

The Culture of the Kingdom The Four Imperatives of Kingdom Culture Part 1

Studio Session 138
Sam Soleyn
05/07/2008

Our culture informs our perspective; what is common to us is how we see the world. The way we see the world is a reflection of our cultural norms. An example, when I first came to the United States as a young student from the Caribbean where I was born and where I grew up, I was immediately impressed by the fact that Americans thought of money and time differently than the way I thought of it when I was growing up. For example, it was common for the worth of a person, the financial worth of a person, to be discussed. Whereas where I grew up no one would ever say whether they were without funds or whether they were loaded (whether they had plenty of money). So in America they would say, "So and so is worth a million if he's worth a penny." And the other thing that I observed was that distances were referred to in terms of time. They would say, "Well, it's two hours by car from say Oklahoma City to Dallas."

Now why would people talk in terms of distance and time and money and worth? Simply because time and money were the important elements of this culture. Now it seemed strange to me as a young man coming into this culture because not only would it be embarrassing to talk about the financial worth of a person, let alone to give any estimate as to what that financial worth may be, but it would be unheard of to speak of distances in terms of time because it all depended on your mode of transportation. If you were walking it would be longer obviously, that if you were riding a motorcycle (which is what I did) or taking a bus or going by a boat. And there was also a culture (still is a culture) in that location where to be late by as much as two hours was acceptable. I mean, no apology was required if you were invited to an affair that was advertised to be starting at five o'clock in the afternoon, if you showed up at seven; they adjusted for it. If they really wanted people there at seven, they would say at five. So both the host and the guest would both understand. And they were more or less on time but it wasn't formal, whereas in America, time was critical and if an affair started at five, everyone was expected to be there at five, and not seven. In fact, if you showed up at seven, it would be over.

My point is that culture informs our perspectives. The American visiting abroad, if he's visiting in a third world country, is likely to tell of his or her experiences in that foreign

environment in terms of what the people 'didn't' have, in terms of the hardships of daily life. They would talk about how difficult it was to go from the airport to the hotel and how poor the food was or unacceptable or not the standard that they were used to in the restaurants. And other Americans would sit around and be thoroughly entertained and informed by that perspective but if you were to ask the person in the third world country about that same experience, their perspective would be quite different. Very likely it would be how difficult it was and embarrassing it was to try to satisfy the demands of the American taste, in a setting that was not specifically geared to accommodate the American. And how odd and perhaps even rude the American appeared to be in that particular setting.

So culture informs our perspective and that's been historically true, that hasn't just been recently true, it's been historically true. When people came into the early church from say among the Greeks (pagans), many of the things that were addressed in the New Testament were addressed to those believers who would not think anything was wrong with that particular behavior. For example, the counsel in Jerusalem addressed the terms of the admission of Gentiles into the church by saying things like... the Gentiles coming into the church should avoid things strangled, they should avoid blood rituals, they should avoid fornication. Well why would these be things that should be prohibited – should be specifically stated as prohibited – to the Gentiles but stating them to the Jew was not necessary? Well because the Jew grew up under laws that created a culture that said these things were wrong. So they did not need to be remediated relative to those issues. But the Gentile, depending on where he grew up, would think nothing wrong with a visitor to a city like Ephesus... would make a stop at the temple of Diana and would engage in sexual activity and pay a fee to the temple and that would be considered very normal.

So to the person to whom this was the normal culture, he had to be informed as to what the culture of the kingdom was. To the Jew, for whom the law functioned previously to prohibit this form of conduct, that element of culture did not have to be spoken to specifically, but another element of culture had to be: the Jew considered himself uniquely chosen as the descendant of Abraham to be an inheritor of a promise from God and they saw no one else as being entitled to inherit that promise. So the Jew, as a descendant of Abraham, routinely felt that all that God spoke was to the Jew, that God had no dealings with, or intentions of dealing with, anyone else, certainly no Gentile. And so Peter considered himself one who was a righteous Jew because he never associated with Gentiles and had no intentions of doing so. So his culture, like the culture of the Jews, created a stumbling block to the purposes of God for the coming of the kingdom, which purposes include the extension of the rule of Christ and of the kingdom, together with all of it's provisions – to the Gentiles.

If you think about this thing of culture, you will see that God spoke specifically to

culture to circumscribe, if you like, to cut away those things that culture would impose upon the understanding of Scripture. If you grew up in certain regions of the United States, the thought of attending a church meeting with a person of a different race – even a few years ago – would be unheard of. And it was odd because those same people – whether it was black or white or Hispanic – those same people accepted as a given that when we get to heaven, all those people who are the children of God, would all be in heaven and all would be able to call God Father and all would be able to sit at the Lord's table at the great wedding supper of the Lamb but we couldn't be caught dead sitting at any table that represented that while we were alive in the earth because culture, not Scripture, culture, dictated a different point of view.

How do you account for the fact that Jews like Peter – who hated Gentiles - (note Cornelius in Acts 10) and Gentiles, such as Romans, who would assume crucify a Jew as they would have any kind of social engagement with them - as was common with the Romans - how would you account for the fact that people, very different in their backgrounds - idol worshipers and people who went to the temple in Jerusalem, temple prostitution and those who frequented it and those who abhorred that practice - how would you account for the fact that people of all these different races, who had such deep cultural divisions, would find in the unity of the body of Christ such profound commonality that they could be described as a whole new race of people? The answer is simple: when you came into the kingdom your culture changed.

Today I am distressed at racial groups insisting on their culture defining their faith because in the first century our progenitors, people from whom in the faith we are descended, when they were faced with the issue of culture and of the kingdom, the early apostles insisted that they all gave up whatever culture conflicted with the kingdom, as a threshold requirement for entering and possessing the realities of the kingdom. Today we have preachers who encourage and in fact celebrate cultural barriers that prevent the body of Christ from becoming one. For example, in this present season, the exposure of a man known as Jeremiah Wright for his glaring racist statements and in case anyone thought that he was quoted out of context, he left no doubt - when he was free to speak on camera to audiences - he left no doubt as to his heart and his intent and his theology. And yet we see significant numbers of black people in his audience agreeing enthusiastically with some of these ridiculous statements. But that's just because culture has been presented as truth but don't worry about it really because none of this means anything because truth is different. You may speak favorably to an audience, an audience may extend great credibility to you, but if what you're saying is not true, it has no lasting value. And from the things I heard this preacher say, anyone who believes what he believes have found comfort and refuge in culture. But both the substance of what is said and the culture that incubates it, is foreign to the kingdom.

Now I'm not on a mission to change any of that, mine is to present the culture of the

kingdom; my mission, my purpose in life, is to present the culture of the kingdom. I fully understand that in doing so, various racial, ethnic, and historical groups will be offended because the strength of their uniqueness is based in their culture. And their perspectives are shaped and determined by these cultural norms. I have not been sent except to those who desire to know the truth. Jesus once put it this way, "Whoever is on the side of the truth will come to Me."

Well, the arguments will persist and the accusations will fly, people will talk in terms of verbal invectives, they will do short term, quick psychological analysis simply because there is a constituency of people in the earth today and many of them are very vocal and very influential and have access to media and the like but they simply don't want to hear the truth and I frankly couldn't care less what they think because I'm playing to an audience of one, namely the One who sent me. And when my time on the earth has ended, whatever was said of me or whatever was engraved upon my tombstone will bear no relevance to the judgment that I will face from the One who judges all. And I couldn't care less what legacy I left in terms of how what I did was interpreted by the society that views me, it matters not to me. In fact, I'm not at all concerned about these things. I think, in the main, I will not be all that important in the earth but while I am here I will say what is true because there is One who judges all men and then and only then is your true value established beyond diminishment. And that is my goal: to represent the One who sent me.

So with that in mind, the culture of the kingdom is different from all other racial, ethnic, historic, political, economic, social cultures. It is distinct and unique. And in order to get into that culture, you have to be dead to every other consideration and literally be born again and born of the Spirit and born into that culture. When the early church understood this and people were willing to die to everything that opposed the kingdom and were resurrected by the Spirit of God into the kingdom, they came up alive within a heavenly culture. Romans 8:11 says, "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then He who gave Christ life from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies by His Spirit who dwells within you."

The importance of the Holy Spirit is that He is the Heavenly Messenger sent to inform the human spirit, and more than informing the human spirit, sent to give the human spirit being and relevance that is defined from a heavenly, and not an earthly, perspective. The Scriptures say, "You did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship by whom you cry 'Abba, Father'. For the Spirit Himself," (speaking of the Holy Spirit), "For the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirits that we are the sons of God." This is Romans 8:14, "And if we are sons, then are we heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

The point is, being saved was far more, it was always intended to be understood as far

more than just going to heaven. Going to heaven is a result and one with which you ought not to be occupied. It will be a result that comes like ripened fruit upon a tree. But you were saved that you might first become a son of God and then you might grow up from an immature son to a mature son to fully represent the interests of God and of Christ in the earth. And the One who brings you to that, who empowers you to that, is the Holy Spirit. The human father, the spiritual father, is meant to disciple you in part by showing you, in his own mature life, what it looks like to become the thing that you are moving toward and to bring correction and instruction – both, correction and instruction – that you might stay on track. That one is a father to you who pastors or disciples or disciplines you and instructs you. But the goal of God is to have you walk step by step, moment by moment, in the Holy Spirit. That implies, and Scriptures specifically stated, it's more than an implication, that there will come to be a renewing of your mind by the Holy Spirit. That is, the Holy Spirit will begin to show you things of the earth from a heavenly perspective.

Now once that happens, one of the fundamental realizations that you will come to is that the things you are being brought into are not new, they may be new to you but they are not new in the earth. That God anticipated the time that would come when He would have sons, born of the Spirit, in the earth. Prior to that time, He created a culture that pre-existed your coming into the kingdom or even the New Testament revealing this culture of the kingdom. The Old Testament is full of the references of precisely this culture. From the beginning, the culture of the kingdom was the way that God set up human society when He set it up. You see, you cannot have sin unless there is a departure from the norm, so there has to be a normative standard. Once you have a standard of normalcy, then you may discuss departures from that; if you have no standard of normalcy, then everything is the norm, it's just that's the new norm.

So when mankind comes into the kingdom, what he finds is that God had from the beginning, from the times of Adam, God had setup a heavenly culture to function among human beings. Now, why do you need the renewing of your mind then, if that were always so? The answer is: Until the Holy Spirit, there is no clear understanding of the relevance of what God previously did. In other words, even the people who were involved in that culture, before the Holy Spirit informed their thinking, they themselves did not understand what that culture was or what they were holding in place to project to a future generation. For example, God initiated the process in creation of the woman being taken out of the man and says that it's one man and one woman; Adam and Eve, not multiple wives for one husband or vice versa and that marriage was the norm; the two becoming one flesh. Well in Christ – when Christ comes and dies on the cross – the reference to His side being opened connects the example of Adams side being opened from which Eve is taken to the side of Christ being opened through which the Bride is inserted.

The culture of kingdom and the work of the Holy Spirit, makes one aware of what God had previously done. Adam did not understand the gospel that was being preached when his own side was opened and the bride taken out of it, Eve taken out of it. Even though he was the subject of it, he did not understand what it meant. It's the generations that would come after Christ that would now have the template of Christ through which to see the significance of all that had been setup previously.

My point is, God not only made Adam a son of God, but even when Adam sinned, God kept him in the earth for nearly a thousand years after that so that a culture of God as Father and humans as His sons would predominant the culture of mankind for more than a thousand years. This would be the norm from which there would be a falling away. But when something is to be restored – that is when the Holy Spirit would function to restore – He would not only restore that order, but He would give meaning in the fullness and in the entirety of it, to that order. Now keep that in mind as we begin to discuss the culture of the kingdom because “The Culture of the Kingdom” is not just some fancy phrasing to sound post modern; the culture of the kingdom has nothing to do with modernism or post modernism, it's the original culture of mankind now to be understood, now to be interpreted by the revealing of the Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit revealing to the mind of the human being – what the original intention of God was.

So we will see – when you look back from the point of view of the kingdom – you will look back through human history, you will see the existence of this reality but in a type of the reality, in a shadow of it, but God has brought us into the kingdom of light according to Colossians 1:12. We've been translated from the kingdom of darkness, where things are seen in shadows and indistinctly, we're being brought into a kingdom of light where that which was shadowy, indistinct and presented as a type, would now come into radical focus so you understand what God intended when He set the thing up initially. All religion is maintaining the shadow as if it were the reality but the kingdom allows for the light of the Spirit to be shed upon the shadow to cause that which was there indistinctly to appear fully. The New Testament church “continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”. These were the four cultural norms of the early church. We will look at these through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and see what the culture of the kingdom is by which we may accurately understand the written word. I'm Sam Soleyn, join me for continuing studies. I'll see you then, bye bye.