His own.
4. Now, Jesus saying these types of things did help some folks to see things in a new light. But for others, pointing out the significance of His miracles, caused them further difficulties yet. Because there were a lot of them who were not so thrilled with what Jesus was up to, or with the kinds of things that He was pointing out needed fixing. And therefore, they were therefore not at all interested in acknowledging the fact that He was authoritatively acting on God's behalf, as evidenced by these miracles. So what happened with them when they were confronted by the reality of these miracles? There were a couple of different strategies that they would tend to take.
 - a. First of all, sometimes, they just kept asking for more miracles. And in dealing with that, Jesus, ever the logician, pointed out the obvious... they already had been given more than enough evidence. If He did another one, they wouldn't believe then

either. *The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."* Jesus then left them and went away. *Matthew 16:1-4.* The miraculous signs that were presented to them didn't help them. Why? Because they could not interpret the signs. And they could not, because they would not.

- i. But I can see where they said, "do another one," can't you? What else where they supposed to say? "We don't want to believe? We are evil? We won't!" No, it was easier for them to say "do another one." A lot of people are still like that today. "I want to believe in God, but I need more evidence" is sometimes just a way to evade being put to a decision. After all, no matter how strong the evidence, there will always be room for doubt.
 1. People already have enough evidence. That is never the issue.
- b. Another strategy for people who didn't want to believe, was just to deny entirely that the miracle occurred. Despite clear evidence to the contrary. Which was terrible because in that case, the miracles were actually harmful for these people. Now they had just piled on another offense. They had just dived into further dishonesty, a deeper obstinate refusal. They only added to their corruption, and their inability to turn toward the light. To their guilt and eventual punishment. Which Jesus pointed out as well. *"Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you."* *Matthew 11:21-22.*
- c. Yes, you say, but what about the most extreme cases, where denying that a miracle had occurred was simply impossible? Things like people raised from the dead. Walking out of their tombs. For those who hated Jesus's message, there was only one logical possibility that remained. A terrible possibility. They would acknowledge the miracles, but attribute them to

Satan, instead of to God. They said Jesus was evil. And acting on Satan's behalf. And Jesus said this was an *unforgivable sin* *Matthew 12*.

- i. And that kind of thing won't be forgiven, because that is the kind of thing that a person does who refuses to come to the light. They are totally lost, beyond reach forever. There is no point circling back to them with more miracles. With more evidence of any sort.
5. That is one of the things that the miracles of Jesus demonstrated. That some people were just utterly recalcitrant. *Hard hearted* is how Jesus put it. *Hearts of stone. Eyes that can't see. Stopped up ears.*
- vi. So, what would an intelligent man do in that situation? What Jesus did. He used miracles when they would be of help. And in the situations where they made things worse, He stayed away from them.
 1. In fact, you will notice in the gospels that there were some towns He didn't even step foot in, because of their unbelief.
- vii. Now, again, for those who were not so wedded to evil that their hearts were entirely closed to the message of love that Jesus preached, the miracles were quite helpful.
 - a. People really did need those miracles in order to believe Him.
 - b. So challenging and powerful and confrontational were His words and His claims, that I am quite sure without the miracles, He never would have gotten a following in the first place.
2. Consider the miracle of Jesus's resurrection. When He first appears to them, the gospels use words to describe their state such as startled. Frightened. Trembled. Bewildered. They touched His body but *they still could not believe it because of joy and amazement. Luke 24: 41.* It was just too much to take in. It was impossible. But eventually, all those people who just couldn't bring themselves to believe, doubting Thomas himself, after putting his fingers in the wounds, after having breakfast with Him, what could they say? *My Lord and my God. John 20:28.* This was the defining moment in their lives. Years later, they would write things like this. *That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched... we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 1 John 1:1-2*
3. And we see that it was same situation with the miracles that the apostles themselves performed. The apostle's miracles helped people to believe in their message. This crazy sounding message that a Jewish man's crucifixion had started a revolution that was changing the world forever didn't look so crazy, when it was accompanied by

supernatural power breaking into reality all around the people spreading that message.

- a. And the apostle's miracles also helped people to believe in the apostle's themselves. Their miracles demonstrated to everyone that the apostles were the ones who were endorsed by God. That the things they wrote and said, which would become the basis of our New Testament, were the final word on things, and not simply their opinions. *The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Corinthians 12:12).*
 - i. And that was critically important, because right from the beginning of the spread of Christianity, there were a lot of charlatans, cults, false teachers, and people claiming to speak for Christ who really were against everything He stood for. The same as today.
- viii. These epistles were given significant thought and weight by the writers. The people who wrote them saw themselves as the leaders responsible for the overall formation and care of the early church, on behalf of Jesus. And they saw themselves as authoritatively sending the essential message of Jesus out in the form of a letter, to, at times, a community of early Christians they had never even met! This is it. This is Christianity. This is *my gospel*. This is *the gospel*. This is *the gospel by which all men will be judged*. That is the type of language we find in them. They say things like, “share this letter I have written to you with the other churches in your area, and have it read aloud to everyone.”
 1. These were letters of core Christian instruction and doctrine. What these people were to do, how to live. And, by the way, if doing dramatic miracles was a critical and necessary part of the life of every Christian, don't you think that would be in there? But, if you read through the epistles, you will find despite the numerous topics discussed in detail, there is no instruction, in any epistle, on learning how to do miracles.
- ix. Well, if the epistles did not contain instructions on miracle working, what type of instructions did these early Christians receive? Well, the writers were sensitive to their audience. And by way of background...the early Christians who received those letters, some of them were fairly comfortable. But many of them were not. Many of them were under exceedingly desperate and brutal circumstances of tremendous persecution. The pressure was intense. In fact, we can see in those early letters and in other ancient documents that because of this, some early Christians fell away from the faith. What did those early Christians need, living like that, day after day, for hundreds of years on end? To get good at doing miracles? They needed real help. They needed superhuman patience, bravery, grit, hope to hang on in those situations. And

that is what those these letters showed them the way to. Those letters are full of enormous emphasis and elaborate instruction on living out of the power of God's resources. Go through and underline every time you see the word power in the epistles. You will be shocked. These letters uniformly insist on the crucial importance and the amazing results of living in cooperation with the Spirit of God. How if you are, no matter what is going on outside, you will be alive inside. That the effects of the Holy Spirit will be bubbling up all over your life. In every part of your life. In your home, in your work, in your relationships, in the things you want, in your feelings, in your way of thinking.

- x. And the epistles are very clear that the criteria that we can use to test if we are in touch with God, is whether or not our lives look like this. The epistles are insistent that the *fruit of the Spirit* is the test of a true disciple. Not miracle working.
- xi. And please note that it is not the *fruits* of the Spirit, it is *the fruit of the Spirit*. *Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness*. They come to a person together, as a package deal. Different manifestations of the same Reality working in your life.
 1. Challenging isn't that? Here is something we all need to be doing regularly: *Test yourself, and see if you are in the faith*, says Paul. *2 Corinthians 13:5*.
 2. Read through and think carefully, prayerfully about each one of those fruits. And as you do so, ask God to help you avoid self-deception. Our false selves are so natural, so comfy, so familiar to us. But we must be rid of them.
 - a. And if any one of those fruit is not continuing to manifest in your life to an ever-increasing degree, then you are not tapped into the Reality of God. If you are stuck in persistent negativity, unforgiveness, doubt, anger, despair or whatever else, without movement away from that and into something better, then you are cut off from the source.
 3. When we find that to be the case, we need to go back to the triangle of transformation that was discussed in talk number 3, and reflect on which side might be missing or distorted in your spiritual journey.
- xii. So, bringing our discussion of miracles to a close here...How do miracles fit into the Christian life today? Well, praying for physical recovery for the sick is a natural, good, and human thing for a Christian to do.
 1. But we always pray "not my will, but Yours be done." We always need to defer to God's wisdom. We do not know for certain what is best for us or what fits best into His grand design. It may be that God's plan for your life that you are relieved of this illness. It may not. At the pool of Bethsaida, Jesus healed only one in a huge multitude (*John 5*). Why not the others? We don't know. Could be all sorts of reasons.

- a. For example, we saw in that earlier talk on the triangle of transformation that one side of it is our suffering patiently and good-naturedly through hardships, because that is what strengthens us. Gets us to where we are effective and resilient, joyful, happy and free. Sometimes, we want God to take away something that we need.
 - b. There could all sorts of other types of reasons as well. For example, as terrible as infertility is for a couple, who knows, maybe their great-great grandchild would have ended up being some horrible serial killer.
 - c. Even with something as horrible as childhood cancer, we just don't know. Maybe the child who died young from cancer would have fell into drug addiction, into a life of brutal suffering for themselves, and profoundly harmed all sorts of people in that process, if they had lived through the childhood cancer, instead of died. Or maybe the shock and challenge of dealing with his child's cancer causes the father to search and reconnect to his own childhood Christian faith, securing him a wonderful eternal future. The possibilities are endless.
 - d. We don't know. So, we trust. And we ask for healing, and anything else we ask for in prayer, from that position of trust. Appreciating that God is working it all out, in the very best way possible.
- xiii. So, yes, miracles are part of the picture, but the main emphasis of the Bible is about God transforming human beings from the inside out so that they can be the wise and good stewards of His physical world, and the joyful, worshiping, loving persons that they are meant to be *If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing*, and so on (*1 Corinthians 13:1-3*). Is your Christian tradition big on the sacraments, big on miracles, big on the Bible, big on converting others, big on community projects? But how about big on the inner transformation of human beings back into the image and likeness of God? Let's keep the main thing, as the main thing.
- xiv. Let's get to work on the main thing, people. That is so key. There is work to do, and time is short. There is an urgency to the epistles. And we simply must get over all these confusions and misunderstandings and come to an understanding of what kind of work needs doing. And get to doing it.
- 3. So, let's do that. Let's move on now from talking about what Kingdom living today isn't, to talking about what Kingdom living today is. If Kingdom living does not necessarily mean us living a spontaneous, vagabond existence, or performing spectacular miracles at will, then what does it mean?
 - a. Well, for starters, Kingdom living means taking God as your King. Which would mean, obviously, that you obey him. You are not a rebellious subject. But that is only a starting point.

- b. Look at how Jesus explained Kingdom living to His followers.
- i. He started with this: *All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to [Him]. Matthew 28:18.* In God's government, Christ is the one running the show, on God's behalf.
 - ii. But here is where things get interesting...once Jesus has showed His disciples the ropes, they are trained and ready to start working on their own, away from His direct supervision, before He sends them out, what does He do? *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick Luke 9:2.*
 1. The same authority God gave Him...Jesus passes it right on to the disciples. Shocking. Consider *Matthew 18. Whatever you shall bind on Earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on the Earth shall have been loosed in heaven Matthew 18:18.* Same idea. You guys are in charge when you are out and about. You are standing in for Me.
 2. The disciples had to learn how to properly administer this power and authority given to them. And so, they went through a mentorship process with Him.
 - iii. Well, does Jesus give us that same power and authority? Yes and no.
 1. No, in the sense that the apostles had special positions, high up in the administration of the Kingdom. When we read Paul, we see him explaining this quite clearly. Paul said that he had been given, by God, power and authority over the church as a head guardian and leader in ways that other Christians have not been given.
 - iv. But, on the other hand, in God's Kingdom, there are no peons. Everyone is a someone. In fact, did you know you are royalty? *1 Peter* says we are a **royal priesthood** (2:9). In God's Kingdom, you are a Prince, a princess. Not a peon staring down at your shoes in front of a towering monarch. We each have our own provision of power and authority, to be used in our own sphere of influence.
 1. Do you remember in the book of *Genesis* when Jacob wrestles with God, or an angel of God, or a vision of God, or whatever we take that to be? The idea of his wrestling is that it is a back and forth of sorts. That Jacob has some significance, some say in things. He is not a worm, but a man, and God respects him as such. And so, after this wrestling match, Jacob is given the name Israel. That name, **Israel**, might be most directly translated as "a prince who wrestles with God".
 2. In fact, here is how Paul described our standing in Christ. *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."* *Romans 8:15*

- a. The Greek language used there for *adoption to sonship* is a specific legal term referring to the full lawful standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture. Absolutely astonishing.
 - i. This means that Jesus, the eternal God become human, who brought creation into being and has supreme authority throughout the universe, is now sharing His authority, His birthright, His power, and His glory with His followers. He invites them into all of it, as co-heirs, as His human sisters and brothers.
- c. You are in a position of enormous dignity, worth, and responsibility. Other people might not realize that. You might not realize that. And you might not be acting up to all of that, but that is what you are called to, and what is available to you.
 - i. We are to come under the mentorship of Christ and learn to access the power and authority of God and bring the rule of King Jesus into our own little domain.
 - 1. That is why we pray *in Jesus's name*. Not our name. We are going beyond our natural sphere of influence. Invoking a power and authority that we ourselves do not possess. That is why, in Kingdom living, you will accomplish things that would not have been possible for you on your own.
 - ii. You know, if the Secretary of Defense, or the Surgeon General, or the Chair of the Federal Reserve, or even someone much lower down the hierarchy like a border patrol agent, tells someone to do something, they do it. And that is because, when that official tells you that, they are not the ones telling you to do it. Instead, it is the U.S. Government telling the person what to do.
 - 1. In the same way, shockingly, you have been entrusted, authorized, by God to make decisions on His behalf. We have been given the responsibility for the utilization of God's resources down here, on this planet.
 - 2. Rather than acting as ignorant slaves, we have been let in on the grand plan, the why of it all, and are to figure out a way to creatively work out our own little bit of it, using our own judgment and discretion.
 - iii. I hope you are beginning to see that if we are going to start with this kind of thing at all, it will mean that we simply must take initiative. Step out and take some real risks.
 - 1. Risk. Putting yourself out there. No one likes it. But nothing gets done without it.
 - 2. And we are so often blocked from the work God has for us by our own fear and doubt. Doubt paralyzes us. That is why, in the Bible, faith is always contrasted with doubt. Doubting people know what they need to do but when it comes time to do it, they are inconsistent, tentative. They have a lack of fortitude, of courage.

3. I think one of the most amazing Scriptures in the entire Bible is that some of the disciples doubted even as they witnessed the ascension! What that shows is that doubt isn't a rational issue. It is an emotional issue. And a matter of resolve, of will.
4. *"He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind"* says James (1:6).
 - a. Consider what happened when Jesus is seen by the disciples walking on the water (*Matthew 14:22-33*). Peter shouts out across the water, "Hey, can I come out there too?" How do you think he felt, as he transferred his weight off the boat and unto the surface of the water? Was he 100% certain the water would hold him?
 - i. Faith is where the risk, the commitment comes in.
 - b. But he takes a deep breath and steps out. And he's doing well at first, but then when he got out there a ways and really saw the wind going hard and the big waves around him, he was afraid, he began to sink, and Jesus has to scoop him up. And at that point, Peter realized he didn't have as much faith, as much trust, in Jesus as he thought he did. And that was a valuable thing for Peter to know, that he had that doubt inside of him. And also, that he didn't need it. That he could have trusted. That it would have been safe. And because of this, he was able to trust better next time. And in order to grow in our faith, and to rid our doubt, that's the process that we will have to go through also. Step out. Fail. And to have Jesus pick you up.
 - c. In our Christians lives, we need failure. We need mistakes. We won't grow without them. And nothing will get done without them.
 - i. "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly," said G.K. Chesterton
 - ii. Do you think Peter's doubt there was a sin? Not every mistake is a sin. We are so terrified of making mistakes in our life with Christ. But think about a child learning math in school. What if that child is afraid to make mistakes? They won't learn anything.
 - iii. The other disciples in that boat didn't make Peter's same mistake, did they? But they didn't walk on water either.
 - iv. In our Christian lives, we don't sit back and say "well I didn't make any mistakes, so I must be doing good." No. Actually, if you are not making any mistakes, you are probably doing badly.

- d. Mistakes matter. They're not great. They have consequences. Sometimes big ones. But the thing is, God can use people who are willing to make mistakes. He can't use people who are not willing to even try, for fear of mistakes
- e. Consider *the parable of the talents* (Matthew 25:14-30). When the master comes back, he is happy with everyone, except the one servant, who buried their money. The one who didn't go out there and mix it up and take some risks and try to make something more out of it. He was afraid of making mistakes, hung up on it. And why was that? Well, the reason for this, if you read that passage carefully again, is that he had a wrong idea. He was afraid of the master. He thought the master was harsh, that he was hard. That's not how God is. He expects us to go out there and get knocked around and mess things up and try again and all that.
- f. God gave you your resources, skills and connections for a reason. Not to sit on them because you are afraid you might mess things up. You, in particular, were put right here; you were put right now. He has specific work for you to do. If you don't do it, no one else can. There will be suffering, loss that occurs because of that.
 - i. For instance, we talked about the fruit of the Spirit earlier. And in *1 Corinthians 12*, Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit. He makes the point that we don't all have the same gifts. He then goes on to say that we are each of us to use our different gifts to build up the body of Christ. That this is why our gift was given to us.
 - 1. *The eye can't say to the hand I don't need you.* Christ's body needs you. Needs your gift. Do your part and help out! Take some time to consider and maybe do some experimentation and see what gift the Spirit has given you for the body, and make a plan and commit to the use of that gift on an ongoing basis.
 - ii. And not just within the church, but outside its walls. There are people all around you, who are just withering away. Troubled, sad, displaced, confused. Help them.
 - 1. *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. Matthew 25.* Look for Jesus in the faces of the people all around you.

2. We are so obsessed with sins of commission, but Jesus seemed to spend even more time talking about sins of omission.
 - a. Kingdom living is about so much more than not sinning.
3. Our helping the weakest and marginalized is always close to God's heart. The old, the socially and economically disadvantaged, infirmed, the mentally ill, those in jail, foster children. *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:27.* We help and mentor the less fortunate as we are able. And sometimes we really can't do much for their overall situation. But in that case, just being a friend to them is important, very close to God's heart.
4. N.T. Wright says. "Those who follow Jesus the Messiah are not simply supposed to survive. They are supposed to count, to make a difference in the world..."
 - g. *You are the light of the World. You are the salt of the Earth. (Matthew 5).* That's your job. Not God's. And that is why *each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Romans says (14:12).* And if your account is that you got out there and went for it and mixed it up and took your hits and made mistakes, He will say *well done my good and faithful servant. Matthew 25:21* And if you buried it in the ground?
 - h. *Without faith it is impossible to please God Hebrews (11:6)* says. Don't be small minded. God is so looking for people He can use to bring healing, justice, goodness and beauty on this sorry planet. *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the Earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. 2 Chronicles 16:9*
 - i. He is waiting to just load those people up with all the help from Him that they can handle. How did Paul describe the work he was doing? *I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:28).* That energy is what you run smack into when you step out in the faith of Kingdom living.
 - i. *God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work*

within us Ephesians says (3:20). And that mostly comes in the form of us using the resources we have been given creatively and boldly in His service. Not in a flashy, bossy way. But with humility, charitably, as a servant. The way Mother Teresa did. The way Jesus did.

- j. Feel like you are too sinful, or your past is too checkered?
 - i. The Bible is full of people like that. Abraham, Moses, David, and on and on. The people in it who did the most for the Kingdom were mostly broken people. Who did some very bad things.
 - ii. Peter, who we mentioned, had all sorts of problems. And made all sorts of mistakes. Some big ones. Some costly ones. Jesus rebuked him, more than once. Paul rebuked him. But he didn't give up. He took his licks and kept on.
 - iii. And by the way, the Bible is full of the opposite situation too. People who never really did anything too bad, but never stepped out of the boat onto the water, so to speak.
- k. Do you feel like you have too many hangups, insecurities, a lack of talent?
 - i. So what! Here, I will let you in on a secret...you are inadequate. But God is not. In fact, people who accomplish the most are not the smartest, or the hardest working, or the most talented. Instead, they are so often the ones who muster up courage in the time of need and go for it.
 - ii. God is not only interested in using the slick and smart folks. In fact, His working with them has its own set of problems that God has to deal with. And so, a lot of the heroes of the Bible are actually marginalized people from unfortunate backgrounds.
 - 1. For instance, in the Old Testament, over and over, the firstborn son, despite that natural advantage, is passed over and is not the one chosen for special service in God's redemptive plan. The younger sibling is the one.
 - iii. Jesus was a no one. From nowhere. *Can anything good come from Nazareth? John 1:46.* This guy? Really?
 - iv. And do you know what would be a good nickname for those disciples of Jesus: The unlikelys. Just plain old

unlikely succeed, when viewed from the perspective of their natural backgrounds and giftedness.

- v. Or think about Mother Theresa. Was she wealthy? Beautiful? Articulate? No, she was an unlikely too. But she thoughtfully considered what she could do of practical value, and looked around at the World, and saw where they need was, and used her imagination, and took some risks, and made some mistakes, and depended on God for help, and look what happened. You think there was no one else that could have done what she did? That there was no one else with her skill set, with her connections? Her charisma?
 - l. Jesus was always trying to get his followers to step out in faith. He was always asking *where is your faith?* And what would happen when they would step out? A connection. Faith creates a Heaven and Earth connection. God, who was just bursting at the seams with waiting to act, would spring into action. They would walk on water. Or healing would start to flow. Like the woman with the bleeding problem as she reaches out and touches the hem of his garment. *Your faith has made you well, (Matthew 9:22)* Jesus tells her. Look at how many times He said that same phrase, and to how many people.
 - m. Jesus isn't amazed too often in the gospels, is He? But one thing that Jesus got really excited about, was when he saw faith in people, because it is such a rare thing to find. It says of the centurion that Jesus *was amazed at him...I haven't even seen such faith in Israel. Luke 7:9-10*
5. Why is faith so hard for us? Is it safe to trust God? What would happen to me if I totally abandoned myself to Him?
- a. The type of life that Jesus lived is the answer to that question.
 - i. *Can anything good come from Nazareth?* It sure did. Because Jesus used what he had. His brains, his wit, his charisma, and the rest of it. Jesus always practiced what he preached. He didn't just step out by faith. He strung steps together. It was a walk. And as He walked boldly in faith, as He put Himself on the line, as He risked, He was met with the power of God, as were His efforts.
 - b. Do you want that? Is the type of life that Jesus lived the type of life that you would want for yourself? Some pretty tough stuff He went through, wasn't there? And, on the other hand, some pretty remarkable things He accomplished and experienced.

- i. Do we trust God enough to want that type of life?
When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the Earth? Luke 18:8.
- d. “That sounds so far off from my life,” you say. “Exiting stuff. Big stuff. But my life is boring. It’s small.” Well, every big thing was once small. So just start where you are, right now, with all of this. We simply must come to appreciate that Kingdom living does not look like searching for God where you are not. Kingdom living is finding God where you are.
 - i. As an example of this, I was at a Christian gathering, and we were going around in a circle and each answering a question from a study guide...How has the Holy Spirit been active in your life? It struck me that the answers from each and every person recalled unusual situations from their past where someone had at one moment heard a voice, or found a specific prayer answered, or observed something that happened in their life that was so improbable that it must have been arranged by God. Now, it is good to see God in those things. He is in the unusual, I am sure. The issue though, was that not one person in the group in their answer discussed the presence and activity of God as an ongoing reality that they, ordinarily and regularly, lived out of. We need to know and believe that God is in the usual, not just in the unusual and extraordinary. *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17.* You don’t have to squint and strain or go on a spiritual expedition to the Himalayas find God. God is in your ordinary, your mundane, your everyday. Find Him there. *In Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28).* Moment by moment.
 - ii. As an example, an older member of my church recently had to move out from her home and into assisted living due to declining faculties. That can be a difficult transition for people, and she felt quite out of sorts, displaced. But then, she stopped, and she prayed and she thought. Why does God have me here, right now? What does God want me doing during this time? And in her praying, the idea came to her that what God would want her to do was to take care of the residents in that facility. And that’s what she does. Checks in on them, goes walking with them, bakes cookies for them, visits with them. You think every Christian resident in the facility is doing that? No, I am sure some of them are feeling sorry for themselves. Worrying about their health. Bored, depressed, anxious. I am sure some of them are watching TV all day. Some are stewing over past hurts, upset with their families for not visiting enough and what not. Or complaining about the staff or the facility. Not her though. You know what is happening with her? Christ loving the world, through her. The Kingdom of God touching down in that facility. She could have asked...Why wasn’t I given a bigger sphere of influence? How am I supposed to make a real difference for the Kingdom tucked away with all these struggling and demented old people? But that’s not faith. That’s doubt.

iii. Faith is Psalm 139:

*For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.*

- iv. You say, “well I am basically spending all day every day just changing diapers, and doing dishes, and running errands and chasing after boogery kids. How is this using my gifts or talents for the Kingdom?” Or you say, “my job, the work that I do every day in the office, is boring, it’s repetitive, no one notices, a trained monkey could do a lot of it.” Well, that’s not all up to you, is it? That’s up to God. What’s up to you? *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24.* Be trustworthy in these small things you have been entrusted with. Your boss isn’t your boss. Jesus is your boss. Do your work with all your heart, do it heartily, says Paul. “You know who does a great job? Jim over in the bakery department. We can always count on him. Great attitude. Hard worker”
- v. Sadly, I find that we Christians tend to mostly devalue our work, and the ordinary lives in which we find ourselves. We tend to think we would be more spiritual if we were just dropped everything and became full time pastors or missionaries. Is there a command or recommendation for all Christians to do that somewhere in the epistles? If so, I must have missed it, so please let me know. Instead, what did Paul tell the church in Thessalonica? *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.* The world needs scientists, cooks, factory workers, moms and dads, and mechanics. And good ones. That’s what it takes to keep things running. Not eight billion pastors and missionaries. God does not take us out of the world. God helps us care for and rule His world. That is why the epistles don’t recommend that we go off and be a monk in a cave. Hard to rule and care for the world and the people in it from a cave. Unless maybe you have a really good WiFi connection there, I guess. Instead, the epistles recommend, by and large, for most of us, serve where you have been put.
- vi. For the majority of us, most of our lives are going to be lived largely in the mundane patterns of work and family life. But we must realize that faithful Kingdom service in the mundane parts of our lives is a key aspect of our spiritual formation. Actually, it is training. Training for what? Training for reigning, as Dallas Willard puts it.

- vii. The mundane is a preparation. If you got the bigger job right off the bat, you just wouldn't be ready for it. Not yet. But it's coming. What you are doing now is connected with what you will become. You cannot get the one without the other. This is not your time. But make no mistake, if you are faithful in the small things, your time will come. It will look like this:
 - 1. *"Well done, my good servant!" 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' Luke 19:17.*
 - viii. Everyone wants excitement, instant results in the spiritual life. The big stage. The spotlight. It's easy to try hard and do well when you are on the big stage and everyone is looking, and patting you on the back. Not so easy when it's the daily grind and difficult going at times and it's hard to even see how you are making any kind of big difference in the world. When people are not even often noticing or appreciating your efforts. That takes real character. And it takes time to develop that type of character. Patient endurance. Don't ever forget that Jesus worked with His hands for thirty years before He started His public ministry. He knows what that's like, being nobody special in this world. Just another middle-aged working stiff. And remember, Jesus was just as much in the Father's will when He was doing the carpentry as when He was going around healing and teaching.
 - 1. He was a pretty smart guy, pretty talented, to be holed up like that swinging away a hammer, year after year. What was God waiting for? Thirty years is a long time. Training for reigning.
 - 2. Be where you are. This moment is where God is. Not far off someplace where you are trying to get.
4. To summarize this talk:
- a. First, Kingdom living does not have to do with abandoning ordinary human interests and entanglements. Instead, it has to do with learning to navigate these well. Which means that we will need to proactively, creatively and intelligently make plans and take risks with the resources and talents that we have been given.
 - b. Second, miracles have a place in the Kingdom, but are not the main concern. And performing miracles is not the test of Kingdom Living. The fruit of the Spirit in our lives is.
 - c. Third, Christ grants us power and authority to act on His behalf. He invites us under His mentorship to come to learn how to wield these for the Kingdom. Doing this will always involve risk, and making mistakes. That is how we learn to trust God.
 - d. Fourth, Kingdom living largely has to do with God's activity entering us in the context of our ordinary, everyday lives, rather than taking us out of our everyday lives. Our ordinary lives are of extraordinary significance, because they are training for reigning in God's Kingdom. Finally, the Kingdom of God is always right where you are, if only you will turn and walk in it, moment by moment.

Father,

Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, in our lives, as in Heaven. - Amen