

The Upside Down Kingdom

For Further Reflection, Discussion & Reading

Questions for Further Discussion or Reflection:

1. Has prominent has the Kingdom of God been in the teaching, preaching and community life of the church(es) you've been a part of? What has the Kingdom of God grown to mean to you over time? Did the sermon cause you to think about in a new way? If so, how so?
2. Why do you think that the Central Message of Jesus ("Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!") has fallen out of the center of the American Church?
3. Why do you think the poor played such a prominent role in Jesus' preaching and ministry? Do you think the church is faithful in continuing this today? How so? How can we be more effective?
4. Can you think of any experiences that illustrate the truth of James 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 1:27-29? What are they?
5. "Salvation has a very broad agenda." Talk about what "salvation" has commonly meant to you. Do you tend to emphasize the spiritual or social implications of the gospel? Why? Did this sermon challenge you to think more broadly about God's saving work?
6. "Our relationship with God hinges on how we treat the poor." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Spend some time discussing or reflecting on the following texts: Isaiah 58:5-10, Proverbs 21:13 and Jeremiah 22:16.
7. How do your politics and your faith interact with each other? Which one is sovereign over the other?
8. Do you tend to think of poverty as being a function of individual sin or societal evils? How does that view impact the way you approach the poor and the problem of poverty? What light does Micah 6:8 shed on this?
9. Do you tend to label people? What about the poor? What sorts of labels do you use? How do you go about arriving at these conclusions about people? How can God's grace change the way we look at people?
10. "Jesus treated victims and choosers exactly the same." This is a key insight into the gospels, and a key insight into how grace works. Talk about some of the implications of this truth for you and your church or family.
11. What else stood out to you from today's sermon? What did you disagree with? What made you angry or confused? What lingering questions do you have?

Questions to Help with Application

1. **Humility: Embrace Jesus' Path of Downward Mobility**
"There are two kingdoms in tension. One is a human society based on selfishness and gaining power. The other is God's society based on giving up power in order to serve." Do you feel this tension in your own life? How does one remain faithful to the Kingdom of God, when, in our daily lives, we interact so frequently with the Kingdom of the World?
2. **Empathy: Pray for the Poor and Read the Bible through the Eyes of the Poor.**
What does Luke 18:1-8 teach us about the heart of God? How might a poor or oppressed person read this passage of Scripture differently than you?
3. **Sacrifice: Give generously and diversify your portfolio!**
Are you giving generously? Historians estimate that 75% of the Early Church's offerings went to the poor. Today, much of our offerings go to institutional overhead (building and grounds, professional staff, denominational institutions) and ministry programs for individuals who are often well off. Does this create any sort of dissonance in your heart and mind? What can be done about it? Do you plan your giving to the poor, or give mostly when a need is put before you?
4. **Solidarity: Find some way to be in relationship with the poor or marginalized.**
Is there a "population" of people that pulls on your heart strings (orphans, widows, the elderly, the homeless, prisoners, juvenile offenders, disaster victims, those who grieve/mourn, single parents, etc.)? How are you serving them? What opportunities exist for you to serve them *personally*? When was the last time you opened your home to "the least of these"?
5. **The Big Question:** are you willing to pray this prayer, "Heavenly Father, I will do what you would have me to do, no matter what. Is there something you have in mind for my life? I want to fully surrender to your will."

For Further Reading:

- **The Hole in Our Gospel:** What does God expect of us? The answer that changed my life and just might change the world (Richard Stearns)
- **Good News, Good Works:** A Theology for the Whole Gospel (Ron Sider)
- **Just Generosity:** A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America (Ron Sider)
- **Soujourners Magazine** and sojo.net