

"KINGDOM PARADOXES"

I. Introduction

- A. The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is a kingdom that is in many ways marked by paradox.
 - 1. The message of this kingdom, the message of the cross, appears foolish and weak in the eyes of those who are perishing.
 - 2. But to us who are being saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.
 - 3. The kingdom of Christ is manifested in this age as a church that is oftentimes relegated to the margins of society.
 - 4. But one day this kingdom will be commensurate with the entire new creation.
 - 5. Christ's followers are characterized by meekness and by being the object of the world's hatred.
 - 6. But we will one day inherit the earth.
- B. All of these things are paradoxical.
 - 1. They seem to be contradictory.
 - 2. But the Word of God assures us that they are not.
 - 3. As we study our text in Luke today, we will see how it sets forth three more kingdom paradoxes.

II. Servants, Yet Enthroned

- A. The first paradox is seen in verses 24-30, where Jesus tells his disciples that they are to live as servants, while also promising them that they will one

day be enthroned in his kingdom.

1. The section begins with Luke telling us about how the disciples got into a dispute over which one of them should be regarded as the greatest.
 2. This sounds so arrogant that we might find it difficult to identify with these men.
 3. But we need to understand this dispute in the context in which it took place.
 4. The disciples knew that they were on the brink of something climactic.
 5. The atmosphere in the upper room was one of intense expectation.
 6. In spite of all that Jesus had taught them, the disciples were still thinking in terms of earthly glory.
 7. Their dispute about greatness took place because they were jockeying for the most important positions in the messianic kingdom that they were expecting Jesus to establish.
- B. As we consider the disciples' argument about this, we should let it remind us of the pride and the love of preeminence that abides in our own hearts.
1. There is a reason why the Bible so often repeats the Proverbs that speak of God's opposition to the proud and his favor toward the humble.
 2. There is a reason why the apostle Paul sets forth Christ's willingness to take the form of a servant and humbly submit to death on a cross as the pattern for our lives as believers.
 3. Like our Lord, we are to look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.

4. We need to have a humble readiness to engage in any work that will be beneficial to others, even if it is lowly work.
 5. We are presented with countless opportunities to serve others in the name of Christ every day, but we often miss out on those opportunities because we think that we are too important to be bothered.
 6. The more we take the time to consider the depths to which Christ descended for our sake, the more we will be spurred on to serve others in his name.
 7. Jesus is worthy of all honor, glory, and praise, yet he let himself be brought to the lowest place of all in order to secure our salvation.
 8. Reminding ourselves of this stirs up the kind of gratitude that overcomes our selfish unwillingness to be inconvenienced for the sake of others.
- C. The verses that immediately follow Jesus's rebuke of his disciples for their prideful dispute come as quite a surprise.
1. We might expect Jesus to continue warning them against the trappings of pride, but he does not do that.
 2. First, he offers them a word of encouragement.
 3. He commends them for sticking with him through the trials that he has had to endure up to this point.
 4. Then he gives them a wonderful promise, saying, "I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
 5. The disciples have just been arguing about greatness, and here we see Jesus assuring them that greatness does indeed lie in store for them.

6. They clearly don't deserve this honor.
 7. What they deserve is to be cut down to size.
 8. Yet Christ grants them the greatest honor of all as a free gift.
 9. He tells them that he will share his kingdom with them.
- D. The apostles obviously have a special place in Christ's kingdom.
1. They gave the foundational testimony upon which the church is being built.
 2. While the office of apostle certainly is unique, other passages make it clear that all believers will in one sense participate in the blessings that Jesus confers upon the apostles here.
 3. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that believers will judge angels.
 4. And in the book of Revelation Jesus promises that those who persevere in faith will sit with him on his throne.
 5. We don't deserve these honors any more than the disciples did.
 6. Yet in his free grace, our Lord lavishes them upon us.
- E. One other thing to note about verse 29 is that this is an important proof text for what we refer to as the covenant of redemption.
1. While the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are the two overarching covenants within time that serve as the framework for our understanding of the outworking of God's saving purpose, the covenant of redemption is the covenant that stands outside of time.
 2. It is the eternal covenant that was made between the members of the Godhead before time began, concerning the salvation of all whom God graciously appointed to eternal life.

3. In their book on covenant theology, Michael Brown and Zach Keele provide this definition of the covenant of redemption: “the covenant established in eternity between the Father, who gives the Son to be the Redeemer of the elect and requires of him the conditions for their redemption; and the Son, who voluntarily agrees to fulfill these conditions; and the Spirit, who voluntarily applies the work of the Son to the elect.” [*Sacred Bond*, 25]
4. In that covenant of redemption, God the Father promised God the Son a kingdom as a reward for his perfect performance of what was required of him as covenant mediator.
5. This idea is present in Luke 22:29, because the Greek term that is translated as “assign” by the ESV is a word that has to do with settling the terms of a covenant.
6. When Jesus says that the Father assigned to him a kingdom, he is talking about what took place in eternity past in the establishment of the covenant of redemption.

III. Sifted, Yet Preserved

- A. We turn now to the second part of our text, where we see our second paradox: Jesus’s disciples are sifted, yet they are also preserved.
 1. This section begins with Jesus addressing Peter by his Aramaic name, saying, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”
 2. One thing that we should note about this is that the term “you” in verse 31 is in the plural in the Greek, as you can see by the footnote in the ESV.
 3. Jesus is telling Peter that Satan has sought God’s permission to go after the disciples in hopes of destroying their faith.
 4. This brings to mind the scene at the beginning of the book of Job, where Satan presents himself before the Lord and contends that the

only reason why Job is so pious and so faithful is because the Lord has granted Job such a large measure of earthly health and happiness.

5. As you know, God responded to that accusation by giving Satan permission to afflict Job and test his faith.
 6. Jesus's words to Peter in our text tell us that something similar took place with regard to the disciples.
 7. This should not surprise us, since we know that as Christians we are all engaged in a spiritual battle.
 8. As Peter warns in his first epistle, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet 5:8 ESV)
- B. After verse 31, the uses of the pronoun "you" are singular in the Greek.
1. This tells us that Jesus is speaking directly to Peter in these verses.
 2. It was Christ's intercession that prevented Peter from utterly falling away and ensured that he would be restored after his threefold denial.
 3. Jesus kept Peter from committing full and final apostasy.
 4. The interesting thing about this is that Jesus could have prevented Peter from denying him in the first place, yet he did not do that.
 5. This reminds us that God has a purpose in our sins and failings.
 6. God uses those times when we choose sin over him, those times when we neglect our duties, those times when we deny him before others, those times when we fail him.
 7. He uses these things to humble us and to deepen our fellowship with him.

8. Even as Christians, we do not understand how wicked our hearts really are.
 9. We do not understand how much we are in need of the salvation that Christ alone can provide for us.
 10. But our God uses the sin that remains within us to open our eyes more and more to the ugly truth.
- C. The fact that we stand in need of this is confirmed by the way in which Peter responded to Jesus's prediction of his denial.
1. Peter protested and claimed that he was willing to go to prison, and even to death, for Jesus's sake.
 2. But when the moment of truth arrived later that same night, what did Peter do?
 3. He did exactly what he swore he would never do.
 4. He denied that he even knew Jesus.
 5. He was unable to follow through with what he had said.
 6. He was unable to keep himself from falling away from his Lord.
 7. When things did not turn out as he expected or hoped, he turned his back on Jesus.
 8. We need to realize how easy it can be for us to do the very same thing.
 9. When we begin to see how difficult the life of discipleship really is, we too can be tempted to turn our backs on Christ.
 10. We face the same temptation that Peter and the rest of the disciples faced.

- D. Why did the disciples flee when Jesus was arrested?
1. Why did Peter deny Christ three times?
 2. They failed because they were trying to overcome temptation in their own strength.
 3. They underestimated the extent of their weakness.
 4. Whenever a Christian does that, he has a 100% failure rate.
 5. We cannot overcome temptation in our own strength.
 6. Our self-reliant efforts are doomed to fail.
 7. Peter and the rest of the disciples were made painfully aware of this.
 8. They abandoned Jesus only a few hours after they vowed that they would never do so.
 9. Our determination is nowhere near enough to deal with the sin that resides in our hearts.
 10. When we try to deal with sin and temptation in our own strength, we will always fail.
- E. The good news is that God has not left us to our own strength.
1. Christ is sufficient to save us not only from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin.
 2. But the only way we can avail ourselves of the help that Christ offers us is by realizing that we are utterly incapable of helping ourselves.
 3. This is the inversion of Benjamin Franklin's famous proverb, "God helps those who help themselves."

4. The truth is just the opposite.
5. God helps those who know that they cannot help themselves.
6. Jesus did not come to call the healthy, but the sick.
7. We have to see that we are grossly overmatched in the struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.
8. Peter came to see this truth as a result of his failure.
9. His denial of Christ showed him his own powerlessness against sin, but it also showed him the power of Christ to deliver him.
10. This is why this passage speaks so powerfully to each one of us.
11. We are just like Peter.
12. We too are powerless to fight sin and temptation in our own strength.
13. But this does not mean we are without hope, because we too have a Savior who always lives to intercede for us.

IV. Provided for, Yet Prepared

- A. This brings us to the final section of our text, where we see a third kingdom paradox: Jesus's disciples are provided for, yet they also need to be prepared.
 1. This section begins with Jesus reminding the disciples of what happened when he sent them out as his emissaries at an earlier point in his public ministry.
 2. On that occasion, he specifically instructed them not to bring extra supplies with them, yet they did not lack anything.

3. The Lord provided for them through the support of those who were receptive to their ministry.
 4. That took place at a point when Jesus had high approval ratings.
 5. But things were about to take a drastic turn.
 6. After Christ's death on the cross, his followers would face the same kind of opposition that he faced as they carried out their mission to go and proclaim the gospel beyond the boundaries of Israel.
 7. This prompts Jesus to tell them to take provisions with them when they go on that mission.
 8. They are not to expect that God will miraculously provide for them and spare them from trouble.
 9. Though Jesus will continue to be with them by the power of his Spirit, he wants them to exercise wisdom and foresight.
- B. One part of the instructions that Jesus gives here that might be a bit confusing is his direction for the disciples to secure a sword, even if they have to sell their cloak to do so.
1. It is not likely that Jesus was speaking literally here.
 2. For one thing, they already had two swords with them, and when they pointed this out to Jesus he said, "It is enough."
 3. If Jesus literally intended for each one of them to furnish himself with a sword, then he is contradicting himself in verse 38.
 4. Two swords is ten short of twelve.
 5. It is not enough if Jesus was speaking literally about obtaining a sword.

6. Furthermore, Jesus rebuked the disciple who used a sword to cut off the ear of the high priest's servant in the garden of Gethsemane.
 7. Also, the New Testament makes it clear that the extension of the church does not take place by the power of the sword.
 8. As the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10, "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Cor 10:3-5 ESV)
 9. Jesus is making a figurative point when he speaks of obtaining a sword here.
 10. He is telling his disciples that they need to be ready to give up anything in order to be well-equipped to continue in their spiritual mission and struggle.
- C. The reason why the disciples need to be told this is because Jesus is about to be put to death alongside the dregs of society.
1. And as Jesus explains, this is going to happen in fulfillment of prophecy.
 2. He cites a verse from Isaiah 53, the great song of the Suffering Servant: "And he was numbered with the transgressors."
 3. Then, after citing that verse, he says, "For what is written about me has its fulfillment."
 4. There are two things to note about this.
 5. First of all, Jesus explicitly says that Isaiah 53 is about him.
 6. He is the one who is to be pierced for his people and crushed for our iniquities.

7. He is going to die the shameful death of the cross because the Lord is going to lay on him our iniquities.
8. Second, Jesus speaks of the fulfillment of this prophecy in the present tense.
9. He does not say that it will have its fulfillment, but that it has its fulfillment.
10. In saying that, he was telling the disciples that the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy was coming upon him that very night.

V. Conclusion

- A. The greatest paradox of the gospel is that the eternal Son of God, who is full of nothing but goodness and truth, was numbered with the transgressors.
- B. And in submitting himself to that fate, the Lord Jesus created another sublime paradox: transgressors are being made heirs of the kingdom of God.
- C. What can we say in response to this but "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"