

Kingdom Logic - The countercultural reality of following Christ
Sunday, August 4th, 2024, 10 a.m.

For those of you who have been following Christ for any amount of time, you know that what the Bible teaches us isn't always natural. The lifestyle of someone who follows Christ does not make sense to our flesh! The way up is down; less is actually more. When you're weak, you're strong, and if you really want to live, you have to die. This morning, I want to look at some of the paradoxes used in the Bible to help us grow in Christ.

Alright, I know it's Sunday morning, and some of you are still waiting for your morning coffee to kick in. But I want to start with some science. Don't worry; even if you don't know what I'm talking about, you're very familiar with the concept. Newton has 3 very popular "Laws of Motion," And because of gravity... the 3rd law is one we're very familiar with. "Whenever one object exerts a force on another object, the second object exerts an equal and opposite on the first." Or, in other words, "What goes up must come down!" This is a law of science! Because we've all spent a while on a planet with gravity, over time, even if you can't explain it, we all understand the laws of nature and gravity. If I threw something right now in the air over your heads... you'd instinctively duck and cover your head. Because we've experienced over and over that "What goes up, must come down!"

But there are some concepts that Jesus teaches in the Bible... that don't naturally make sense to us! This "Kingdom Logic" at times goes against our own logic, but it helps define our understanding of the kingdom of God.

The first principle of Kingdom logic that I want to start with contradicts what I just finished saying. Newton says, "What goes up must come down!" Jesus teaches, "What goes down must come up."

James 4:10 - Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

When we humble ourselves before God, He holds us in high regard, He thinks very highly of us, and He lifts us up. This goes against our natural tendency to do the opposite. If it's up to us, we'd choose to look after making ourselves look good. Even if we're not thinking about it... naturally, we don't like it when other people think less of us. We like it when other people recognize us for all that we've done.

That's what the religious leaders in Jesus' time were guilty of. They wanted others to recognize them for their hard work and dedication to obeying Scripture. The problem is they were doing it all for the wrong reasons. That's why Jesus always seems to call them out. They're missing the point. Jesus said to them and a large group of people:

Matthew 23:11-12 - 11The greatest among you will be your servant. 12Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

What we need to remember is that when it comes to "Kingdom Logic," The greatest people Are the servants. Jesus said those who humble themselves are exalted. Those who humble themselves are lifted up or held in high regard. Humility brings exaltation. That's backwards. Naturally, we want to celebrate ourselves; we're not afraid to lift ourselves up or "pump our own tires." But Jesus says that when we exalt ourselves, We'll be humbled.

We can all probably think of many embarrassing moments in our lives when we were humiliated because we thought we knew more than we did or were better than we actually were. If you've never had that experience. Watch golf on TV... look how easy it seems to hit a ball onto some grass. You'll think to yourself, "How hard could that be? I could easily do that..." Until you go out and try it. You'll be humbled really quickly.

When Jesus taught about humility, He wasn't teaching that you should punish yourself or think you're worthless or useless. That's not what the Bible is teaching. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's about thinking of yourself less!

We should all ask ourselves this morning, "Is there anything in my life I'm craving exaltation and credit for, That I should be getting from God instead?" We all want to be appreciated for the things we do, But need to find our security exclusively from God!

Philippians 2:3 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.

One of the biggest hangups in our desire for exaltation is trying to impress others. We often want to win others over with our good deeds. Scripture calls us to avoid this kind of behaviour! Be humble! Humility isn't easy or even natural. If it was, we'd all already be doing it.

Alright, so the first paradox is humility. The next one I want to look at this morning is weakness.

We've all seen someone try to act tough and strong even though they weren't. If you were to drive behind me and see my license plate, you might think I'm one of those people. When in reality, I'm not interested in anyone thinking I'm tough. My parents just love a good personalized plate.

When it comes to looking tougher than we are, I'm sure you've heard the phrase: "Their bark is bigger than their bite," It's funny watching someone who names their Chihuahua "Spike" or some menacing name like that run around completely unaware that their bark is bigger than their bite. But the reality is that little dogs like that... end up overcompensating for their own weakness. We all have some kind of experience with "small dog syndrome" by overcompensating for weakness. Why do we do this? Because we hate weakness! But the truth is, we all have weaknesses. Let's look at how the kingdom of God views weakness.

Psalm 73:26 - My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever.

Even in our failure and weakness, God is the strength of our hearts! In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul prays about the "thorn in his flesh," which caused him weakness. Through prayer, the Lord tells Paul that even in his weakness, God's power is on display.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - 9But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. 10So I take pleasure in

weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

We think that strength comes from what we can muster up, but real strength comes from relying on God in our weakness. Paul concludes, "I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses," Knowing that the power of Christ resides in us more when we are weak!

Many people believe that showing vulnerabilities is tied to weakness, But being honest and vulnerable is actually a real challenge that takes strength! When we stop trying to remove weakness from our lives and choose to find God's strength in our weaknesses, We will experience God's power in a whole new light! The solution for weakness is Jesus.

Matthew 11:28 - "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Jesus does not call us to "get better," Although growth is important; instead, He gives a simple invitation to rest in Him.

So, the second paradox of "Kingdom Logic" is that Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness. The next paradox of "Kingdom Logic" I want us to look at this morning is related to our generosity.

When it comes to being generous and gift-giving, I'm sure everyone's mind turns to Christmas. Some would even say, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" According to stats I found online, in 2023, Canadians spent an average of \$946 per family on Christmas gifts. Americans spent \$826 per family on gifts, And in the UK, they spent \$728 per family on gifts. Clearly, Canadians love purchasing and receiving gifts from our loved ones. As kids, we wanted presents more than anything. Now that I have kids, I love seeing the joy on my kid's faces as they come down the stairs to see all the presents under the tree. As an adult, I think I get more joy in seeing loved ones open the presents I get for them than I do in opening presents myself. Watching someone open a thoughtful gift is an incredible and special moment.

We've all heard the saying, "It's more blessed to give... than to receive." Jesus's words are absolutely true. God has a way of pouring out blessings on those who give freely to others.

Do you live generously with others? There is so much more to being generous than just being financially generous! You can be generous with your encouragement and compliments. You can be generous when driving and let in the driver next to you whose lane ends in your lane. And maybe most difficult, you can be generous with your time and help others out. When we live with a generous spirit, God will bless us even greater.

Acts 20:35 - In every way I've shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by labouring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

This is counterintuitive "Kingdom Logic"! We often think of "blessings" as "things that happen to us" rather than as something "we give to others." The world's logic says if you give, you'll be empty-handed. Kingdom Logic says if you give, you will never lack.

Luke 6:38 - Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over — will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

This is powerful language about the blessing that will be given to you. The Lord promises that He will provide all our needs (and much more) when we live in generosity. If you want to experience the greatest blessings God has for you, Be generous! “Kingdom Logic” teaches us that God blesses us when we bless others.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - 6The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. 7Each person should do as he has decided in his heart — not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver. 8And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work.

God directly measures our giving and receiving. This doesn't necessarily mean the amount of our giving but our heart of generosity. Like the widow and her two coins, we must be willing to give not from our means but from our hearts!

The last paradox for this morning regarding “Kingdom Logic” is life and death. These two things are obviously opposites, but they're connected, and I don't mean in terms of “reincarnation” or anything like that.

A beautiful example of the connection between life and death that we're all familiar with is what happens to a seed when it grows into a plant. In order for a plant to grow—in order for new life to be born—the structure of a seed dies, and in its place grows the plant it was always meant to be. If, for some reason, the seed's structure refuses to die, allowing the plant to grow, the seed will remain a seed, buried, and slowly begin to rot and break down. And the kingdom of God is very similar. Jesus says that we have to “die” and be born again if we want to enter into His kingdom.

This can seem like a silly question, but it's a very real one! Have you died? Although it may sound completely backward and difficult to understand, When it comes to “Kingdom Logic”, things have to die before they can really live.

John 12:24-26 - 24Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. 25The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

Jesus uses the same illustration of a seed; once it “dies,” it produces great life and a plentiful harvest! Jesus also said in:

Matthew 16:24b-26 - 24...“If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but

whoever loses his life because of me will find it. 26For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?

How frustrating! If we try to hold on... we'll lose our lives. But if we give it up... that's how we actually save it! There are so many confused Christians desperately trying to hold on to their own lives... unsuccessfully. They flounder around, feeling like they're stuck in a rut or they're waiting on their miracle. In reality, because they're desperately holding on to their self-serving life, they're missing out on the life Christ has in store for them. All of us want to walk into the fullness of life God has for us in eternity. We all want to walk in joy and peace here on the earth. In order to do that, we have to die to ourselves. Don't hold on to your life. Die to yourself and receive eternal life from Jesus! Jesus made it abundantly clear, and I'll add emphasis to make His point as clear as I can. If you want to live, You have to die. Some translations say, "Give up your own way," while others say: "You have to die to yourself!"

Notice Jesus doesn't say, "If you want to live, you need to be in this building every Sunday morning." He doesn't say, "If you want to live, you need to attend every Bible study and Pot Luck dinner," And He doesn't say, "If you want to live, you need to pay for the person's coffee in line for you every time" Those are all good things, that as a follower of Christ will help strengthen your witness. But none of those things save you. You're not saved through church attendance, You're not saved because you keep good Christian fellowship, And you're not saved by your "good works," None of these are substitutes for believing Jesus is the Son of God, repenting of your sins, and then putting to "death" those sins in our lives.

Examine yourself and ask, "What areas of my life am I not surrendering to God?" There are likely areas in each of our lives that God doesn't have complete control over. This is what it means to pick up your cross! We don't sprinkle a little Jesus on top of our lives. He doesn't want some of us; He wants all of us! Die to yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus!

So, as I wrap up, let me recap each paradox that makes up what I called "Kingdom Logic" this morning: First, ask yourself how you can prioritize other people ahead of your own wants and desires this week. Spend time considering where you typically put yourselves first and make it a point to serve the needs of others above your own. If you think of other people before yourself, You will walk in humility and service. By thinking of yourself less, God will raise you up! Be considerate of others... and love one another.

Next, what areas of your life are weak... and because of that, you're trying to overcompensate for? Are there any areas that you're trying to muster up your own strength to conquer? Resist the urge to "fix" your weaknesses. Instead, remember that in our weakness, Christ's power is perfected. Pursue God's strength in your weakness and find rest in Jesus. Come to Him as you are. Don't wait to improve your weaknesses to come to Him. He wants you as you are... weakness and all. He'll take care of the rest.

Next, God has called us to be generous to others, and that can take many forms. We can be generous with our time, our talents, and our treasure. Scripture promises that when we are generous by offering our time, abilities, and finances to others for the kingdom. God will richly provide our needs in response! Notice I didn't say God will pay every bill and leave the rest in your account, collecting interest. When we have a generous and giving heart, and when we're

not doing it because it's the right thing to do or because we know we probably should. God can and will provide for our needs. Be intentional about caring for and blessing others. Ask God where you can invest your time, abilities, or finances in other people this week.

And finally, true blessing comes from giving your life to Jesus. If you have never given your life to Him, don't wait! The greatest blessing of all will live within you! Spend some time this morning reflecting on whether there are any areas of your life that you are holding onto, and surrender them to God! This is what it means to pick up your cross! We don't sprinkle a little Jesus on top of our lives. He doesn't want some of us; He wants all of us! Die to yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus!