

### The Kingdom (3) – Turns everything upside-down (Mark 10:13-27)

Wonder if you've ever had the experience of watching the news with children and seeing some piece of bad news – and the kids ask you 'why do people do that?' – and it's hard to answer that, and you find yourself saying: 'well, that's just the way the world is.' Why do a bunch of angry young men decide to go on the rampage in a university in Pakistan this week, killing complete strangers? Why will 30,000 people die today of preventable diseases? And why does the death of a famous actor or singer – great as they are – get more news coverage than either of these? It's 'just the way the world is'.

It strikes me that a lot of the journey from childhood to adulthood is about understanding and coping with the way the world is. Often that is a difficult journey: how do you live in the real world without getting cynical? How can you be good and still succeed? Or do you just fit in for a quiet life?

And as we understand the world better, we see that the world is governed by fundamental laws. Not talking about legal laws, but bits of insight or knowledge which describe the way things really work:

- science –  $E=mc^2$ , Newton's laws of motion;
- politics – 'it's the economy, stupid';
- Football – 'you run around for 90 minutes and then the Germans win';
- Fashion – 'red and green should never be seen with nothing in between' (check)

Spend a lot of time raising our kids to succeed – to understand 'ways of the world'. Civilised world operates on 3 basic laws (human sin likes to bypass):

- Rules – obey the rules and you're OK
- Merit – you only get what you earn
- Status – there's always a ladder: learn your place in life and observe laws (1) and (2) to climb the rungs – or failing that, cheat and get away with it

See in action everywhere:

Strategies for social conformity – compliance and punishment. Necessary for moral boundaries – start with naughty step and move on from there. But also for whatever it is that we define as the right behaviour. Do this and you'll fit in – you'll find your place on the ladder, you'll be accepted in our tribe. Sometimes the reverse – nobody likes a snitch, so the rule is: don't snitch.

Hierarchies everywhere – e.g. my work job grades (EXPAND) – but true everywhere e.g. army.

e.g. Documentary on sales reps – cars – advertised engine (1.4/1.6/1.8) and spec (GL, then GLS, or Ghia) – knew place in rung from your car. Rep almost in tears when given a Maestro 1l Clubman Diesel ('I got a Clubman D'). // Then managers would get a Vauxhall Carlton, or a Ford Granada or Scorpio. (WHO?)

Operates everywhere – for my kids the pressure is that it's all about what shoes you have. Need to be Nikes or equivalent. Remember this well. As a teenager I was desperate for adidas or nike – only had basic Dunlop (not even Green Flash) – got 'Nicks' – fell apart in 6 weeks. Social hierarchy in action.

Or your choice of drink: 60s Beer/spirits – then wine in 70s – then when NW wine came in 90s it had to be French or Italian wine (friend snootily called Chardonnay 'the new Liebfraumilch').

**Fundamental rule: principle of 'law' – you only get what you earn** – what Philip Yancey calls 'ungrace'. It's the way the world works.

**Kingdom operates by completely different rules – fundamental new rule 'grace'** = We don't deserve diddly but God loves us anyway. 'Nothing we can do... EXPAND'

Kingdom of God turns everything upside-down – it reverses the fundamental rules of the world. (Series on kingdom – priority i.e. major theme of Jesus / surprising – mustard seed has surprising power, yeast has surprising influence. 3<sup>rd</sup> week – turns everything upside down)

Takes us to famous passage in Mark 10 – Jesus blessing children and rich young ruler. Usually read separately and loads to say about each. But meant to be read together. Mark deliberately puts them together to make a fundamental point – 2 types of people approach Jesus seeking his blessing – big question is: who gets blessed? Or to put it another way: what is the kingdom of Jesus about? Teaches us 2 fundamental things, both of which profoundly challenge the way of the world:

### **The kingdom is for 'nobodies' and not just the elite**

Provocative – can't call children 'nobodies' – but in culture of day they were property of parents. Made Victorians look progressive! When kids approached Jesus, perfectly normal for disciples to shoo children away – but Jesus challenges them, and us – 'kingdom belongs to such as these'. The people you think are least in the kingdom are the ones that God welcomes. The kingdom is no respecter of status. Here's how Philip Yancey puts it in 'What's so amazing about grace':

*Q Yancey p152-3*

Kingdom is for nobodies not just the elite – first radical change to the way the world is.

### **The kingdom cannot be earned, only received**

Rich young man – what must I do? How can I earn it? (Sense of insecurity that despite all his advantages he still needs to do something else). Jesus said: one thing you lack. What? (DISCUSS)

Lacks treasure in heaven – deeper: lacks empty hands needed to receive kingdom of God. His advantages were getting in way. Jesus welcomes the empty handed. Need to get rid of whatever gets in the way. And he couldn't....

Children just like that (empty-handed) – that’s why Jesus said: Whoever does not receive kingdom of God like a child can’t enter it.’ You can’t earn it – only God is good enough to do that. It has to be received.

In these two stories Jesus turns way of world upside-down. Out go the hierarchies, the get-what-you-earn culture. In comes a radical new way of seeing the world. The kingdom is open to all, from whatever background. God’s favour can’t be earned, only received. It’s good news for the humble, the downtrodden, the poor and the persecuted. Who inherits the earth?: the meek! If that’s alright with the rest of you.

Sting in the tail: not good news for everyone who’s grown up playing the system. Who’s used to earning it all for themselves, who’ve reached a certain rung in the ladder and want to keep it that way. Who think they’re doing God a favour by giving to charity or attending church occasionally. Who think respectability is a fruit of the spirit. Jesus says: it doesn’t work like that – not anymore. Not in God’s kingdom. We’re *all* Oddballs, but God loves us anyhow. It’s humbling, we’ve got nothing to bring, only ourselves with empty hands and open hearts.

And for some of us that’s downright annoying: we want to prove to God that we’re worth his love: and God says to us – you’ve always been worth it, if you think you have to prove anything, you’ve never understood me at all. You can’t earn a thing – but you can receive my love.

Maybe some of you here today have spent decades being respectable, doing your bit, trying to earn your way to heaven. And like the rich young man, deep down you’ve always had this sense of disquiet, of not quite doing enough – what else do I need to do? Have I earned enough yet?

And God says **one thing you lack: empty hands**. You’re approaching me according to the way of the world. But I came to redeem the world, to change it from the inside out. I don’t want your trinkets and baubles, as if that’s going to impress me. ‘This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.’ Empty hands. Open hearts. ‘Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it. And put his arms around them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.’ Amen.