

My Little Kingdom & God's Kingdom

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[0:00] Well, let's do a little review before we move into today's lesson. Last week we saw that sin is settling for less when God offers more.

! Sin is settling for less when God offers more. And we took that definition, and we said it's not a complete definition, but it's a complementary definition for the other, like, sin is lawlessness, sin is any lack of conformity to the law of God or transgression of it.

This is a complementary definition, and we took that from Romans 3.23, and it says, for all have sinned, and then he tells us what that means, and fallen short of the glory of God.

So Paul defines sin as prizing, loving, cherishing, glorying in something other than God.

And so, when we are not loving and prizing and rejoicing in God, we are sinning. And that is the height of wickedness.

[1:12] It is to God's face telling him, God, this thing, this person, whatever, is more important to me, is better to me than you are.

And so, I put you, God, and I put this thing on the scale, and I measure their worth, and this thing is more valuable to me than you are.

And you can see the wickedness of that. It's not just choosing a McDonald's cheeseburger over a filet mignon, and we can't just say, well, I know it's less, sin is less, but I'm okay with that.

I can deal with that. Sin is more than that. It is an offense. It's a rebellion against God, and it's spiritual adultery, as we're beginning to see in Sunday morning.

It's acting like Gomer. It's leaving God our true love and going to something else. And so, it's rebellion. It's choosing to live for our kingdom when God says, here, live for my kingdom.

[2:17] And that's exactly what happened in the fall. Adam and Eve chose autonomy. They chose to leave God's kingdom, and they decided that they were going to set up their own kingdom, and that's how they were going to live.

And we have been ratifying that decision every day of our lives since we've been born. And a thousand times this week, I have said, I will have my own way, and I will build my kingdom, and my way will be done on earth as God's way and God's will is done in heaven.

And so now, there's an unceasing, never-ending conflict between our sinful little kingdoms and God's kingdom.

Ever since we chose autonomy and started living for our little kingdom, all of life has been a battle. Every decision, every action, every choice, every desire, every deed, every plan, every agenda has been done in pursuit of my kingdom or God's kingdom.

And the problem is that as Christians, a lot of times we confuse the kingdoms.

[3:35] We don't live like our kingdom is in conflict with God. We go through our normal days. We go through a Monday and a Tuesday and a Wednesday, and we think, then we assume that our little kingdom and God's kingdom are the same things.

And so when he promises us grace and help, we take those things as promises to help us in our kingdom. Instead of what they are, promises to bless us as we join him in his kingdom work.

And so the fact is that God's grace, it isn't meant to help us build our kingdoms now.

It isn't meant to help us live the good life now so that my kingdom will grow and so that my kingdom will become great.

So Jesus didn't come and he didn't die to give us the American dream. Jesus saves us from the American dream. Jesus didn't come to give us a white picket fence and a car in the garage and two children.

[4:49] He didn't die to give us that. He didn't die so that all of our marriages would be perfect and all of our relationships would be great. He didn't die so that we could have children that would do

well in school and that would always obey us and that they would go to college and get good jobs and bring home beautiful grandchildren for us.

He didn't give us any of those things. Now, don't get me wrong. All those things are great. But the problem is, is when our life is, that is our life.

He didn't die to give us the selfish, petty American dream that this world is offering to us. He came to free us from that life.

He came to save us from living for just those things. And so we often get our kingdom and God's kingdom mixed up. And so the question is, that we're going to spend a lot of time answering is, well, how do we know what kingdom I'm living for?

And Jesus answered that question in Matthew chapter 6. So turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6. And this is the Sermon on the Mount.

[6:03] And Jesus is talking about life in the kingdom of God. And he's going to tell us how, he's going to show us how it's different than living for our own kingdom.

So Matthew chapter 6, verse 19. And we're going to read a longer portion, and it's a familiar one. And as we read, I want you to ask yourself just one question.

And the question is, what are the two points of focus? What are the two big things that my little kingdom is built around? What are the two points of focus that mark all little kingdom living?

And we'll begin in verse 19. And I want you to see if you can find these two big points. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[7:11] The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness?

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow?

[8:14] They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon, in all his splendor, was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you?

O you of little faith, so do not worry, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. So, little kingdom living is marked by two major points of focus.

Did you see what they were? Anyone? Dad? Earthly treasures. Earthly treasures. That's exactly right. That's the first one? Worry. Worry. Exactly right.

[9:19] Perfect. The first is, little kingdom living is marked by earth-bound treasures. Earth-bound treasures.

So humans, all humans, are treasure seekers. We're all looking for a treasure. And so what is a treasure? A treasure is something or someone that we put great value on, that we are living for, that we consider valuable above anything else.

So let me ask you, what are some earth-bound treasures that Reformed Baptist Christians often pursue?

Yes, Mark? Secure retirement. Secure retirement. Is retirement a good thing? Securing your retirement is probably a very good, smart thing. It's a problem when you treasure it.

What else? Job security. Job security. We all want that. We can easily start living for that. Ed? You put a parentheses here when you talk about Reformed Baptist.

[10:25] The two things that have already been mentioned, that refers to all people. Right. So are you looking for, like, purity of teaching, of doctrine, our own?

I don't understand why you limit this. Because I think as Christians, I guess I'm not limiting it to Reformed Baptist. I'm talking about my audience here. As, what is something as Christians that we can very easily put more worth into than God?

How about parenting successful children? Is that something that Christians value? And we put a lot of emphasis on.

Is it important? Yes. Can it become an idol and a treasure where we care more about raising a particular kind of child than we do about God?

Yes. It does affect the way you appear to others. Your parenting, your friends, and where you're seen and not seen. Right. I think a lot of times that's true.

[11:33] I even think of, sometimes we're, we're very concerned about what other churches think of us. And maybe more so than we ought to be.

What other Reformed Baptist churches think of us. Yes. I guess that all boils down to image. You can get it kind of wrapped up. And we think in terms of the person just in the world, spent a lot of time in front of the earth and put on our image.

We don't have to leverage that's better than that yet. I know that these Christians, we can get involved based on our image. We don't just put on this. Yeah.

That's very, very good. So we, I think everyone has particular treasures that they're more prone to run after. And I think every group has particular treasures that they're more prone to run after.

And then in this world, just living in America, we have retirement and job security that is, that our culture treasures. And they can start living for.

[12:38] And the problem is not that any of those things are good or bad, necessarily bad. The problem is when they get put to the most important place in our lives, when they become the thing that we value and treasure and that we're living for.

And so Jesus warns us for, for living for those kinds of treasures, because they're so fleeting. They're so fleeting. So moth and rust, they destroy them.

And then the thieves break in and steal them. And just like that, they're gone. And he warns us against living for those kinds of treasures for another reason, because they are so alluring.

They seem so right. And they are right in a lot of ways, but then our heart gets too attached to them. Well, listen to Tripp.

I never wake up in the morning and say, I want my job to be the single life organizing treasure of my life. But somehow it becomes that. And I never say, today I will get my identity, my meaning and purpose from another human being.

[13:47] Yet somehow the affection of a certain person becomes my treasure. And so ask yourself, what makes for a good day in your life?

When you can have a day and you say, this was a good day, this happened, and this was a good day. What are those things that make you happy and satisfied? And those things are your treasures.

That's your treasure. And so if your answer revolves around earthly things, about things that are here and now, then you've also found your kingdom.

You know what you're living for, what kingdom you're building. The second mark of living for your kingdom is, as Jim said, worry. It's anxiety-bound need.

And so we had earth-bound treasure. Our treasure is bound up in this earth. It's tied. It's chained to this earth. And all of our needs and our worries are bound up here.

[14:50] And anxiety binds all of our needs. And so it's incredibly dehumanizing to live like this, where all we're concerned about is what I need.

And so when we're just living for earthly needs, what I'm going to eat and drink and wear, then we're really no better than a bird or a squirrel that goes around looking for nuts all day.

And in a matter of fact, we're worse than they are. Because they're not worrying about where it comes from. But we do.

And so often, we don't act like God is going to take care of us. And so we're scurrying about asking, what shall I eat? What shall I wear?

What shall I drink? And we're all worried about it. And we can never live life the way God meant us to live if all that we see before us is our felt needs.

[15:52] If that's all I see in my life, then I can't live for those greater glories that we talked about. I can't live for God because my needs are pressing right into my face.

And so there's the pagan. And he's running around and he's raking in the muck and he's trying to find something. And he's working, working, working.

And he never lifts up his eyes to see what his life is about. He never has any time to consider God. There's no room for God in any of his thoughts.

And the sad thing is that when you live like that, you can never guarantee yourself that you will have the things that you think you need. You can't guarantee that you're going to have what you need. So the farmer, he can't make it rain. And when it rains too much, he can't make it stop. And the parent whose treasure is their children's behavior, they can't make their children perfectly obey them.

[16:57] And the husband can't make his wife respect him. And I can't make other people like me. And I can't keep my neighbors from letting their grass grow really high or treating their yard like a mechanic shop.

I can't make people do what I want. And I can't keep my job from being downsized. And I can't pull the economy out of a recession. I can't provide for all my so-called needs.

And do you see how horrible of a life that is? If all you're consumed about is your felt needs, then you're going to live a miserable, pointless life.

And it will be a very pathetic, sad, scary life. Because you'll always be focusing on things that you can't control. And no matter how much you worry about them, you can't change them.

And then in the end, it's all gone. Everything that you live for is taken away from you. And the other problem with this kind of living is that have you seen that in your life, when you're focusing on your needs, the things that get put into the needs category grows bigger and bigger.

[18:16] As our life gets smaller and smaller and smaller and we're thinking more about ourselves, it seems like our whole life gets filled up with needs. John D. Rockefeller is considered by many to be the richest man in history.

And to put his wealth into perspective, the richest man in the world right now is Bill Gates. And he's worth about \$56 billion. If you adjust Rockefeller's worth for inflation and how the currency has changed over the years, he would have been worth about \$663 billion.

So that's about 12 times richer than Bill Gates. And Rockefeller was a committed Northern Baptist. I don't know what that means, but he wasn't Southern, he was Northern.

And he didn't drink and he didn't smoke and he gave all sorts of money away and he contributed to all sorts of church causes. And when asked how much money he needed, he said, just a little more. And so the man that had everything, the man that probably could rival Solomon and wealth, needed something else.

[19:40] And the little kingdom of self is marked by those two things. I'm living for here and now and I never have enough and I'm anxious about it. Well, we want to answer another question.

That's kind of what marks the little kingdom. Let's ask, where is that kingdom? Where is that kingdom? Turn over to Luke chapter 17 and Luke 17 verse 20.

And we'll just read 20 and 21. Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would have come, Jesus replied, the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, here it is or there it is, because the kingdom of God is within you.

So where is the kingdom of God? It's within you. It's in your heart. Where is the little kingdom? It's in your heart.

The little kingdom is a heart commitment. It's what we give our hearts to. And because it's in here, it's in my heart, I take my kingdom wherever I go.

[20:51] And it totally affects and determines how I respond to everything I come to in my life. Because wherever I go, the kingdom that I'm living for will come out.

My kingdom, it determines how I respond to God. So in the college and career, we've been going through a book or a study on the parable of the prodigal son.

And we have been very convicted by the lostness of the elder brother. See, the elder brother was a good boy.

And he stayed at home and he did things that were right. He did what the father said. But the whole time, he was using the father to get what he wanted. See, in reality, he wanted the father's things. He didn't want the father. The younger brother, he wanted the father's things and he wanted to go his own way. So he wished his father dead and tore part of his inheritance away from his father and left and spent it.

[21:57] He didn't want the father. He wanted the father's things. And the elder brother slaved away. He stayed at home and he slaved away hoping at the end to earn his father's things.

But he could not have cared less about the father. And so on the greatest day of the father's life, when his youngest son comes home and is restored to him, he has to go out and plead with his son to come in.

And can you imagine how embarrassing that would be? And the older brother would not rejoice with the father because he did not love the father. He just wanted what the father had.

And so when he saw the father giving away more of his inheritance, spending more on this party, he was furious. And when we pursue a little kingdom life, that is exactly how we are.

We allow God into our kingdom, but he doesn't get to sit on the throne. He's just a tool to be used. He can only come into our kingdom as we can control him and get what we want.

[23:10] And so when I'm desperate to protect the things that I have, and I'm desperate to protect my way of life, that's when I pray. And so I read my Bible diligently, and I pray hard, and I give money to the church, and I come whenever the doors are open, and I do all these good things, not because I love God, but because I'm hoping that somehow I can earn something so I can protect my life because it makes my life better.

And I want to justify myself. I don't want him to justify me. I want to say I have justified myself. I justify my existence. I live because I have worked hard.

And we can see this in how we pray. When we're pursuing a little kingdom life, we pray in a very particular way. We treat God like a domestic intercom, and he is there on the other end to give me what I want and what I think I need so that my life will be better.

And so I pray, protect me. Give me a good day. Help me to do good at my work. Help me to say the right thing in this situation. Help me in this meeting.

Help me to put this sin to death. Help me to preach well. Why? Well, because I want my kingdom to go well. We can ask all those things in the right way, and we can ask all those things in the wrong way.

[24:41] But when you're living for God in his glory, and your heart is set on God, and you love the Father, then your prayer life isn't just ask, ask, ask.

It isn't, the focus isn't on me and my needs. The focus is on how beautiful God is, and how glorious God is. And so when you're living for the little kingdom life, someone said, it's just like treating God like a vending machine.

You put good works in and you press the button and you expect blessing, and when he doesn't give you the blessing that you want and your life doesn't go the way you want, you get angry. But when you're alive to God and you're living for his glory, when you are living to see his name advanced in the earth, then your prayer isn't all about asking, asking, asking.

It becomes prayer and adoration. They find their way or praise and adoration. And your prayers become full of those things. And so let me ask you, how is your prayer life?

Is it just petition after petition with no room for praise? Well, your kingdom orientation determines how you relate to God and it determines how you relate to other people and relationships.

[25:56] See, when you live for your kingdom, you don't drop out of life. You don't quit relationships. It's just relationships are all about you. If your relationship with your friend is beneficial to you, you think that's a good relationship.

If he gives you the acceptance that you want, then that relationship is good. If the relationship is fun, then that is good. But the minute the relationship becomes hard and personal and where you have to sacrifice, that's when you start ignoring that person if you're living for the little kingdom. And so my relationships don't become about encouraging my brother and sister. It becomes, how can I be encouraged? And my relationships aren't about loving.

It's about being loved. And it's not about serving. It's about being served. And so the all-important, all-determining question in everything that I do when I'm living for myself is, well, what is in it for me?

And if I'm not getting what I want, then I'm getting angry. And so the little kingdom contacts every part of our life. And then what it does, it contacts every part of our life and then it pulls it in on ourselves.

[27 : 16] And everything becomes about me and what I want. And that is why the little kingdom is so attractive. Because at the heart of the little kingdom is selfishness.

And selfishness is the DNA of every sin. So this is what Tripp says. Sin is about wanting my way and my own way and my own time.

And so behind every sin behind every ugly sin and behind every beautiful sin there is selfishness. So Jacob deceives his brother and he lies to his father because he's selfish.

And Achan steals things from Jericho and he disobeys God to his face because he is selfish. And Saul, he doesn't kill the Amalekite animals and the king because he is selfish.

And we can go on and on. The baby stiffens in the crib and gets all angry and throws a fit because she is selfish.

[28 : 27] And the five-year-old calls another kindergartner a name because she is selfish. And I'm angry when you're standing in line in front of me at the store and you're taking too long because I'm selfish.

And I, you know, I get depressed when my sermon flops because I'm selfish. And our kingdom runs on selfishness.

and that is why it's so pathetic and so ugly and so small and so worthless. It's only big as, it's only as big as me and that's why it is so attractive at the same time.

And we're drawn to it. We can't help ourselves. We love it because in our hearts we love ourselves and we want to live for our glory.

You see, I love me and I have a wonderful plan for my life. And when you mess up with that plan, then I'm going to get angry and when things don't go my way, I'm going to become discontent.

[29 : 36] And we're attracted to it. And this shows us the power of the grace of God. Because in salvation, God cuts a hole into our little kingdom and he pulls us out.

when we are so attracted to our little kingdom, he takes us away. God takes us out of the kingdom of darkness and he brings us into the kingdom of his son.

And so only God could have done that. Because my heart is like a magnet. It is so attached to my little kingdom. And because he could have only done that.

Because I am way too in love with myself and with my agenda that I would never leave my kingdom if it was left up to me. Well, God did what we never could have done.

He introduced us to a superior glory. He introduced us to something that ruins our little kingdom. kingdom. And he pulls us out of ourselves and he pulls us out of our little world.

[30 : 46] He pulls our heads out of the sand and he shows us the sunshine. He shows us Jesus Christ and he makes Christ so glorious to us that I can never ever go finally back to that little kingdom again.

Now, the problem is he has brought us into the kingdom of his son. But the problem is we have this heart that still wants to go back to our own way to our own kingdom.

And so we find ourselves constantly playing around with lesser glories living for lesser things lesser glories we turn our back on God but God is faithful and every time we do that he comes and he lifts us up again and he brings us to himself again.

Well, Tripp gives a great example of this in his book and I want to read this to you. It's kind of long but I want you to see in this how attractive our little kingdom can become and how confusing sometimes our kingdom and God's kingdom can be and then just look at God's grace and mercy in his life.

it was one of the hardest moments in my ministry one that I never imagined I would ever go through. I had been one of the founders of a Christian school.

[32 : 13] I had taught there while still being a pastor and without any additional pay and I had functioned as its principal and president of its board for eight years. Meanwhile, I had paid for each one of my children to attend but in one shocking night I was voted out of my position and removed from any influence over the school that was so precious to me and my ministry.

And I drove home that night unable to grasp what had actually happened. I could barely talk as I shared the horrible events of the evening with my wife. And the next morning I was haunted in my thinking by the faces of the people who had led the coup.

I was determined that I had to do something. I was gearing up for a fight until I called my brother Ted. And he said, Paul, I'm sad that this has happened to you.

But what are you going to do? Are you going to go to each one of those leaders and keep going until they are convinced that they have made a mistake? Are you going to go to every person who voted against you and do the same with them?

How long do you think all this would take? And what would happen in the process to the other things in ministry that God has called you to? And he continued, I know that what you're going through is very hard to face, but the school is not yours.

[33:35] It belongs to the Lord, and it is his to do whatever he wants. You haven't been building your kingdom. He has been using you to build his.

And I suggest that you get up in the morning and you continue to do what God has called you to do, to serve the school and serve the people in any way you can and entrust the health of God's kingdom into his hands.

They were tender words, but they stung. Somewhere along the way, it had become my school. Somewhere along the way, it had become about my presence and my vision. Somewhere along the way, I had tried to squeeze the big kingdom vision of Christian education into the little kingdom confines of Paul and I humbly had to admit that most of my grief was not about what was best for the school, but about the fact that they had removed me.

Yes, I had been wronged, but my response to those wrongs revealed something that had happened inside of me. The two kingdoms were not only in conflict. I had confused one kingdom with another. I had thought I was doing big kingdom work, but that work painful grace, God cut a hole in my little cubicle kingdom and he reached in with his loving hand and began to pull me out.

[35:02] And those kind of things happen in our lives all the time. We get our kingdoms confused, we get mixed up, and our heart deceives us, sin deceives us, and we start living for me and mine.

And though we fall again and again, God will restore us again and again. And so we aren't just left to ourselves and that's the good news and we're going to see more of the good news as we go along, but we're not left just to ourselves.

God sends his spirit into our hearts to help us to live more than for our little kingdom. And so the spirit lives within you and to how great his kingdom is.

And he lives within you so that you can live for God's fame and not your own. And you can forget about your fame and it can become about God and his glory. And you can forget about your way because you love his way.

And you can take care of this world and you can take care of your families. You can take care of your work is in us.

[36:21] What he's doing in us. And so he lives within us for the same reason that Jesus died for us. To take us out of the little kingdom and give us a big kingdom so that we can live for something more than just me and my desires.

And if that is why Jesus died for you and if that is why the spirit lives within you, why your little kingdom when God has done something so terrific for you to give you a big kingdom to live for something greater than your own glory when you can live for so much more than just you.

Well, let's pray and then we'll be dismissed. Our Heavenly Father, we just ask that you would give us a greater vision of Jesus Christ and his kingdom and his glory and his righteousness and his majesty so great that we would willingly walk away from our kingdom and our glory and our righteousness that are nothing.

Will you bless us as we go on our way as we go into worship will you help us to be grateful and be filled with praise for you. You are surely worthy and I pray these things in Jesus name.

Amen.