



Week 3: 'Come and Follow'

Hey everyone! I'm back! No, you're not experiencing déjà vu. This is not a glitch in the Matrix. Those of you watching online, do not adjust your TVs. I know what you're thinking, "Pastor Mark, you just spoke 2 weeks ago!" When my Dad was still recovering we weren't sure how long it would take, so I took his spot in Week 1 but this was actually the weekend I was scheduled to speak so I apologize for the confusion. The good news, as many of you know, is that he has made a full recovery and you won't have to see me again until Christmas.

But I am excited to be speaking again. How many of you are enjoying this series so far? Are you being challenged? If following Jesus doesn't challenge you sometimes, confuse you sometimes and even frustrate you sometimes, you have to ask yourself, "Am I really following?" Amen? Because Jesus will take us where we've never been and call us to things we've never done, and it can be scary but that's what makes it an adventure.

In this series we've been following the adventures of Jesus and His followers – His chosen ones. In Week 1, Jesus challenged us in our approach to those who are 'other'. The story of the Good Samaritan taught us that true love, true compassion, and true oneness doesn't happen when we try harder to be good Samaritans but rather when we each acknowledge that we are the broken and wounded ones in need of Jesus – the true Good Samaritan. It is only by first receiving His love that we are truly able to love others. And then last week, Pastor Earl gave an outstanding message where he challenged us to be those who invite others to come and see.

In Week 3 of our series, word about Jesus continues to spread bringing large crowds of people looking to be healed. As Jesus spends His day healing, this third episode of The Chosen imagines what a conversation amongst Jesus' followers may have sounded like as they wrestle with Jesus' mission, their own personal expectations, and even tensions amongst themselves.

Jesus' followers were faced with the challenge of understanding His mission and managing their own expectations of what He came to do. As Christians living in the 21st Century we have the advantage of hindsight, however, we too can miss the point of Jesus' mission and confuse our agenda with His agenda. Today, we're going to study the verse that inspired episode 3 and see if we, like Jesus' first followers, can discern the reason for His coming.

Before we get to our text, I want to ask you a question: What did Jesus come to do? Imagine, like those disciples in the clip, that we're sitting around the fire discussing Jesus' mission. In your own words, what was Jesus' mission – what was His purpose? Was it to die for our sins? To birth the Church? To show us a better way?

1. How did you answer the question, "What did Jesus come to do?"



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Now, based on which verse you pick you could make a case that any one of those were Jesus' reason for coming. You can look at His words and conclude that Jesus was a profound moral teacher. You could look at His actions and conclude that He was an activist for social justice. However, if you look at the entirety of His life and the entirety of His message, you will conclude that Jesus was really about one thing. To put it into perspective, the gospel of Matthew is 30 pages and Jesus references this theme over 50 times (That's 1.5 times a page.) It was this theme that sparked His revival, it is why thousands left their homes to follow Him, and it is why He was ultimately put to death.

¹⁷ "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent,"

In other words, "Pay attention! Your whole world is about to change. Something has happened that is going to change everything so get ready!"

"for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," (Matthew 4:17 ESV).

Jesus' entire life – the miracles, the teachings, it was all pointing to one thing – God's Kingdom had come. It was this message that flipped the entire countryside upside down and it was this message that made Jesus enemy of the state no. 1. But if this was Jesus' main message, why isn't it ours? Somewhere along the line a disconnect has happened between Jesus' message and ours – when I say, 'ours' I mean the Western Church, I mean Pastors, I mean me! Don't raise your hands, but when I asked earlier what Jesus' mission was, how many of you thought it was this?

*²³ "And He [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people,"
(Matthew 4:23 ESV).*

Everywhere Jesus preached, He proclaimed the gospel, or good news, of the Kingdom. I propose to you Church, that somewhere along the line, we in the Western Church have substituted Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom for a different gospel. We will address that shortly. First, you need to know, that when Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom, everyone listening knew what He was referring to. I suspect that part of the reason we have neglected Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom is because, unlike Jesus' listeners, we don't know what He is referring to. So what would Jesus' listeners have understood when they heard Jesus reference the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven?

2. What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God/Heaven? How would you define it?



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In order to understand what Jesus meant by, 'the Kingdom of God' we need to go all the way back to Genesis 1. God has just created the heavens and the earth and everything in it and now He is going to create something unlike anything else in all creation – us.

²⁶ "Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.

So Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have brought order to the chaos, the nothingness, the void that existed before everything we see now. They have established the created order. And now they say, "Let us create something like us – in Our image. These beings will image us to creation."

They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

²⁷ So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.

²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground," (Genesis 1:26-28 NLT).

This was the beginning of God's Kingdom on the earth. God appointed us to image Him to the rest of creation. We were appointed to reign over the created order – not to dominate and exploit it but to partner with Him to cultivate it and unlock its beauty and potential.

So in the beginning there was one kingdom – God's Kingdom. It was pure, it was perfect, it was without defect. And humans were appointed to reign within God's Kingdom and image His nature to all of creation.

3. Mankind was created to image God to creation and reign in His authority. What implications does this have for Christians today?

Unfortunately, this ideal situation doesn't last. As we are so prone to doing, people get it in their heads that we, not God, should rule. We don't want to reign with God, we want to reign in place of God. And mankind eats the fruit, buys into the lie of the Devil and establishes their own kingdom. Now there are two kingdoms – The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world. The Bible refers to it as, 'the present darkness' and 'the domain of darkness' amongst other things. 1 John says, "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Mankind rejected and seceded from God's Kingdom. Whereas God's Kingdom is pure and perfect and full of life, man's kingdom is broken and decaying and marked by death.



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But here's where the story takes an amazing turn. See, there's this tragic conversation that takes place between God and His children, Adam and Eve, in the garden where He's telling them the consequences of their actions. Through them sin has entered the world and is already beginning to corrupt it. Their world will now be marked by suffering and ultimately death. The two kingdoms are beginning to tear apart from each other. God's Kingdom is withdrawing from the earth and they will no longer relate to Him as they have been from this point on. But in that moment, God reveals that He is already setting events into motion to bring the two kingdoms together again where God and man will reign over the earth once more.

So to summarize the opening pages of the Bible – God creates a perfect Kingdom and appoints mankind to rule and reign over the earth. Mankind rejects God's rule and establishes a separate kingdom in opposition to God. Then the rest of the entire Bible is about how God is redeeming this world to bring the two kingdoms back together again.

In the midst of this fallen kingdom God chooses for Himself a people for His Name and establishes a Kingdom for Himself amidst the kingdom's of this world. These people are set apart from the surrounding peoples and are supposed to be a representation of His Kingdom on earth. God commands them to build a temple where He may abide on the earth. This building represents a convergence on the earth where heaven and earth touch.

So God's Presence had returned to the earth! This is awesome! Yes and no. This arrangement was only a microcosm of God's master plan and it was far from perfect. The price for God's Presence to exist in the midst of our sin-filled world was blood – lots and lots of blood. Because the cost of sin is death, death is required to pay for sin. But God provided a substitute for man's blood – the blood of animals. This is where we get into the whole sacrificial system, which we don't have to time to unpack. So God was confined to one spot on the earth and only one person could access His Presence and only after a lot of animal blood to atone for sins. Like I said, far from perfect. So God's people continued to wait with great anticipation for the day when God would re-establish His Kingdom over the whole earth and rule as King forever and ever, which brings us back to Jesus.

²³ *"And He [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people," (Matthew 4:23 ESV).*

What was Jesus' mission? Jesus was sent to proclaim that the wait was over, God's Master Plan was coming to pass, the Kingdom of God was at hand – and not just for one people, for all people; And not just in one location, all over the earth.



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But not only was this what Jesus said, this is who Jesus was. Jesus was God's Kingdom come to earth. When John says in John 1, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." That word for dwelling is tabernacle. Jesus was now the convergence of Heaven and Earth. He was a portable hotspot of God's Kingdom touching earth. This is why when He healed people He would say, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." In other words, right now, God's Kingdom has invaded this space because in God's Kingdom there is no sickness.

And Jesus' plan was always that His followers would continue His mission – that His main thing would be our main thing. That we would continue His mission of proclaiming the arrival of God's Kingdom here on earth and contend for our world to come under the reign of our King.

When Jesus sends out His disciples in Luke 10 He says, ⁹ *"Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'* (Luke 10:9 NIV).

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray He said, ⁹ *"This, then, is how you should pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed [holy] be Your name, ¹⁰ Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,"* (Matthew 6:9-10 NIV).

Like those animals who shed their blood as payment for sin so that God's Presence could dwell among us, Jesus shed His blood so that God's Presence (His Kingdom) could dwell within us once and for all. His blood cleanses you so that you can exist in His Kingdom and His Kingdom can exist in you. Like Jesus, we have become portable hotspots of His Kingdom and His Presence so that His Kingdom within us can overcome the fallen kingdom around us. Jesus didn't die so that we could live in heaven. Jesus died so that heaven could live in us. Why do you think you're still here? If the purpose was to go to heaven you would have teleported there the moment you were saved. "Your Kingdom Come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God's Master Plan is for the earth – that heaven and earth would be one.

4. What would it look like for God's Kingdom to come to your different spheres? What would a home, school, workplace, community, etc. look like in the Kingdom of God?

Towards the beginning of this message I said I believed a disconnect has happened between Jesus' message and our's. I'm praying for God's grace in this moment because what I'm about to say may offend and that is not my intention. Please know that everything I'm about to share is directed first and foremost to myself. I take full responsibility for the disconnect I am about to articulate. The disconnect I've observed is that many Churches have a salvation culture not a Kingdom culture. The truth is that you can't have one without the other. You can't talk about the Kingdom apart from God's saving grace. But neither can talk about salvation apart from the Kingdom.



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As a Church, we can be so salvation oriented that we are not Kingdom oriented. If we never broaden our perspective beyond personal salvation we will miss what Jesus came to do. A salvation culture is concerned with the individual and focuses heavily on personal sin management. A Kingdom culture focuses on the Kingdom family and our common goal to fulfill Jesus' mission. Salvation culture is concerned with securing your place in heaven but Kingdom culture is concerned with bringing heaven to earth. Salvation culture says, "Jesus, I invite you into my life." Kingdom Culture says, "My child, I invite you into My Kingdom." In salvation culture Jesus says, "Invite me into your heart." (Which He never said). In Kingdom Culture Jesus says, "Follow Me". Salvation culture says, "I need to tell others about Jesus". "Kingdom cultures says, "I need to contend for every space, my home, my school, my work, my community, this state to come under the rule of God's Kingdom – to reflect the values of the King. See the difference? When we focus on salvation and neglect God's Kingdom, we neglect the very thing Jesus came for.

There is so much more I would love to unpack but, without giving anything away, know that we will be pursuing this to a whole other level going into 2022.

The story is told of an architect who went to visit the site where a magnificent Cathedral, of his design, was being built. The architect came across a number of workers and questioned them about what they were doing. The first, a brick-layer, not realizing who he was speaking to, replied irritably, "What does it look like I'm doing? I'm taking this brick and laying it on that brick." The second, without looking up answered, "I'm earning my daily wages." But when the same question was put to the third man, he stopped, put down his hammer, straightened himself and said, "If you want to know what I'm doing, I'm building a house for God." How do you look at your life? Some people can't see beyond their work. Others can't see beyond their paycheck. But the third man looked beyond his tools, his work and his wages to the ultimate end he was serving. He was cooperating with the architect to build a place where God would be worshipped.

This morning I pray that we would be a people who are about our Father's business. That we would be a people who are about Jesus' main point. That we would look beyond our jobs, our money, our possessions, to the greater work we've been invited to take part in.