

Is This What Jesus Wanted?

Hespeler, November 24, 2024 © Scott McAndless – Reign of Christ
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, Psalm 93, Revelation 1:4-8, [John 18:33-37](#)

The Gospel of Mark summarizes the entire message of Jesus like this: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”** (Mark 1:15) And that is indeed an excellent summary because the announcement of God’s kingdom was central to just about everything that Jesus ever said. But do you know what is really annoying about that? He talked about this kingdom all the time, but he never said what it was.

He told stories about it. He said that the kingdom was like this or like that. But when it came to giving a good dictionary definition, he just didn’t do it. And that has left us with a bit of a problem. It is left to us to speculate about what this kingdom is, where it may be found and what it means that it has come.

The Seven Mountain Mandate

And I would like to inform you about a particular movement that has been spreading rapidly recently and that suddenly received a huge boost in terms of power and influence just a couple of weeks ago. This movement has a very specific answer to that question. And it is an answer that, if I can be frank, scares me.

The movement is called “The Seven Mountains Mandate.” It is not tied to any particular church or denomination. It has spread through a number of churches, but most particularly through Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic and increasingly Roman Catholic churches.

Domination Over Key Aspects

The central idea of the movement is that there are seven “mountains” in society – seven key aspects that are centres of influence and power. They are family, religion, education, media, arts and entertainment, business, and government. The idea is that Christians have a mandate to dominate in all seven of those areas – that that is what Jesus is calling us to do.

And they are seeking to fulfill that mandate in very practical terms by training and getting Christians who think like them into leadership positions in all of those areas of society.

That is a very clear answer to the question of what Jesus meant by “the kingdom of God.” It is saying that the kingdom is what will happen once the followers of Jesus occupy and control every key aspect of the culture. And I appreciate clear answers to difficult questions as much as anybody, but I am not sure that I am comfortable with this one. Nor am I sure that that is what Jesus intended.

A Restrictive Idea

For one thing, it offers a very restrictive idea of the kingdom of God. It understands it exclusively in terms of Christians taking over society. It says that the only way that



we can influence society is by controlling it. It rules out the possibility of working in cooperation with other groups to accomplish anything good. It rejects the notion that our role is to serve and substitutes the idea that we are here to dominate. It embraces a kingdom that is all about power.

And when I look at everything that Jesus said about the kingdom, he seems to have been at odds with all of that. The Jesus who said, **“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave,”** (Matthew 20:26-28) was probably not thinking of his followers orchestrating a hostile takeover of the seven mountains of society. The Beatitudes of Jesus mean many things, but when they are focussed on the “poor in spirit,” the “meek” and the “merciful,” I just have a hard time reading them as a manifesto calling for his followers to take charge of everything.

But, as I say, the Seven Mountains Mandate is an interpretation of the message of Jesus that is growing. It also played a very big role in the outcome of the recent American election. Its devotees would claim that election as a key victory in terms of them taking over the “mountain” of government and a stepping stone towards taking over the other six as well.

Pilate and Jesus

We are told in the Gospel of John that, when the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, had a chance to interview Jesus, he had heard that Jesus had come to announce a kingdom. **“Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’”**

Jesus, rather typically, didn’t give a simple yes or no answer. What he gave instead was an idea of what he was expecting of those who recognized him as a king. **“My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”**

The Location of his Kingdom

What does that mean? I know that sometimes people assume that what Jesus is saying is that the kingdom he has been talking about it not *located* in this world – that his entire goal in all that he has done and said in his ministry has had nothing to do with affecting this world at all, apart from getting people out of it after they die so that they can be part of a kingdom somewhere else – in heaven.

But I am not so sure. Remember the parables of Jesus, the stories that he told about the kingdom of God? They were almost never about describing some reality beyond this world. They were always grounded in the experience of here and now – of seeds growing in the ground, of somebody searching for something that was lost, and of people dining at a table. He was pretty clearly saying that the kingdom was something that you could encounter in this world.

When he announced it, he didn’t say you could get there some day or that it was waiting for you after you died. He said that it had already come near, that it was at hand and already within you.

Where it Belongs

And so Jesus in his answer to Pilate does not say “My kingdom is not *in* this world.” He has been pretty clear that it *can* be found in this world. Instead he says, **“My kingdom does not belong to this world.”** This is a statement of his kingdom’s foundation and allegiance, not its location.

The explanation that he gives for that is telling. **“If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”** What it all comes down to is a question of how the kingdom is created in this world.

Not by Violence or Power

Jesus rules out the very idea that the kingdom might be established through violence or the exercise of power. Why? Because that is this world’s way of establishing kingdoms and dominions. They are established, often enough, through conquest and war. They are established by certain groups, be they aristocrats or oligarchs or others, who take over the dominant institutions of society, like, for example, those listed in the Seven Mountains Mandate.

Jesus insists that the kingdom of God cannot be established in that way, according to this world’s methods. That is why I do not believe that the Seven Mountains approach will ultimately be successful.

Oh, it probably will be successful in the short term according to how our world measures success. I have little doubt that the coming years will see more and more takeovers of certain “mountains” of our society by people who profess a certain kind of Dominionist Christianity. They have planned and organized for this using this world’s methods which are very effective in this world.

Failure in this Approach

But whatever success they find, will they actually build the kingdom of God on earth? I believe that Jesus was clear that you cannot build the kingdom of God with such methods.

I also suspect that they will find the achievements they seek to be very elusive. They will not create a society and culture that conforms to their notion of morality. Whatever forms of identity or expression or activity they seek to ban, might be pushed underground, but will not disappear. People just don’t take well to having their thoughts or identity imposed upon them from atop one of the Seven Mountains of culture.

The Lure of Power

But worse than that, I am quite certain that the very power that they seek will be their downfall. Once you begin to chase worldly power, it will seduce you. Having achieved power, you will desire more of it. You will give up anything to hold onto it. Power itself will become your goal and you will begin to confuse the idea of you holding power with the existence of the kingdom.

I know that this is what is going to happen because it is exactly what has happened so many times before.

How is it Established?

So once again we are left with the fundamental problem. Jesus came to announce the kingdom, but he didn't say what it was. He told stories about it. And, in this passage he tells us what it isn't – that it isn't something that comes through worldly power and the ways in which earthy kingdoms are built.

But how then is the kingdom of God established? The fundamental answer to that question is that it is something God builds. God is the one who is at work establishing it in this world. But that does not mean that there is nothing for us to do.

Our Participation

We are called to participate in the work that God is doing. That was what Jesus was inviting us to do in all of his parables. But in all of those parables, he never used images of us acting in power of taking things over. Instead he spoke, for example, of us being like salt: **“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.”**

Have you ever had a meal in which the dominant taste was salt? I have. I have unfortunately done that a few too many times – I added way too much salt to something, or I didn't manage to properly get the salt out of some salted meat. Do you want to know what the result of that was? The meal was awful; it was near inedible.

A meal that just tastes of salt is a very bad meal. But, at the same time, a meal that completely lacks salt can be quite tasteless. When Jesus called us salt, he was giving us a challenge. And it was to have influence in our society. But we are not to have that influence by taking over and taking control and turning it all into salt. We are called to season this world, to have influence by calling forth deeper and better flavours, and by speaking for what is just and what is right.

Testimony

Jesus himself offers the alternative to fighting and taking everything over to establish his kingdom. **“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”** The kingdom is established through testimony. And that is what we are called to do. To testify, in the midst of a sometimes-hostile world, to what we know is true. And since, as Jesus says, **“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,”** as the truth spreads, so does the kingdom.

It is not by power and not by domination that the kingdom of God spreads in this world. It is by our testimony to what is true, the truth that we have experienced in Christ. So consider when and how you can testify to that truth as you pass through life in this world.