

Turning His Way – Living a Kingdom of God’s Agenda

Therefore go into all the world – Part IV

Matthew 6:25-33, Matthew 4:1-17

September 13, 2015

How many of you now rely on your GPS when driving to a destination you have never gone to before. How many of you now rely completely on your GPS to get you to a destination that you have never gone to before? I must admit I was one who was pretty slow in giving up control and completely trusting someone I have never met before to get me to where I want to go. I personally like maps – I can see the big picture. And besides that I am a man and I really don’t even need a map. But truthfully, I have become better at being able to give up control and I have started to rely more and more on my GPS.

A month or so ago I had an appointment in Sidney, at some place I had never been before. So I put my destination, the address I needed to go, in my GPS. It said it would take 35 minutes so I gave myself 45-50 minutes to get there on time. I looked at the route and it looked to be a nice ride in the country, and according to my GPS the address I was going to was out in the country as well. So I set out all excited, ready to enjoy a beautiful afternoon ride. That is until I got to the first detour. My stress level started to rise thinking that I wasn’t going to get there on time (mostly I was concerned because they were offering a free lunch!). But the detour wasn’t that long and soon I was seeing some beautiful country, going through some small towns I had never seen before. Better yet, I was still on time! Even some time to spare. Then I came upon another detour and some more “recalculating.” I don’t know about you but I don’t like “recalculating.” It’s like every time that woman in the box says “recalculating,” she’s saying “I’m wrong.” Or maybe it’s the fact that it is a woman saying it. Maybe I should change the voice on my GPS to a man’s voice. But either way we were able to successfully navigate the detours and I arrived at just the right time – the voice said, “you have arrived at your destination!” There I was sitting at an intersection on the Shelby, Miami county line with absolutely nothing that looked like the business I was supposed to be going to. There was no street name that matched the street name of the address I was going to. Apparently the GPS’s destination and my destination were not the same.

So here I was driving around, out in the country, with no idea where I was going or where my destination really was. I drove around for about 10 minutes before I came across a utility worker parked along the side of the road and I asked him if he knew where my destination might be. It turns out it was right in the City of Sidney, about ten miles from where my GPS led me. In this illustration we find a very important lesson. The GPS takes us where it is programmed to go. Each of us has our own internal GPS. What is your internal GPS set on? Is it to have lots of friends? Is it to be popular? Is it to be comfortable? Is it to enjoy a certain lifestyle? Is it to be the best in your field of work, or a title or a degree? Is it health and happiness? Perhaps it’s a combination of these things. But what single desire outweighs all the others? What’s your zenith destination? Which one trumps all the others? It’s very important for each of us to make the distinction because it will ultimately determine our destination.

This morning we are continuing our series entitled “Therefore go into all the world!” based on Jesus’ last words to his disciples as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.* That is Jesus’ mission for his disciples!

Last week Alex talked about the need for us, God’s church during this time frame, to discover and to join in on God’s purposes, that which is referred to as *Missio Dei*, Latin for the “Mission of God.” More often than not we’re usually trying to come up with our own mission and then attributing it to God.

I am often intrigued by all the time and energy different churches spend on trying to come up with just the right mission statement. It is like if we can come up with just the right mission statement everything else will become crystal clear. Well, it seems pretty clear to me that God has already given us His mission statement. It’s right here in the Bible. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.” The challenge is not that we don’t have a mission, the challenge is trying to live the mission out.

As disciples of Christ, Jesus invites us to live our lives very differently than the rest of the world. He invites us to live our lives by Kingdom of God standards vs. Kingdom of World standards. Jesus tell us in His *Sermon on the Mount* which we looked at a couple of months ago, - *Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and everything else will be given unto you* (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus tells us that God’s kingdom does not look like the kingdom of this world. Jesus tells us that in God’s kingdom the first will be last and the last will be first. Jesus tells us that if we want to be first, we must be willing to be last. Jesus tells us that if we want to live on God’s agenda we need to die to our own agenda. How counter-intuitive is all that and how exactly do we get on God’s agenda?

Well, the answer is found in one word, found in Jesus’ first words to his disciples as recorded in the Gospel of Mark: repent! Interestingly both John the Baptist, referred to as the last of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, the first and ultimate New Testament prophet, chose the same word as the first commandment regarding the arrival of the kingdom of God – repent!

As Brad Brisco and Lance Ford (p. 32) point out in their book, *Missional Essentials*, that which is providing the framework for this series, “The kingdom of God is not something we build or establish. It is a realm – God’s realm of rule – that we enter into, that we receive. Just about every area of the kingdom of God that we want, or should want, to enter into requires us to repent, to turn around. What is it that we are turning from? And what are we turning toward? Primarily, we are turning from our own ways, and means of command and control. We are turning around from our own demands to have our own way and to accumulate all that we can for our own selfish desires. . . . The ongoing effect of the kingdom of God (on our lives) is that it constantly brings a holy disruption to our lives. It messes with our plans and definitions of both what is needed in life as well as who is worthy of our attention and devotion. This is the essence of servanthood in the kingdom of God.”

The kingdom of this world, the kingdom of America, tells us that comfort, travel and leisure, retirement, disengaging from the world are our ultimate desires. The kingdom of God tells us no such thing. Some of us look at the Amish and their disengaging from culture as both inviting and attractive. There is only one problem with it. That is not how Jesus lived and as Jesus followers it is not how he expects us to live. As we read in the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life, Jesus clearly expects his followers to remain fully active within all aspects of culture but to do so from a different set of values and ideals.

We are called in live out the kingdom of God, by kingdom of God values and ideals taught by Jesus our Master, Savior, and Lord, in the kingdom of this world that has much different values and ideals. We are tempted by the kingdom of this world's values and ideals each and every day.

It is no coincidence that Jesus, after his baptism here on earth, and receiving the full empowerment of the Holy Spirit, was sent into the desert to be tempted by Satan. He was tempted with the three greatest kingdom of this world temptations that each and every one of us are tempted with each and every day: 1) Provision; Safety & Security; and 3) Glory & Honor.

The tempter came to Jesus and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:3-4

Jesus tell us that which we think is the only thing here on earth which sustains us, food and water, is not really the case. It is the word of God which is the overarching sustainer of life. By feeding on and obeying the Word, we will be fulfilled and sustained.

⁵ *Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.* ⁶ *"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"* ⁷ *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Fear and anxiety are at epidemic levels. More and more of us are on anti-anxiety medications, people who are afraid to come out of their own homes, to drive from one town to the next. That's just in our own community, that which are about as safe as any in the world. The kingdom of this world's political agenda is pushed forward by fear. Are we really less safe today than we have been before? Are our chances of dying today any greater or less than they have ever been? I once again refer back to Paul's words in 1st Corinthians: *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people* (1 Cor. 15:19). If we're staking our ultimate hope, our safety and security in our life in this world, in this kingdom, we are to be pitied more than all men and women.

The last temptation that Satan offered Jesus during his time in the desert, his own glory and honor. Satan offered Jesus the kingdom of the world if he would only fall down and worship him.

*The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.*⁹ *“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”*

Matthew 4:8-9

That offer is still on the table for us all. The truth about worship is that what or who we worship shapes our identity and values. Some people worship fashion, or cars, or living a certain lifestyle, or size of home, or titles, or money . . . It all depends on the destination which our GPS is set on. Sometimes the GPS is set on the wrong destination and we don't even know it.

Jesus said that for his followers there is only one destination and there is only one way of getting there. *“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and everything else will be given unto you.”*

Jesus' wilderness temptations didn't just last during his forty days in the desert, they lasted his entire life here on earth, even more so during his three years of ministry. Jesus' wilderness temptations are reminiscent of our entire life here on earth and the persistent and daily battle which we engage in between the two opposing kingdoms – the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.

Craig Van Gelder, wrote in his book, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* –

“The children of the kingdom of God live by a different set of values. They are guided by a different set of expectations. And they live out of a different source of power. This event confirms the character of the kingdom of God. Those who follow Jesus must realize they are entering into a cosmic conflict with the enemy, a conflict they can win only by the Spirit.”

By now most of you are probably asking the question, what does all this have to do with being missional? Well, the truth is we can't even begin to carry out God's mission for us as the church until we realize the battle that we are in.

I am currently reading a very good and challenging book which someone from the congregation recently gave me entitled *“Good or God?”* by John BeVere. In it he writes, *“The world is a toxic mess Many of us act if we're on a playground when in actuality we're on a battlefield.”*

Brisco & Ford close their chapter on *Turning His Way – Living a Kingdom of God's Agenda* with these powerful words:

“Undoubtedly, most of us fail to maintain a conscious awareness of the spiritual battle we are in as children of the Light. The kingdom of darkness is as real as the chair you are sitting in right now. It is unrelenting. Drawing our strength from the Lord is not our only hope for victory, it is a sure hope for victory. Happily, the only fight we have is the fight of faith. The rest of the battle is up to God. Living a lifestyle whereby we seek God's agenda first and foremost is the initial and ongoing step toward the missional journey. If we are serious about entering the kingdom of God here and now, we agree to God's terms and God's turns.”

I would add that the only way we gain access to the kingdom of God, for all eternity, is by entering in to the kingdom of God here and now. And how different is the kingdom of God from the kingdom of this world?

The kingdom of this world says we have the right to bear arms to defend ourselves. The kingdom of God found in the fulfillment of Jesus says no such thing. In fact Jesus says, “put the sword away. . . whoever lives by the sword dies by the sword.”

The kingdom of this world says that it’s okay to drink as much alcohol as you want and to do whatever you want to your body. The kingdom of God says “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and drunkenness is sin.”

The kingdom of this world says that it’s okay to accumulate as much wealth and as many possessions as you can during your life here on earth. The kingdom of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ says one cannot serve both God and money, or God and possessions, or God and anything.

The kingdom of this world says that sex outside of marriage is okay, that we can get married, divorced, remarried as many times as we want, that marriage doesn’t have to be between a man and a woman. The kingdom of God found in the fulfillment of Jesus Christ says, “have you not heard that in the beginning God made them male and female and for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh: So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

The kingdom of this world says to love our friends but not our enemies. The kingdom of God says to love our friends and our enemies.

The kingdom of this world says it’s okay to hold grudges and not to forgive those who harm us. The kingdom of God found in the fulfillment of Jesus says we must forgive others if we want to be forgiven.

The kingdom of this world says that some sins are worse than others. The kingdom of God says that all sin is punishable by death and that the only way to salvation is through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and everything else will be given to you as well.

You see, we like to pick and choose which kingdom of God values and ideals we like, and disregard the others. It’s the same great sin that Adam & Eve committed in the garden, eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they wanted to decide for themselves what is good and evil, not having God decide it for them. It doesn’t work that way. Either we’re all in or we’re not in at all. Either the GPS is set on Jesus and his kingdom as the ultimate destination or it’s time to “recalculate.”