

Christ Alone Empowers Us for Kingdom Living (Part 3)

We're looking at how Christ empowers us for kingdom living, and over the past couple weeks we talked about kingdom leading and kingdom character. This morning we're going to look at a third arena: kingdom power and priorities.

²³ And he 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. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. Matt. 4:23-24

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Jump down to vs. 21 (we'll double back over the verses we're skipping)

²¹ And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. ²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Mark 1:14-15, 21-27

Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the kingdom of God and then demonstrating the kingdom of God with power. He healed the sick, he cast out demons, he raised the dead. He taught with power. Some translations say "authority" which is power used rightfully. What we want to see is that the power of the kingdom was always used to further the priorities of the kingdom.

If you had the power to do anything – I mean, *anything* – what would you do with it? I'd want to fly – wouldn't that be cool?

Why didn't Jesus use his power to fly around?

Think about what you could do if someone was saying bad things about you. Someone's coming against you, criticizing and insulting you. And you have the power to do anything. Hm.

I'm not talking about hurting them. Just silence them by taking away their voice. Or making them slap themselves. Here's a fun idea, what if you slightly rearranged their face so that while they're saying bad things, their nose starts to slide down to their mouth? If they have a mustache, the nose would part it like the Red Sea. We're only talking about one or two inches, but it would be so effective at silencing them.

The point is, Jesus had the power to do anything. Why didn't he teach the Pharisees a lesson they'd *never* forget?

The answer is Jesus never used his power to impress or punish, Jesus always – *always* – used kingdom power for kingdom priorities. Kingdom power demonstrated kingdom priorities, kingdom priorities directed kingdom power.

What are kingdom priorities? Loving people to the glory of God! Everything Jesus did expressed love to people and glorified God.

- When Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and set the demon possessed free, it was kingdom power working kingdom priorities. When that blind man, or that woman bleeding for 12 long years, or that leper who hadn't felt human touch for many long years were healed, they felt power, but they also felt the love of God, love that said, *you are a priority to God!* The response was that people praised God.
- When Jesus taught it was with authority – *power* – and those words displayed the heart of God, the priorities of God. Words that invited us to call God our heavenly Father. Words that promised us it was the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Words that revealed that God doesn't want to condemn us, He wants to save us. The result was people grew to know who God was.
- Even Jesus' death on the cross was a display of the power of the kingdom. Paul wrote the gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. On the cross, Jesus demonstrated God's love in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus also said that the cross was why he came and prayed, Father, glorify Your name.

In Jesus' ministry the power of the kingdom was always in line with the priority of the kingdom: loving and saving lost people to the glory of God.

The power and priorities of the kingdom didn't go away when Jesus ascended to heaven. He told his disciples to wait for power from the Holy Spirit to what? *Be his witnesses!* Power to further God's priorities. And that's true for the church today, that's true in our lives today.

How does the power of the kingdom and the priorities of the kingdom get walked out in your life and mine today?

Let's go back to Mark chapter 1. We read that Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God was at hand. Soon after he began to heal the sick and cast out demons. The kingdom of God demonstrated in power.

In between is a different kind of kingdom moment. Let's read it and then unpack it's relevance to our lives and our discipleship journey today.

¹⁶ *Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.* Mark 1:16-18

When Jesus calls us to follow him, it's a call to live by the power of the kingdom for the priorities of the kingdom. Loving people for the glory of God. God wants that for us. We want that for us. How do we see more of that in our lives? I have some thoughts, but first let me tell you a story.

When Janice and I were newly married, we decided our apartment needed more light and air circulation so we bought a ceiling fan with lights. But it needed to be installed, which would have been easy enough for me to do if all I had to do is hang the fan. But somehow I needed to run wire from an electrical panel to the ceiling fan. I had no idea how to do that. So it stayed in the box.

A year later we moved to another apartment. The ceiling fan stayed in the box.

Several years later we bought a house that would have been a perfect place to install the ceiling fan and light, but I didn't know how to get power to it, so it stayed in the box. 6 years later we moved again, and the ceiling fan followed us through 3 more moves, until we finally moved to our home in Painted Post.

A year later we sold it, unused, still in its box, at a garage sale, having never done what it was built to do.

We don't want that to be our lives, coming to the end of our lives never having done what God created us to do. We don't want to finish our lives still in the box. We don't want that to be our church, never having accomplished as a church what God created us to do.

I want to share four ways we can make sure that isn't us. Four words that can help us grow in both kingdom power and kingdom priorities.

1. Faith - *getting out of the box!*

God doesn't want us in the box. God wants each of us to accomplish the unique work He built us for. It takes waking up every day with faith to get out of whatever box doubt and unbelief would put us in and step out believing God will use us.

Faith to get out of the box sometimes means doing things outside of our comfort zone. God may say, "I'm calling you to do something that doesn't come naturally to you. Trust me."

At first glance, it's easy to think Jesus called these men to simply adjust what they knew. They were already gifted fishermen, so becoming fishers of men was really in their wheelhouse.

I don't think so.

Fishermen are usually not public figures, usually not comfortable being public figures. They sit in a quiet boat at night casting their nets into the water and hauling up fish. What Jesus was calling them to be is completely *out* of their wheelhouse.

Think about it this way: what if Jesus went up to a farmer and said, *follow me and I will make you a harvester of men*. Most farmers I've met wouldn't be comfortable with that. The hard work of farming is

very different than speaking before hundreds and thousands of people. Very different than sharing faith with people. Very different than being a public figure and the leader of a movement. But that's exactly what Jesus was calling the disciples to do. Leave the box of what they knew and were comfortable with and follow him.

The most important ability God is looking for is availability. Every day let's choose to have the faith it takes to get out of the box.

2. Prayer - *plugging into God's power by prayer*

Jesus said "wait for power." Don't be a ceiling fan with no power – don't just hang from the ceiling but have no light, no fan cause you don't have power. Plug into kingdom power through prayer.

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him he was calling them to follow him into a life of prayer. He modeled prayer for them. He taught them to pray. And he said "wait" and they took that to mean wait praying until the power showed up.

I struggle with my prayer life, maybe you do to. But if we want to live life out of the box, being used by God the way He means us to be used, we need power. And prayer is plugging into that power. Let's pray for power.

3. Love - *doing what God's called us to do*

The power we're talking about isn't power to fly or power to make someone's nose slide down their face. It's power to love. And I don't mean that in a mushy, sentimental way. Jesus wasn't all that mushy. But oh, he loved people!

If we believe that people are precious to God, if we believe that people are separated from God through sin, that they are captives to a kingdom that wants their destruction, the most loving thing we can do is share with them the good news of the kingdom of God, that it's doors are wide open to all who will believe in Jesus.

I was watching the Republican National Convention the other night when something Sister Dierdre Byrne said really resonated in my heart. She said, "I'm not just pro-life, I'm pro-eternal life." That's the greatest love there is. It's why Jesus came: to give us eternal life, to save us from Satan's kingdom and transfer us to his eternal kingdom.

Where and how do we love?

When Jesus called the disciples, he was calling them to leave everything they knew. But I think for most of us, we don't follow Jesus out of our lives, we follow Jesus in our lives. Some are called to full time ministry where we leave our boats behind.

But we can show the love of Jesus in our jobs, in our families, in our communities. To the poor, to the

downtrodden, to the hurting. They're all around us. Love them where their lives are and love them into the kingdom.

4. Together – *making this journey together*

Jesus called his disciples, not his disciple. Kingdom living isn't a solo act. We need each other. We can't do it alone, discipleship is a journey we need to take together.

The first message I preached in 2020 was titled: *Are We Ready for God to Do Something New in the New Year?* Well, God did something new that most of us probably weren't ready for.

Six months ago, we were seeing a fresh vision and building a fresh momentum for serving together. Then COVID-19 hit, and that momentum was lost. We did, as everyone did, what was needed to be done. And we still are.

I want to challenge us as a church this morning. It's a challenge I am issuing to myself, I want to share it with you: let's pursue a higher level of kingdom living over the next year. Let's believe God to do awesome things in our lives and our church and our community! Let's pray for fresh power from heaven. Let's look for ways to love people and share the good news of the kingdom as we do. And let's do it together.

We can't know what new things God may do in the coming year. Some of those things may shake our lives and rock our world more than COVID did. But we serve a kingdom that cannot be shaken. The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater privilege, and no greater calling. Let's make the journey together, spurring each other on to live for that eternal, unshakable kingdom.

Closing song: *Let Your Kingdom Come*