

The upside down kingdom...or is it?

There is a brilliant book called 'The Upside Down Kingdom' by Donald Kraybill, which explains how the kingdom of God is so opposite to what the world teaches about what is important in life. The world teaches us to look out for number 1 while Jesus teaches us to deny ourselves and love our enemies. The world teaches us that having more and more will make you happy. Jesus asks us what will it profit someone if they gain the world yet lose their very self?

However it is my contention that it is not the kingdom that is upside down, it is the world that has things the wrong way around (I need to state that Kraybill says this also, however he simply wishes to retain the upside down image to focus on certain issues). When I think of this term, I think of the way of Jesus being the way things were meant to be. When we follow Jesus we are being who God originally meant us to be. It is when we follow the ways of the world that things turn upside down. The ways of the kingdom are the right way up. We are told that the first disciples turned the world and the Roman Empire upside down, through their boldness and conviction in teaching about this Jesus who had been raised from the dead. They were so radically changed from cowards who ran away when their Master died, completely disillusioned and having to face the idea that he was just another failed Messiah, to people who literally risked their lives for Him after they had been convinced that He had indeed risen from the dead. And indeed they did turn the world as we know it upside down. No one and nothing could stop them. But we have to go a lot further back than this, indeed back to the beginning itself, in the Garden of Eden, to see when things really turned upside down. For this was when everything that God created, everything being good, was tainted with the stain of sin when Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator. Hence the need for Jesus to come to bring us back to God and back to how things are meant to be. The way of Jesus could very well be called 'the right way up kingdom'.

The way of the kingdom is the way of paradox when seen in the light of what we see around us. Consider the paradoxes of our faith. We die to live, we surrender to gain victory, we suffer to gain glory and we give to receive. What a contrast this is to what we are bombarded with every day. Many years ago I heard a sermon which mentioned the well-known Christian chorus, 'Spirit of the Living God', the words of which go like this:

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me

Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me,

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me

The preacher then contrasted these words to the world we live in today. He said, imagine asking to be broken in a world where we are taught to be strong. Imagine asking to be melted and molded in a world where we are taught to be ourselves, and where we are to be who we want to be. And imagine asking to be filled in a world where self-sufficiency is the indicator of a healthy personality. The words of this chorus are weak words indeed when seen in the light of the way we are subtly (and not so subtly!) taught to live our lives. The reality is though that these are not words of weakness, they are words of meekness. When we humble ourselves, then we are exalted. In humility we find strength. When we are weak, then we are strong. When seen in this light, the words of this old chorus are really words of power, but not the power of the world. Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord.

The kingdom of God is not an upside down kingdom. It is the right way up kingdom. It is the way things are meant to be. To live in the way of Jesus is to live the way God intended, the way life was originally created to be like. This is when life works best, and when we are most at peace. There is no other way by which we can be saved.

by Nils von Kalm
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