

Sermon 7-7-19, Paul Purdue preaching

*Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)*

Have you ever noticed how Jesus always seemed to be giving away free healthcare?

*Jesus called the Twelve together, gave them power and authority... and sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1-3)*

*Luke 10:1-10 tells us* "After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place. Jesus offers seven organizing principles: 1) pray for more help 2) Watch out for wolves 3) Take no wallet 4) Avoid chit chat 5) Eat local 6) Bless the city 7) Forget the haters and move on. To these Jesus adds two defining tasks: *Heal the sick who are there, and proclaim, 'God's kingdom has come upon you'* (Luke 10:1-10)

To be effective caution signs need to be direct. Does Jesus' Kingdom of Heaven have any claim on your daily life? The Early Church believed the Kingdom mattered enough to risk death for it. The "proclamation of Jesus as Son of God, Lord, and Saviour directly countered Roman Imperial theology.... Jesus was Lord and the emperor was not! "Jesus is Lord" was high treason!... (The)message challenged the normalcy of civilization, then and now, with an alternative vision of how life on earth can and be." (Marcus Borg- The First Paul)

Prayer: Jesus, give us an alternative vision of how life can be, so that through our living, Your Kingdom may come on earth as in Heaven. Amen.

Would you indulge in a moment of imagination? I invite you to close your eyes and imagine a simple gold chair: a very simple golden seat. It is the simplest of thrones. It rests atop a rectangular platform maybe by 4 feet by 2.5. The lip of the platform is decorated with golden leaves like a crown around the throne. Each corner of the gilded platform comes with a sturdy ring, housing a long pole, allowing the entire ensemble to be carried over the shoulders of strong guards. During a parade it allows the ruler to sit elevated over the heads of the crowd. Two hand carved angels covered in gold leaf stand guard over the seat, they bow to the throne while shielding it inside outstretched wings. A box hangs under the throne. In the golden chest are the nations foundational documents. This mobile command post is fit for Cleopatra, Caesar, or Pharaoh. This litter carries the symbols of royalty, judiciary, worship and law. Who or what should sit on that throne?

I asked you to imagine the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the golden chest are the Ten Commandments! The priests carried an empty throne and Ten Rules for the kingdom! Who can sit on the throne? Who can sit above the law? Who do we bow before? Who rides above the crowd? Who sits in comfort as laborers struggle below them? The Bible thunders “No one”! No king or queen demands more respect than any other child of God. Indeed, the book of James names unequal treatment or “respecting persons” sinful. The empty throne speaks of a radical equality among all God’s children.

The Ark comes as parable. It teaches us about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Israelites carried around these Ten Commands, elevating them like a king: Worship God alone. Eschew idols. Take a day to worship and rest (your hired help and immigrants too). Honor elders. Do not kill. Keep your vows. Do not steal. Watch your mouth. Don’t covet stuff. These laws stand over our selfish impulses, they guide our living, judge the nation, and help us become human!

What are your rules for living? What values do you enthrone? What are your idols? Do not put your job, your career, your partner, an identity, a political party, a market system, a relationship, some stuff, your mom, your nation, your ideology, or your theology on that throne. All created things come up short. Save that mysterious space in the center of your being for God alone. Any ideology that guides our theology is idolatry. And any theology that binds the Holy Spirit may be blasphemy. Put no idol on your throne.

Jesus brought the Good News of God’s kingdom. The Kingdom is ruled by two commandments: love God and love neighbor as yourself. Do you lift these two rules above all the market forces, economic laws, self-interests and tribal impulses that shape your being? Jesus’ two rules are caution signs calling us to consider how we live.

Hear the Moses’ first guardrail: *“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You must have no other gods before me.”* That first caution sign and commandment is a statement of identity. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. I am the Lord, caught up in your particular history, engaged with your experience, part of the national narrative. As you exit slavery and build a new community: Never, Never, never forget how bitter oppression tasted! Now in power: do not repeat that sin! Remember, God heard your cry out. Remember, Pharaoh separated children from their families at the river’s edge. Remember, God commands us to remember! Remember how a desperate mother tried to save her baby. Remember how while she was still nursing, she wove a basket from reeds and put her little beautiful baby inside. Do not blame her for floating him down the river, risking crocodiles. She sought freedom and justice. She dreamed of a better day! She hoped some merciful citizen would find the courage and compassion to hear her babies cry and defy Pharaoh. Remember, how Jesus escaped a cruel king- leaving at midnight in the arms of Mary and Joseph to

become a refugee in Egypt. God commands us to remember that the law is not just about personal morality.

When did God quit caring about national politics? When did God release rulers from the duty to defend the orphan, widow, and alien? When did God stop hearing the cries of the oppressed stranger? When was faith regulated to individual behavior? Did not Jesus proclaim a kingdom? Friends the greatest sin of American evangelicalism is regulating faith to private matters. The Bible tells us that Jesus brought healthcare to entire villages, had compassion on crowds, and feed over 5,000 people twice. Do you remember how Jesus got worn down caring for the crowds who lined up for free healthcare? Any personalized faith that allows us to ignore Jesus' feeding of 5,000 people or Jesus' free health clinics is a pseudo-faith. Jesus offered free healthcare wherever he went. If Jesus perfectly embodies God will, then is not Jesus' practice showing us that healthcare is a human right? Indeed, Jesus tells the 72 to preach 'God's kingdom has come upon you,' after they have "healed the sick". The Kingdom of Heaven is not a private matter- but a public work! Indeed, any faith rooted in "loving your neighbor as you love yourself" demands we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and offer healthcare. How can you "love your neighbor as yourself" and practice a private faith? The kingdom of Heaven demands public works not just private faith.

What kind of kingdom will we build? What will we put on our throne? What rules will we live by? Will we work so that all people have enough to eat, every child is safe, every stranger is welcomed, no one is enthroned above another, the refugee has nothing to fear, no mother desperately puts her child in the river, the sick can see a physician? Or will we live for lesser things, little pleasant idols to replace a radical love for all people?

Now this is tough medicine: a strong caution sign. Hear the Good News: Jesus whispers "*I tell you, do not worry about stuff: clothes, cars, phones, positions, possessions, professions... No, seek first the heavenly kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will fall into place.*" (Matthew 6:33) Well is that just pious pie in the sky? No, I think it is the fruit of living Kingdom Values. Jesus instructs us that once we have "healed the sick," built that tiny home, read to that child, served a meal, given extravagantly, passed out that popsicle, well then you can just look around and declare: "Look right here, right now, the kingdom of God is at hand." Matthew 25 tells us that when the crowd is fed, the prisoner visited, the dividing walls broken down, the haughty slide off their thrones, the poor are clothed, strangers are welcomed, thirsty are refreshed, broken folks are made whole...then Jesus is present and the kingdom of heaven is already at hand. Amen.