



Stewardship: Living as God's People in God's World

Lesson 1: The Kingdom of God

THE GOSPEL MAKES US ONE

Through the gospel, Jesus makes us a people for others. His gospel gives us deep respect and great hope for every person, and frees and empowers us not to live for ourselves but for others.

The gospel does not just save us as isolated individuals but as a community. Because we are defined by God's grace and love, we no longer look to other things to define ourselves – race, class, gender, or education. The Church is intended to be a picture of what unity can look like amidst incredible diversity. We can approach our differences without pride or fear because our identity is found in our common ground – our need for Jesus and Jesus' radical love for us.

Introduction

Our sermon series during *Advancing the Vision* is focused on the vision and values of Harbor Presbyterian Church. We feel it is important to keep our focus on those areas in our Sunday worship. But in addition to being further informed and further involved, *Advancing the Vision* is also challenging us to be further invested in Harbor's vision. So we are using the last five weeks of *Advancing the Vision* to focus specifically on the issue of stewardship in our Community Groups.

We often think of "stewardship" only in terms of money. While stewardship definitely addresses the issue of finances (our treasure), it also involves how we use our time and talents. So during these five weeks we will attempt to broaden and deepen our grasp of God's kingdom and our place in it. We'll begin each meeting with some questions that reflect on the value that was presented in the sermon, and then move on to the following topics:

- Week 1: The Kingdom of God
- Week 2: Stewards in God's Kingdom
- Week 3: Money—a Blessing or Curse?
- Week 4: How Should We Give?
- Week 5: The Joy of Giving

Further Informed & Further Involved (15-20 minutes)

Sermon Topic: The Gospel Makes Us One

- Describe a time when you experienced "unity" – whether in a team setting, friendship, marriage, etc. Why do you think "unity" among Christians is so important?
- Why do you think unity is so elusive in the church? Do you think our culture (American individualism) impacts our thinking on unity in any way? Discuss.
- How does the gospel break down the barriers to unity?

Psalm 47

¹Clap your hands, all you nations;
shout to God with cries of joy.

²How awesome is the LORD Most
High, the great King over all the
earth!

³He subdued nations under us,
peoples under our feet.

⁴He chose our inheritance for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.
Selah

⁵God has ascended amid shouts of
joy, the LORD amid the sounding
of trumpets.

⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing
praises.

⁷For God is the King of all the
earth; sing to him a psalm of
praise.

⁸God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.

⁹The nobles of the nations
assemble as the people of the God
of Abraham, for the kings of the
earth belong to God; he is greatly
exalted.

Isaiah 11:1-9

¹A shoot will come up from the
stump of Jesse; from his roots a
Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest
on him— the Spirit of wisdom and
of understanding, the Spirit of
counsel and of power, the Spirit of
knowledge and of the fear of the
LORD –

³and he will delight in the fear of
the LORD. He will not judge by
what he sees with his eyes, or
decide by what he hears with his
ears;

⁴but with righteousness he will
judge the needy, with justice he will
give decisions for the poor of the
earth...

Further Invested (45-60 minutes)

God is the King!

Webster's dictionary defines a king as one who holds a "preeminent position" and who unilaterally heads an "organized community." This idea is foreign to most of us because we have been born and raised in a "democratic," as opposed to "autocratic," society. We are accustomed to choosing our leaders, and voting them out of office if they don't do what we like.

Because of this, it's easy to misunderstand God's word. When we read that God is exalted as our King and that he is unilaterally ruling the world, it grates against our pluralistic and democratic impulses. We resist being told how to live our lives, especially in a place like San Diego. We are used to mapping out our own futures and controlling our own destinies.

So we need to put the Bible's teaching on the kingdom of God in the context of worshipping God for his majesty and power. Let's do that by beginning with Psalm 47 and noticing how the Psalmist sees the kingship of God as something that brings him joy and comfort.

- Read Psalm 47 out loud and note the themes of God as King.
- What images come to mind when you think of a king? How does the notion of a kingdom differ from most of our political and cultural experiences?
- What attributes of kingship does the Psalmist see as praiseworthy? How do these attributes bring joy? How do they bring comfort?

If God is truly the King over the world, then we are completely dependent on him for all things. Everything belongs to him, including our time, energy and resources.

What Does God's Kingdom Look Like?

When our politicians run for office, they attempt to paint a picture of what our lives would be like if they were elected. The best communicators use pictures and vivid imagery to inspire our hearts and imaginations. So it's no surprise to find that God does that as well. In Isaiah 11:1-9, God paints the picture of his kingdom.

At the time Isaiah 11:1-9 was written, Israel was an oppressed people longing for their king. Israel had been freed from their slavery in Egypt and given the Promised Land. But because they turned their backs on God, they were facing exile and eventually they would be on the brink of cultural extinction. Through the words of their prophets they "dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would be straightened out...the foolish would be made wise, and the wise humble. They dreamed of a time when deserts would flower...when people would work in peace...when all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God." In other words, they dreamed of the ultimate

⁵*Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

⁶*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.*

⁷*The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox...*

⁹*They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

Mark 1:14-15

¹⁴*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.* ¹⁵*"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

Matthew 4:12-14, 16-17

¹²*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.* ¹³*Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum...* ¹⁴*to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁶the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."* ¹⁷*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹*"This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

shalom, (which is) the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation into fulfillment and delight...in other words...the way things ought to be" (Cornelius Plantinga).

- Read the passage from Isaiah 11 out loud.
- How is justice described in God's kingdom? What images of peace does the passage present to us?
- Who is the "little child" that will lead them?

When we understand what God's kingdom will look like, our fears and apprehensions are gone. We see God as the ultimate good King who always rules with kindness and justice. It's no wonder that passages such as Isaiah 11 were the texts used by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders when they were trying to lift the hearts and eyes of the oppressed people in their generation to envision life as it ought to be.

What did Jesus say about God's Kingdom?

Jesus' words and deeds as recorded in the Gospels (healing the sick, feeding the hungry, casting out demons) were signs that the kingdom of God was at hand, which meant that the pent-up longings of God's people for their Messiah to come were about to be realized in Jesus Christ. The "Lord's Prayer"—modeled by Jesus for his disciples (and us)—implies that as citizens of the Kingdom, we are called to participate in the ministry of Jesus.

Matthew records this prayer as part of a longer section of Jesus' teaching on matters ranging from anger and forgiveness to compassion and money. The implication of this expanded teaching is that every area of our lives is under God's rule. He has called us to be his people, and expects that we would seek to follow his laws, his values, and his priorities—in other words, his mission. But as we will see, this is not to be a legalistic or harsh obedience born out of fear, but a willing conformity to the purposes of God motivated by our gratitude for the love Christ demonstrated for us through the gospel.

- How do you think the people responded when Jesus set his ministry in the context of Old Testament prophecy?
- How does the reality of the gospel enable us to embrace God not only as our King, but as our Father?
- Pray for one another, asking God to give you opportunities to be "outward faced" this week in a way that would be a demonstration of the presence of God's kingdom. Conclude your prayer time by reciting together the Lord's Prayer.

Next Week: Come prepared to think through the implications of God's kingdom in your own life. We are not only "citizens," but also "stewards." We will begin to unpack what it means to live as God's people in God's world.