

JESUS' KINGDOM

Kingdom Conflict, *Matthew 10:34-35*

Conflict seems to define the histories of our world's nations. It proves so central to our understanding of nations that we even evaluate countries on the basis of their military strength and willingness to engage in conflict. Jesus came into the world announcing the arrival of a new kingdom, a kingdom over which he rules. But Jesus' kingdom rejects the conflict thinking that defines the world's kingdoms. His rejection of the world's thinking does not result in his kingdom becoming some kind of spiritual Switzerland; instead Jesus' kingdom embraces a radical agenda:

Jesus' kingdom seeks to reshape the world, which solicits the world's hostility.

This lesson concludes our exploration of Jesus' kingdom and his expectations for those who claim citizenship in it by considering the conflict his kingdom encounters in the world and how he expects citizens of his kingdom to respond to that conflict.

Peace, but not peace

- Jesus announced that God sent him to “preach the good news of the kingdom of God”¹ and to reveal his identity as the one to whom God gave rule over that kingdom (*Luke 4:43; 5:17-26; Daniel 2:31-45; 7:1-14*).
- Even though the rule God gave him included “all authority in heaven and on earth” (*Matthew 28:18*), ***Jesus recognized the world gave its allegiance to someone other than him***, someone he identified as the “ruler of this world” (*John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Ephesians 2:1-3*).
- John, in his revelation, saw that ruler personified as a “dragon” who aligned himself with two beasts, forming an unholy trinity that seduced the world away from God (*Revelation 12-13*).
- The tension between Jesus' God-given rule and the world's enthrallment with “the great dragon...who is called the devil” shaped his mission – ***he came to “put all his enemies under his feet” so that he could resubmit the world to God*** (*1 Corinthians 15:20-28*).
- Just as his kingdom and its values take unexpected form, so too does Jesus' victory take an unexpected form. Consider:
 - Jesus intentionally delays his guaranteed victory to give people time to join his kingdom (*cf. Acts 2:14-41; Revelation 12-18*).
 - While assured victory, he realizes it in a surprising way - ***Jesus achieves victory through defeat*** (*Revelation 5:9-10*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- Part of Jesus' plan to assert his rule includes using the church to both witness to his identity as the ruler of God's kingdom and to invite people into the kingdom (*Acts 1:8; Colossians 3:1-4:6*).
- Because we take the message of Jesus into a world that has given its allegiance to the devil, our announcement of Jesus' rule, and of his eventual defeat of the devil, makes us targets of the world's hostility (*John 15:18-21; cf. 1 John 2:15-17; Matthew 10:34-35*).

Applications

- Jesus does not seek peaceful compromise with the world; he seeks absolute victory over it (*1 Corinthians 15:20-28*).
- Jesus' intention means, then, that we will always be at odds with the world when we identify ourselves with him and his kingdom (*Matthew 10:34-35; John 15:18-25; 1 John 2:15-17*).
- You cannot, therefore, follow Jesus and live in peace with the world (*Matthew 10:34-35; 2 Timothy 3:12*).
- The issue for us centers on how we respond to the world's hostility – ***Jesus' victory through defeat is more than an ideal; it must be our strategy for dealing with the conflict we will encounter as representatives of Jesus' kingdom*** (*Revelation 5:9-10*). Victory through defeat means that we:
 - Love, rather than fight, our enemies (*Matthew 5:38-42*).
 - Defend the dignity and wellbeing of others rather than defend our rights (*Matthew 20:20-28; John 13:3-17*).
 - Use our resources to benefit others rather than to benefit ourselves (*Luke 12:13-34*).

The nature and agenda of Jesus' kingdom solicits the world's hostility. As people who claim citizenship in his kingdom, we become targets of that hostility. But Jesus calls us to follow his example in dealing with hostility rather than following the world's usual response – he calls us to willingly, lovingly serve our enemies. What, therefore, does your response to the difficulties the world throws at you reveal about your embrace of Jesus' kingdom values?