

**Thy Kingdom Come****Session 2****Kingdom vs. Empire**

**PRAY**-God give us hearts to receive hard truths from your word. Holy Spirit empower us to live as obedient kingdom citizens in a world that is raging against our every effort. We ask this for your glory and our good. Amen

**Introduction-**

We are citizens of God's kingdom but we are waiting for its fullness.

There is a competing reign that we live in the shadow of. It affects us daily at every level and in every relationship.

We will call this competing reign the Empire.

"The Bible could be studied through the lens of God's kingdom challenging the empire. The Bible is a book utterly immersed in empire: (Bird & Wright)

- Assyria
- Babylon
- Persia
- Greece
- Macedonia
- Seleucids
- Rome

"The Bible developed against the context of these empires, providing concrete meaning to the counter-cultural claims of Israel and Jesus. One way to read the Bible is as a History of faith resistance." (Bird & Wright)

This understanding should drive the church to its vocation-reminding ourselves that God builds his Kingdom but he uses his church to:

- Participate
- Promote
- Defend
- And Reveal his kingdom

We don't build the kingdom but we work at building FOR the kingdom

God uses us in this work

This is sobering and weighty

“The Bible can’t be understood fully apart from empire. “ (Bird & Wright)

Most of the time Israel was living the shadow of the Empire or experiencing its oppression.

The Testimony of scripture is that kings and empires were raised up to challenge Israel or be brought down by Israel.

However God had acted in these situations.

God uses empires to accomplish his purposes-he even called wicked Cyrus his servant

Bird & Wright

## **Empire**

Definition- the world’s systems, motives and practices that operate in opposition to God’s mission for his Kingdom.

- Is opposite of the upside-down and cruciform kingdom
- In scripture and in life we see the tension between the Kingdom and the empire
- In scripture- the word --world, can mean culture (word culture not in NT but: Manners, customs, traditions
- World can mean Cosmos-unfortunately translated “world”
- World can mean All people, inhabitants
- Most striking use- social order.
- We can embrace elements of culture that reflect truth, beauty and goodness  
Red Yellow Green

## **Empire Attributes**

Its seductive- Odysseus-sirens, can we partake and not be harmed?

- Are we even tying ourselves to masts anymore or thrown all caution to the wind?
- Some cultural aspects should be embraced as part of God’s good gift
- Some parts of culture should be avoided due to their antithesis to God’s will for His people

- It's not always easy to tell
- Our life consists in a daily embracing or shunning of the culture

### **Ubiquitous – “How's the water boys” illustration**

- Both its good and wicked elements have encroached into the church.
- We often have trouble recognizing it- We breathe in so much of the empire that we can be deceived (Woe to him who calls evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20)
- World systems, driven by demonic forces and practices have always existed (since the fall) (not a spooky shakedown!)

### **The Empire captures our imaginations-**

- Then feeds our desires
- Marketing- over 10,000 times a day-propaganda
- Empire tells us what we “need” who we should be, what we should value
- American Dream should not be the goal for Christians- we cannot serve God and the Empire. The American dream is part of the Empire's story-a successful life= economic success
- The Empire's stories draw us into a particular understanding of the world that is not Biblical
- Stories are powerful-they shape us
- The implications are immense
- 
- Their stories are powerful (Rags to Riches, you can be whatever you want, follow your heart, trust your emotions, love is love, be true to yourself,)
- These stories perpetuate the empire's lies
- If we're honest, very often the stories of the empire inform our thoughts and actions more than the stories of the Kingdom
- Has political and social implications-not just individual

### **The Empire-unlike the Kingdom of God is temporary**

#### **Foundation**

- Built on systemically centralized power- someone is calling the shots
- Secured by socioeconomic and military structures of control and cultural influences
- Has religious connotations-devotion, commitment- Try challenging the empire and see what you get in return!
- Legitimated by powerful religious myths
- Sustained by captivating imagery that perpetuates a false portrait of the empire.
- It makes the empire seem good
- Based on Idolatry

- Numbs us to the Kingdom
- Ruled by the powers of Satan
- Acts 17:16-Paul strolled Athenian street and “he was greatly distressed because the City was full of Idols.”
- What idols would he see in our cities and streets?

#### Warnings in Scripture

##### **Paul in Colossians**

His teachings on the powers should be formative in our thinking.

Powers? Real

- Words for powers:
    - Principalities, authorities, dominions, thrones, world rulers-all linked to Idolatry
    - Paul’s message subversive to the Empire
    - “Powers” refer to the worldly, evil systems that are in play
    - Paul tells us that these powers blind the minds of unbelievers, lead to slavery and death
  - Often disguised as light (2 Corinthians 11:14) Deception is the empire’s strongest tools
    - Reason for some stealth-Roman Empire
    - Paul’s readers would have heard this as subversive to the empire
    - Paul warns us and carefully instructs us that the powers of the empire need to be challenged
    - In order to challenge them, we have to recognize them (FOC example-to the hard of hearing you shout)
    - What is your perception of reality?
    - Does it include the conviction of evil spirits working behind the scenes to promote evil?
    - The Cross: Exposes, disgraces, mocks, makes an example of the powers
    - Colossians 1:15 “and having disarmed the power and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross”
    - For by him all things were created.... whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. -powers created by Christ and under his control
    - Col 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through the hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of the world rather than according to Christ.”
    - If Jesus is lord-Cesar is not
    - Western Globalism is similar to Roman Empire, Egypt and Babylon
- Control  
Power

Greed  
 Consumerism  
 Individualism  
 Humanism

It's a system that has potential for great good, but that's not its current manifestation

### **Paul in Ephesians**

- Warns against the following the ways of the world  
 Gratifying the cravings of the flesh  
 Following the desires the empire evokes  
 Deserving of wrath
- Evil exists within us and external to us
- Ephesians 3:10-11 there are supernatural powers in the heavenly realm for our demise

These powers can afflict Christians by working through human political and social bodies, through culture, through economic systems  
 (Example Revelation's depicting – eerie imagery of complete control of political and social systems by the satanic power structure.

- Since our battle is not against flesh and blood it is fruitless to use our flesh to fight spiritual battles.
- Ephesians 6:10-13  
 "Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the Devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the ruler, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm"

Please remember this-You need to spend daily time with Jesus in word and prayer. And be part of a Bible teaching church.

We cannot resist the seductiveness of the empire, the spiritual battle we face, if we are attempting to fight in the flesh, we need God's word and the church

- Meet with Jesus every day

- Very few excuses hold any weight here. Coma? Hospitalization-of course
- We need the full armor of God and it starts here.

### **Paul in Romans**

- “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, not heights nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our lord. (Romans 8:35-39)
- Romans 12:1-2 “Patterns of this world”
- “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortress. We are destroying speculation and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”
- Paul knows that every battle is a spiritual battle and has eternal consequences
- Prayer and God’s word, through His Spirit destroy strongholds.

### **Empire in OT**

#### Moses vs Pharaoh

Moses brought God’s freedom and redemption to Israel

Pharaoh brought slavery and bondage

Moses relied on God’s power

Pharaoh was convinced of his own power

Exodus 11:7 Contrasts the empire and the kingdom

“Know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt (empire) and Israel.(Kingdom)

Israel often blurred this distinction (We do too)

- God mercifully delivered his people from the tyranny of the Empire and led them in live as Citizens of the Kingdom in the promised land
- 400 years under Pharaoh’s Empire without a word from God meant the Empire was deeply engrained in their collective memory
- God got his people out of Egypt by subverting the Empire, now he had to get Egypt out of his people and subvert the “Empire that resided in their hearts” (G, Howitt)
- Israel’s greatest challenge was to not be like the empire they were rescued from (And sadly wanted to return to)
- We see God’s people entrenched in the empire’s religious idols- Golden calf)

- They were delivered from the oppression and idolatry of the empire only to turn around and become oppressive idolaters
- We can't be naive to the powers at force we struggle in similar ways
- God gave Israel everything they needed to subvert the empire in their hearts: Torah, temple, leaders, ceremonies, the sacrifices- his very presence

We too have God's word and law, leaders, sacraments and on top of that we have God's spirit dwelling in us-We have everything we need.

## Prophets

- Prophets-covenant enforcers, they understood the power of language to evoke. They tried to nurture a kingdom consciousness  
"The Time may be ripe in the church for serious consideration of prophecy as a crucial element of ministry." Brueggemann
- They attempted to call Israel away from their empirical practices  
Amos "They trample on the heads of the poor and deny justice to the oppressed"  
4:1 "Hear this you cows of Bashan, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy

My first response to this was "Well I don't do that!" Then I kept reading Amos-

- 6 "Woe to you who are complacent"
- When we sit back and do nothing, we are culpable
- Ezekiel 27:29 The people of the Lord practice extortion and commit robbery, they oppress the poor, mistreat the foreigner and deny justice
- Israel's kings were corrupt and her leaders wicked and its citizens were living by empire standards and were complacent to injustices

## Empire in the N.T. Jesus & Rome

- Jesus brought the Kingdom into the world in the midst of the Roman Empire (The fullness of time Galatians 4:4-7)

- Jesus' teachings and actions were a threat to the Empire-to Caesar who was worshipped,
- Jesus deployed workers for the kingdom in the midst of the empire- this led to his death and the persecution of Christians
- Israel was called to be "A light to the Nations" Isaiah 60:3) they failed,(Christ succeeded)
- The church is now to embody this calling (matt 5:16)
- Have we lost ourselves to the empire and don't even know it?
- Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the Earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot-
- Is our light dim?

We skim by these warnings

Many believe the church in the West has lost its saltiness as we've succumbed to the ways of the Empire (always a faithful remnant)

Lot in Gen 13:13 chose to dwell in S & G's prime land with economic wealth as well as moral bankruptcy

Lot chose to "Pitch his tents" in the Empire without caution. He ended up being influenced by their ungodliness rather than being salt and light

Parallels for us

The Disciples of Christ will lose their Saltiness when they compromise with the Empire rather than living in contrast to it.

In Revelation John warns that Jesus would remove the lampstands who had lost their saltiness.

But we don't have to live by the ways of the empire:

The cross was not the Defeat of Christ at the hands of the powers; it was the defeat of the powers at the hands of Christ.

We have everything we need to resist

### **Revelation-Babylon & the New Jerusalem**

- The tale of 2 cities



- John's readers" must decide which city will determine their lives in the present and shape their destiny for the future. " Clint Arnold

"Those who conquer by being part of the lamb's resistance movement against evil will inherit the glorious blessing of the New Jerusalem (Rev 27:7) Those however, who share in the sins of Babylon will be excluded from the Holy City that is filled with God's Holy Presence." Clint Arnold (Revelation 21:8, 27, 22:3)

John in Revelation is:

- Challenging his readers' imaginations
- Giving them a new vision
- Summoning God's people to live counter culturally
- It should give us courage to swim against the stream of the world that has succumbed to the beast.

In his wisdom John: in Revelation

- He takes us into the throne room
- Throne 46 times in Revelation: Message:

If God is on the throne Caesar is not

If God is on the throne .....western idolatry is not.....

Part of understanding God's kingdom is knowing who is on the throne

John's vision calls us

- A new theological imagination
- The Lamb's end time victory over the beast calls us to- EXPOSE & RESIST the empire
- Revelation's transformed world of vision can give us a perspective from which to do theology in our own world.
- Revelation is first and foremost a discipleship manual
- " Revelation gives us a vantage point from which to reimagine our world"

"Christian communities resist the empire by being outposts of another Kingdom, the empire of God and the slain lamb." Dean Flemming

- Egypt and Rome and Babylon are warnings to us
- We don't need to throw up our hands in despair
- We need to humbly admit our complicity in the ways of the empire-REPENT

- We need our imaginations renewed and our flesh pricked
- We need a commitment to holy living
- Through the power of the resurrected lamb and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God's people CAN live as faithful Citizens of the Kingdom in the shadow of the empire
- All of this can be overwhelming-session 3 we will cover 2 particular ways we can live out kingdom faithfulness.

### **Closing thoughts**

- We reside in an Empire as citizens of the Kingdom; not in Egypt, not in Rome, but in the West, driven by the idols of greed, consumption, individualism and autonomy
- We didn't choose or create the wicked structures that surround us- but we are responsible for how we participate in them
- God has shown us in his word how to live faithfully in this cultural, historical-redemptive moment
- We have every reason to be hopeful-the powers of the empire were defeated at the cross-their influence is temporary and limited and one day, will be totally removed
- Through the power of the resurrected lamb and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God's people CAN live as faithful Citizens of the Kingdom in the shadow of the empire

"Christian communities resist the empire by being outposts of another Kingdom."

This means engagement-NOT retreat

We need to live in the world for the SAKE of the world.

"Are we living out our kingdom reality?"

Newbigin "Are you optimistic or pessimistic of the future?"

"Neither- I believe in the Resurrection"

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank you that at the cross you defeated the powers that work against your kingdom. We need your help in our current situation to live faithful. Would you lead each of us to application as we seek to honor you and demonstrate Christ to the world?

Show us when to resist and give the power to do so. Lead us to use our gifts in your mission for the sake of the world.

Bind Satan from deceiving your people.

Prick our flesh

Inflame our imaginations to the end that we would live in this world for the sake of the world that many more would come to know you.

In Jesus' name,

Amen