

Sermon Series: Kingdom Culture

Sermon Title: *Good News: Jesus Is Trying to Kill You*

By: *Neil Silverberg*

Scripture Text: Luke 14:25-35

Introduction

John Hess Yoder, a long standing missionary in Laos reports the following about what he learned while serving as a missionary in Laos:

While serving as a missionary in Laos, I discovered an illustration of the kingdom of God. Before the colonialists imposed national boundaries, the kings of Laos and Vietnam reached an agreement on taxation in the border areas. Those who ate short-grain rice, built their houses on stilts, and decorated them with Indian-style serpents were considered Laotians. On the other hand, those who ate long-grain rice, built their houses on the ground, and decorated them with Chinese-style dragons were considered Vietnamese. The exact location of a person's home was not what determined his or her nationality. Instead, each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values he or she exhibited. So it is with us, we live in the world, but as part of God's kingdom, we are to live according to his kingdom's standards and values.

That's exactly what I am hoping we learn through this new series we are launching today: A Kingdom Culture. I really want to ask and hopefully answer the question, "What does it mean today to live life in the kingdom of God and really follow Jesus, especially in a culture that is opposed to it?"

We have been learning much of the doctrines of grace in this church. The great truth of what God has done in Christ in reconciling guilty sinners and making them His own. It is important that these doctrines be taught in the local church. The truth proclaimed in Gospel doctrines is the only thing that can change the human heart. But those doctrines, when understood and believed, produce a culture of grace.

The grace of God transforms our hearts so that we become radical disciples of the kingdom of God. We should expect that those who believe and receive the grace of God will live as disciples of Jesus. That's why one of the titles of this Gospel is the "*Gospel of the Kingdom*". It is the good news that God, in Christ, has "*Delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.*"

When the grace of God transforms us it doesn't leave us the same but brings us into a new dominion—the dominion of grace. We are called to radical, self-denying lives and out of the culture in which we previously lived. The objective in this series is best described by Bill Muehlenberg who said the following:

Only as the church recovers the radical nature of Christian discipleship will the sugar-coated gospel give way to the self-denying call of Christ. With this in mind, we must conclude that in many respects the Christian church today is a good reflection of modern hedonistic “*me-first*” culture, but is a poor reflection of the gospel message.

The article was entitled “*The Culture of Self and the Kingdom of God*”.

It points out with sadness that in many ways, the Church today is no different than the culture it is seeking to reach. That just as the world might best be described as the ‘Kingdom of Self’ so many Western Christians seem as obsessed with self as those in the culture. Chuck Colson observed:

Outwardly, we are a religious people, but inwardly our religious beliefs make no difference in how we live. We are obsessed with self. Much of the Church is caught up in the success mania of American society—suffering, sacrifice, and service have been preempted by success and self-fulfillment.

Maybe the best way one can observe that is to peruse a Christian book store. I recently went to a local bookstore to buy a new Bible and was amazed how many books were devoted to the cult of self.

There were books on how to lose weight for Jesus, how to overcome self-doubt, how to improve self-image, how to find inner healing, how to achieve peace of mind, how to achieve self-realization, how to find fulfillment and success, prosperity and peace. Certainly there is place for self-improvement, but ultimate self-improvement comes from a right relationship with God, not an obsession with self.

Of course, the ultimate manifestation of that in the culture is the fact that we are living in an age in which people will not commit themselves to something unless they believe they will get something out of it—some benefit or privilege. The ultimate question we often hear today is, “What’s in it for me?” We don’t want to commit ourselves to something unless we believe we will get something out of it. *That mindset has ultimately affected the Church. People want to know what they will get out of Christianity if they commit themselves to it.*

Look at how people often choose a church. They choose it on the basis of the proposed benefits they will receive rather than where they can best serve. This is often evident in some of the reasons people often leave a church. They changed the time of service, they changed the way they do children’s ministry, I don’t like the style of worship, there are not enough programs for my kids, or the pastor mentioned money!

Here’s the reality: *You can’t have a kingdom culture unless you first have kingdom citizens; people who are really following Jesus and living out the demands of discipleship.* But isn’t that opposed to grace? Sounds like you’re talking about a system of works: something I must do to achieve God’s favor? Not at all!

The Background

Jesus had been invited to the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. While there, he told the story known as the Story of the Great Banquet. In that story, he talked about an invitation going out, compelling people to come in. *“Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.”* The overarching emphasis is that God’s grace would now call Gentiles to fill the house since those who were invited refused to come. ***Grace is freely inviting them to the banquet.*** Then Jesus gets up and leaves the house.

Luke points out great crowds were accompanying Him at this time. In fact, scholars and Bible teachers conclude that he probably experienced his biggest crowds during this time of his entire public ministry. That needs to be kept in mind because what He now does is shocking. It is antithetical to everything we have learned about evangelism (if you’ve got the crowd, don’t do anything to upset them).

By the way, the parallel to this might be seen in Matthew 4 and 5. Matthew records at the end of chapter four how Jesus was freely and graciously healing people who followed Him, with no strings attached. But chapter 5 starts, *“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when He sat down, his disciples came to Him.”*

He leaves the crowd so he can gather his disciples to him. Jesus doesn’t seem to be impressed with the size of his crowd. For Him, success is not determined by how big his audience is but how many were true followers. We see the same thing here. Luke records that great crowds are accompanying Him. That’s why it is shocking what he now says to the crowds. He tells them his terms. And in the process of telling them his terms he tells them why these are his terms. Jesus knows there is all kind of buzzing about Him and hype. Many were interested in the phenomena of Jesus and his ideals. Others were just curious about what He would do next (there’s excitement about Him wherever He goes). Some genuinely wanted to be his followers, but others had less than pure motives. *Jesus knows every heart perfectly so he responds with these shocking statements.* They were meant to cut through the falseness of those with selfish interest in Him.

His Terms

He says there are three things required of kingdom disciples: **(1) total loyalty, (2) total death to self; (3) forsaking all one has.** Jesus knew this would send shock waves down people’s spines as they heard His terms. So in vs. 28-32, he tells them the “why” these are his terms. He wants them to know why these are his impossible standards. I want to start there because this must be understood. It’s not whether you start but **whether you finish** that determines if you are a disciple. Jesus illustrates that by the two parables of the Builder and the King. One is building a tower the other is a king preparing for war. **These both have been called Parables of Forethought.** *The prevalent thought is not “will you start following Jesus” but have you really counted the cost of what it means to follow Him so you can finish?*

Jim McCracken who has been preaching the gospel for many years visited Trinity last year. He shared his personal testimony which powerfully relates to the heart of this message. A Jewish

woman who of course had become a believer had shared the Gospel with Jim. He approached her and said he was ready to become a Christian. She simply told him: “You are not ready” and she instructed him to read the scripture passage we are examining this morning (Luke 14:25-35). He went home, examined the passage and God dealt with Jim on what it means to be a disciple. He counted the cost, became a believer and has faithfully served the Lord. Many do not do this and when life tests them, they do not remain.

Kingdom Citizens Exhibit Three Qualities

Jesus says there are three things you will have to deal with if you really want to be a kingdom citizen. He doesn't say these are optional, but necessary (You cannot be my disciple if you don't accept these terms). First, He demands nothing less than **perfect loyalty** above every other relationship in your life (vs. 26). He uses a form of speech known as 'hyperbole'—intended exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. He doesn't mean that he wants you to intentionally treat your parents and other family members with contempt. He is talking about those things that compete with our loyalty to Him.

Notice, He doesn't say the things that might compete with loyalty to me are bad things but beautiful things, good things. I once led a Jewish girl to Jesus in Miami but she forsook Him when her parents threatened to cut her off. I've seen young men begin to follow Jesus and then a girlfriend comes into the picture and before long, they are compromised. The enemy doesn't distract us from loyalty to Jesus by bad things but by good things. Are you willing to let the grace of God bring you to where Paul was: *“I have suffered the loss of all things and count it dung.”* In comparison to your love for me, everything else must be hated, including your own life. In comparison to your life in the next world you are to hate your life in this world. Viewed in this light, it is not difficult to understand our problem: we love our lives.

Secondly, he demands that his followers **bear their own crosses to follow Him** (vs. 27). Sometimes people talk about their cross to bear (their mother-in-law, some illness, etc). That's not the cross. Just because you are suffering something doesn't mean you bear the cross. It means to deny yourself as Jesus did and accept that we are under a sentence of death. There is only one way to deal with self and it is not to coddle it or make it religious, but to accept its death at the cross. It is to do what it says of Jesus in Phil. 2: *“He emptied Himself.”* People read this and see it as a difficult thing. Jesus isn't trying to make your life difficult, but liberate you!

Your biggest problem, my biggest problem is *self*. He is trying to kill it. There are people listening to me who have no relationship with the body of Christ. The reason: they don't feel like anyone is loving them and reaching out to them. So they sit and sulk and complain about how the Church isn't meeting their needs. But, what if they knew God's grace in truth and accepted and believed the unconditional love of God and then commenced taking up their cross. They would start loving and giving and pouring into others regardless of what they received back. They don't because self rules them. What they need is first in their life. So they are holding on to the very thing that Jesus is trying to kill. Finally, whoever wants to be his disciple must forsake all that he has (vs. 33).

The true disciple must relinquish all his possessions—not just money and material things but it includes friends, family members, desires, ideals, plans, etc. It doesn't necessarily mean that he has

to immediately sell all of his possessions, but it does mean that he has to totally relinquish them and give Christ totally control. In some cases, it might mean that a person has to sell all that he or she has and go serve in some foreign field. For others, it means that they will have to stay here and handle money, but learn to hold it lightly. Again, this is not meant to be hard but liberating. Whoever wants to follow Him as a kingdom citizen must be inwardly free from worldly-mindedness, covetousness and selfishness.

Imagine being free totally from worry about money because it is all his. Imagine what it would be like to give him your desire to be liked by everyone and live without the need for approval. But let's not forget that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks specifically about money and our relationship with it. Here is his clarion declaration: "You cannot serve God and money!" There are so many covetous Christians in the body of Christ, always seeking more for themselves, yet never giving. They pride themselves that they are following Jesus but they are controlled by money. They cannot be disciples because of it, though they think they are.

This is the only terms by which we can become kingdom disciples. If we want the culture of the kingdom we can only do so on the basis of these terms (**three times he said "you cannot be my disciple"**). Living like this should be the result of having been transformed by the Gospel. Discipleship and living as a kingdom citizen is the natural result of being transformed by grace.

I want you to do something in this series. I want you to really take stock of yourself and where you are in reality. One of the things we are going to see in this series is the difference between living in a church culture and living in a kingdom culture. I want you to step away from judging your life from the perspective of a church culture where all that is necessary is to show up and do the church thing.

I want you to look at your life from the standpoint of the kingdom: Are you utterly loyal to Jesus? Have you accepted the death sentence on your life? Have you forsaken all your possessions so that you truly live as a steward? Be totally honest, and answer these important questions.

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Ed Rosen has provided the questions below for your use in House Church discussions.

1. Neil began his sermon by quoting a missionary to Laos. He ended the quote by saying: "The exact location of a person's home was not what determined his or her nationality. Instead, each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values he or she exhibited. So it is with us, we live in the world, but as part of God's kingdom, we are to live according to his kingdom's standards and values."
 - a. What is your understanding of America's kingdom values?
 - b. Neil then asked this question: "What does it mean today to live life in the kingdom of God and really follow Jesus, especially in a culture that is opposed to it?"
 - c. Neil said that "in many ways, the Church today is no different than the culture it is seeking to reach." How is this so?
2. Neil said "the doctrines of grace, the great truth of what God has done in Christ in reconciling guilty sinners and making them His own, were the only thing that could change men's hearts."
 - a. Can you name some of the doctrines of grace?

- b. How do they change men's hearts making them self-denying radical disciples of the kingdom of God?
 - c. Why does grace produce disciples rather than being an excuse for living any old way that you want? See. Romans chapter 6.
 - d. Is there a contradiction between grace and living out the demands of discipleship? Explain.
3. What is the difference between discipleship and self-improvement?
 4. Jesus had just finished His Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:12-24) where the master of the house told his servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.' (verse 23).
 - a. Jesus then shocks the crowd by giving them a list of His demands, what it will cost to follow Him and be His disciple. Verses 25-33
 - b. What was your initial reaction to what Jesus said concerning THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP?
 - c. How do the evangelistic methods Jesus employs differ from those all too commonly used today?
 - d. Why do His methods produce disciples and modern methods do not?
 5. Jesus, in elaborating what it means to be one of His disciples makes three demands: (1) He demands **perfect loyalty** (verse 26), "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (2) **He demands that they bear their own cross to follow Him** (verse 27), "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." And (3) He demands **The true disciple must relinquish all his possessions** (verse 33), "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."
 - a. In verse 26 Jesus uses a form of speech known as 'hyperbole', an intended exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. What is the emphasis that Jesus is making here?
 - b. What does it mean to "bear the cross and follow Jesus"?
 - c. What did Jesus mean when He said that we have to relinquish all our possessions in order to be one of His disciples?
 - d. In what way does this differ from what He told the Rich Young Ruler?
 - e. When you were first converted did you have an understanding of the demand that Jesus was making on you to be one of His disciples? Explain.
 - f. Three times Jesus repeats the phrase "you cannot be my disciple". Explain why this is actually liberating for us rather than restricting.
 6. Finally, in verses 28-32 Jesus tells those who would follow Him, that they must first count the cost.
 - a. Have you counted the cost?
 - b. Are you willing to pay the price?
 - c. Will you employ the same evangelistic methods the Jesus used as you reach out to extend The Kingdom of God?
 7. Why is it absolutely necessary that each one of us follow Jesus by living this way to have the kind of church that exhibits kingdom values rather than worldly values?