

## 6. Reflecting the Kingdom

We've noted that to **SHARE** the Kingdom like Jesus did entails **Seeing** people and **Having** compassion on them. Even though **Announcing** the kingdom comes next in the acronym, we going to discuss **Reflecting** the Kingdom next. To my way of thinking it is more likely that we would have the opportunity to reflect the kingdom to someone in our life and deeds, before we will have the opportunity to announce the good news to them. So we are going to follow logical order instead of acronym order. Actually, I don't really think we need to be too concerned about the order. Instead we need to be ready to engage in whichever aspect of Jesus' ministry God gives the opportunity to do at a particular time.

By **Reflecting** the Kingdom, I am referring to living a godly life and doing good deeds for others. I refer to this as reflecting, because we are not the power. The power of the kingdom lies with God and Christ. God's kingdom has affected us, though, and we reflect his power on to others. Paul wrote, "And we all, who with unveiled faces behold or *reflect* the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." Just as Moses spent time with the Lord on the mountain and emerged with a glowing reflection of God's glory, so our time with the Lord transforms us to where we reflect his glory to others. That's our focus for the week. Before you go any further, take a minute to look at the applications at the end to make sure you set aside time to do them. Don't forget we are *training*. We learn by doing!

### The Importance and Meaning of Jesus' Deeds

In order to understand the importance of Reflecting the reality of the Kingdom through our deeds, we need to be clear about just what is happening when we do good deeds for others. We're not just being nice. We're not even merely being Christian. We are pointing to a great, unseen reality. Let me explain.

We noted in a previous lesson (p. 35) that Satan has a kingdom and is working to harass and destroy people. He comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). We have also noted that one of the reasons Jesus came to us is to "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Or as Peter put it, Jesus went around doing good and "healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). Jesus wasn't just helping people. He was delivering them from the power of Satan.

On another occasion, Peter pointed out that God accredited Jesus by enabling him to do miracles, wonders, and signs (Acts 2:22). To accredit is

to testify. Through the miracles, God was testifying to something about Jesus. The word "miracle" (*dunamis*), which is the source of our word dynamite, emphasizes the *power* of the deeds. "Wonders" emphasizes the *marvelous* nature of the deeds. "Signs" *point to* something. As with billboards and street signs, the sign isn't the thing. Rather, it points to the thing. It points to some greater reality. In the case of Jesus, the signs point to his identity as the Christ and the Son of God (John 20:30-31). By enabling him to do miracles, God testified that Jesus was his Son.

This leads to an extremely important event for understanding Jesus' ministry. One day a man was brought to Jesus. He was possessed with demons who made him blind and mute. Jesus healed him, restoring his sight and speech (Matthew 12:22). The common people were amazed by what Jesus did and wondered if he could be the Son of David. This is messianic title (v. 23, cf. Matthew 1:1; 21:9; 22:42; 2 Timothy 2:8), so their question shows the sign was having its intended effect. It was pointing to Jesus' identity as the Messiah and the people were considering it.

The Pharisees made an opposite interpretation. They accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (v. 24).

Jesus showed the fallacy of their accusation by saying, "every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined" (v. 25). Though stated as a general principle, Jesus was referring specifically to the kingdom of Satan. If Satan put the demons in the man and then Satan drove them out, he would be divided against himself and would destroy his own kingdom (v. 26). Notice that "his kingdom" in v. 26 refers specifically to the kingdom of Satan. Satan, too, is a ruler and has a kingdom.

That leads to an extremely important line for understanding the role and power of Jesus' good deeds. In contrast to the illogical view of the Pharisees, Jesus states the real truth: "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Matthew 12:28). Jesus was driving out demons by the Holy Spirit, and he said this demonstrated the arrival and reality of God's reign. Previously, he had said the kingdom was at hand (Matthew 4:17). Now he says it has come. By casting out demons, as well as healing those inflicted with diseases, it is clear that God had come to reign among humankind. It is also clear that the power of God and his kingdom is superior to that of the Tyrant. This is not the last time that Satan would suffer defeat at Jesus' hand.

The parable that follow immediately in Matthew is related. Jesus said, "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his

house" (Matthew 12:29). Jesus is teaching that Satan is like a strong man who takes possession of people and controls them. But Jesus is stronger. His exorcisms are tying up the strong man, that is, limiting his power. As a result, Jesus can rescue those who have been under the control of the Devil. There is clearly conflict going on between the two kingdoms, and Luke's account of this parable uses more direct terms of warfare (11:21-22). Jesus is assaulting Satan. In so doing, he demonstrates both the reality and the superiority of the kingdom of God.

Good deeds, then, are testimony to the reality of the kingdom that Jesus was announcing. The same is true in us. We do good deeds not only for obedience, compassion, or helpfulness. We also do them to demonstrate the reality of God's kingdom.

Deeds or Miracles?

But wait a minute! Jesus didn't just do deeds, he did miraculous deeds. He gave powerful testimony to the reality of God's kingdom by miracles, wonders and signs. Does that mean we have to be able to do miracles in order to demonstrate the reality of the kingdom?

In several places in the New Testament we find God doing miracles through human beings which testified to the truth of the message they proclaimed. For example, "Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders" (Acts 14:3). Similarly, Paul wrote, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:18-19; cf. Acts 13:6-12; Hebrews 1:1-4 and possibly Mark 16:15-18). In these passages, where God does miracles through human hands, the dynamic is very similar to what we saw in Jesus' ministry. These signs don't indicate that the humans are anything special (Acts 3:11-16), but they do testify to the truth of the message they were speaking. So where does that leave us?

I was so excited when I realized that Jesus' miracles were not merely impressive, compassionate, and helpful deeds but that they also signified the truth of the kingdom and his kingship. But then I got confused. If the miracles of Jesus played such an important role in testifying to the truth of God's kingdom, what can I do? I have never done an actual miracle. I don't have that power. And calling something a miracle that really isn't, doesn't make it so. So can a regular guy like me bolster the truth of the kingdom?

I won't digress here to entertain the question about whether we still have true, miracles today like those Jesus did. Suffice it to say there are plenty of us who don't do them. So how does the principle of demonstrating the kingdom through deeds apply to us?

As I continued to wrestle with all this, I came to four realizations. First, it is not yet God's will to destroy the Enemy who brought all the sin, pain and disease into the world. Even Jesus did not to heal everyone and undo all the deeds of the evil one. Rather, his purpose was to demonstrate and describe the kingdom to as many different towns and villages as possible (Luke 4:40-44). The parable of the weeds shows clearly that God has decided to let good and evil grow together until the end of the age (Matthew 13:24-30). Because of this, we should not expect that all the evil, pain and suffering will be rooted out of the world during this age.

By the way, it is worth remembering this parable and knowing it well enough to tell it. People frequently ask why there is evil in the world or why God allows it to remain. No one can answer that question fully, but a partial answer is that God has not yet willed to destroy it. This doesn't answer the "why" part but it does show that God has not lost control of his world. Telling this parable is a good way to affirm that the reality of what we see going on in the world fits the way God planned to save the world.

Second, Jesus and the Holy Spirit did entrust the power to do miracles to his apostles (Matthew 10:1; 2 Corinthians 12:12) and to some other disciples. *Some* disciples, but not all. Scripture is clear that we have different gifts from God (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31). The Spirit has distributed them as he willed (1 Corinthians 12:11). It is very clear that not all work miracles or have gifts of healing (v. 29). It is has never been God's will for all of us to Reflect the Kingdom in all the same ways Jesus did.

Third, Jesus has done enough to show that God's kingdom is real and powerful. Whenever he encountered the work of the Enemy, God's power and kingdom were victorious every time. Christ demonstrated the reality of God's kingdom multiple times. Even if we don't do miraculous deeds, we can testify to the One who did. Just as we can tell people about the *message* of Jesus, so we can also tell them about the *deeds* of Jesus. In fact, we can say exactly what Peter did, that God was accrediting Jesus. God testified to who Jesus is by the miracles he enabled him to do (Acts 2:22). We can tell them that he went around doing good and healing all those who were oppressed by the Devil (Acts 10:38). We can even tell about the healing / exorcism of the man who was blind and mute and quote Jesus' actual words, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). Not everyone today will believe it, of

course. But many people do believe Jesus did miracles, yet may not recognize the reality that his signs were pointing to. Telling people what Jesus signs pointed to may open their eyes to the reality of his kingdom.

Fourth, we can clearly demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom of God in other ways that are not miraculous. If we have heard the message of the kingdom and submitted to the king, it will change our lives. We will live differently. Scripture specifically says that living as God teaches us will give the Christian message credibility. We'll look at some examples below. Miracles are uniquely different from non-miraculous deeds. But the dynamic is similar. Both are evidence of the reality of God's kingdom.

I don't know if these four realizations are satisfying to you, but this is the way God has chosen to bring his kingdom to the world. He chose to work in an unparalleled way through Jesus. He chose to use human workers, and even gave miraculous powers to some of them. He also chose to allow Satan's kingdom to survive until the end of this age. And he chose to have us testify to his truth not only by words but also by deeds. Sometimes I am tempted to think it should be different, but I know God has set it up in the way that is best. I am in service, not management. I will follow God's plan.

#### Ways we Can Reflect the Kingdom

I believe that **Seeing** people and **Having** compassion on them are ways we can reflect the truth of God's reign. Some non-Christians do these things too, but all who follow Christ will do them. And we do them because of the truth of his kingdom. He rules our lives calls us to see people and have compassion. Doing so points to the reality of the rule of Christ our King. As you read the following ways we can demonstrate the kingdom in our lives, stop to look up the references to any points that are not clear to you or that you feel you really need to hear. You may also want to highlight key points.

Beginning on the negative side, we need to realize do much harm when we do not practice what we preach. Years ago I read an article about the "Bretharians." They were a strange religious group in California who believed that a person doesn't really need food or drink to survive. All they need, so they said, is the regular intake of fresh "breaths" of air. It is inconceivable to me that such a group could attract a following, but they did. But then the ranks of the Bretharians were rocked by scandal. Their leader was caught sneaking out for junk food at a local convenience store. I haven't seen an update on the numbers, but my guess is that recruiting is way down. People won't cast their lot with those who do not practice what they preach. In Romans 2:17-24, Paul directly confronts the Jews about their inconsistent lifestyles, ending with the climactic phrase, "God's name is

blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." And Jesus said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

On the positive side, many passages show the power of a good example. Let's begin with Jesus. In Matthew 5:13-16 he said "you *are* the salt of the earth" and "you *are* the light of the world." What we *are* matters. If we hope to have the positive influence on those around us that salt and light have, we must be authentic. This seems to refer specifically to having the qualities of life mentioned in the immediately preceding beatitudes (vv. 3-12). If we have that kind of life, it will lead us to do good deeds that will point others to God (v. 16). Verse 16 can also be translated, "Let your light shine before others *in such a manner*" that they may see you're your good deeds and glorify God. The *manner* in which we "shine our light" matters.

Around 10:00 o'clock one evening many years ago, just after my wife and I arrived at home, we heard a knock at our front door. We had turned off the porch light, but when we opened the door we saw an old man holding a flashlight against his chest, pointing it upward toward his face. The shadowy, distorted face of an aged man standing on your porch at night is disturbing, to say the least. It turned out to be our neighbor. Ironically, he told us he was shining the flashlight on his face so he wouldn't scare us! He didn't realize it had the opposite effect. When Christians shine the light on themselves by calling attention to their own good deeds, we are not handling the light in the right manner. Outsiders may be more repulsed by this than afraid, but in either case they are not likely to turn toward toward God.

The letters often discuss the importance of our example in supporting our message. In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul is defending the authenticity of his ministry to the Christians there. He tells them that he and his helpers didn't use flattery or greed but instead cared for them like a nursing mother cares for her children. They shared the gospel but also their very lives. They worked hard at regular jobs so as not to be a financial burden on the Thessalonians. They lived holy, righteous, and blameless lives. They encouraged, comforted, and urged the Thessalonians to live lives worthy of God, just as a father does his children (vv. 5-12). All this showed that he was genuine and teaches us the importance of living authentic lives.

In Titus 2 Paul addresses five different groups of people and urges each to live right. He mentions specific behaviors like avoiding slander and addiction to alcohol, and instead living in self-control, love, kindness, and purity (vv. 1-10). But he also provides reasons for living these ways. It is "so that no one will malign the word of God" (v. 5). It is "so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (v. 8). It is "so that in every way they will make the teaching about God

our Savior attractive" (v. 10). Living well has a powerful effect on how people view the Christian message.

Similarly, Peter urges all believers to, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12). Then he, too, addresses some various groups, urging them to be submissive, pure, reverent, and to have inner qualities of beauty that are of great worth in God's sight (2:13-3:12). One reason for these behaviors is so that unbelievers can be "won over without words" by the behavior, purity, and reverence of our lives (3:1-2). Later, when he urges all Christians to be ready to explain the reason for the hope they have, it adds that they need to do so gently, respectfully, and out of a clear conscience, "so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3:15-16). Again, living right bolsters the message.

In Colossians 4 Scripture directly urges us to "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders" (v. 5). It also says we should let our speech or conversation always be full of grace (v. 6). You have no doubt seen how little grace there is in people's speech and online posts today. Similarly, Paul urges the Philippians not to grumble or argue so that they would be pure in a warped and crooked generation and "shine among them like stars in the sky" (2:14-16). Currently, gracious speech is an especially good way of demonstrating the right way of life under God's kingship.

Another key area in which we need to illustrate the truth of the message we proclaim is in our relationships with the church. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). We agree with this easily enough, but we don't act like it. We often act like Jesus said that everyone will know we are disciples if we criticize each other, complain about each other, or prove to each other that we are right about everything. This is not the way of Christ.

Similarly, Jesus prayed that we would be brought to complete unity. One of God's primary purposes in sending Christ was to create "one new humanity" out of groups as diverse as Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-16). He wants to "bring unity to all things in heaven on earth under Christ" (1:10). Through such a church as this, he makes known his great wisdom (3:10). If we are unified, "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them" (John 17:20-23).

Because of this, we are urged to live in one accord, be like-minded and preserve the unity of the Spirit (Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:1-4). I don't think this means we are

expected to agree on every little matter, because Scripture talks about us accepting each other in spite of different beliefs on some smaller things (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8-10). Rather, I believe the like-mindedness and “speaking the same thing” that is referred to is our unified confession that we follow Jesus, instead of any human being or human way, and that we share the selfless mind of Christ. Churches are struggling mightily with unity right now, perhaps because we are so heavily influenced by our self-centered, bickering society. It is urgent that we take seriously what Scripture tells us about unity. The unbelieving world is watching to see if we really do have a better way of bringing people together as one.

We can't go into the details here of how we can bring about unity. But if you feel a need to give some attention to God's way of helping people get along, here are some matters you can read and pray about. Unity comes by:

- Developing the humility appropriate to the cross (1 Corinthians 1-4)
- Having Christlike attitudes (Ephesians 4:2), making every effort (v. 3), and focusing on major matters we all share in common (vv. 4-6)
- Recognizing and utilizing the resources we have in Christ (Philippians 2:1), and allowing those to empower us to deny ourselves and put others ahead of us (vv. 2-4) like Jesus did (vv. 5-11).
- Willingly and lovingly forfeiting our rights for the sake of others (Romans 14).

There is another area to which some Christians have been called to demonstrate the reality of the kingdom. It is the ultimate one, martyrdom. The word martyr in the New Testament means “witness.” It refers to witnessing by blood, and it is the ultimate testimony. If a person will willingly die for something, it indicates that they believe in it strongly. I don't know if any of us will be called on to martyrdom, but I do know the Scripture says a lot more about the necessity of suffering than we like to admit (Acts 14:22; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 1:9). In Scripture, it is not a strange or rare phenomenon. We need to realize we may have to suffer for our faith and know how we can handle it well (1 Peter 2:18-25).

We moved to Philadelphia when we were young to help start a church there. The first person who became a Christian through our work was a man named Steve. One day he asked, do you know what it was that convinced me to follow Christ? I perked up since I was the one who studied the gospel with him. I just knew he was going to say it was the tremendous insight I had into the Gospel of Mark. But no, that was not it. What convinced him was “how seriously you all took it in your everyday lives.” This is a real-life confirmation of all we have been reading here. Living godly lives testifies powerfully to the truth and reality of the kingdom of God.

## Closing Thoughts

Sometimes the good deeds we do will lead to opportunities to speak the message. That's why I wanted to talk about **R**eflecting the Kingdom before **A**nnouncing the Kingdom. The Colossians 4 passage tells us to be wise in the way we act toward outsiders, and the very next phrase is "make the most of every opportunity" (v. 5). Since he says "every" opportunity, it seems to refer to various kinds of opportunities, including opportunities to speak (cf. v. 6). Reflecting can lead to Announcing.

We see this multiple times in Acts. When Peter healed a man who was lame, the people who saw it were astonished and came running to Peter and John (3:1-11). Peter made the most of the opportunity and proclaimed the good news (vv. 12-26). This bothered the Jewish authorities and so they arrested Peter and John. Later, when they questioned them about the healing, Peter again took advantage of the opportunity proclaimed the message (4:1-12; cf. Matthew 10:16-20). Reflecting the Kingdom by healing a lame man led to multiple opportunities to Announce the kingdom.

In Acts 2, it was not a human good deed that gave Peter an opportunity to speak but a powerful act of God, namely, the coming of the Spirit (vv. 1-4). This dramatic act of God led to a crowd gathering and asking questions. Peter stood up and explained to them what was going on. But just as he did in the two examples above, he did not stop with a simple explanation of the specific event that had taken place. Rather he "made the most of every opportunity" by explaining the larger picture of what God had done and was doing through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Good deeds (our own or others) are not adequately explained by the simple fact that God wants us to be good. Their ultimate explanation is the death, resurrection, and kingship of Jesus. If we realize and remember this, we will find more opportunities to announce the good news of God's Kingdom.

We need to be careful, however, not to attach strings to our good deeds. For them to be authentic, they must be unconditional. Freely we have received, freely we give. When Jesus healed the ten lepers only one of them, a Samaritan, came back to thank him. Jesus' response is instructive. "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18). Jesus did his good deeds with high hopes that people would recognize and appreciate God's work, but he did not make that a condition. I'm pretty sure he didn't zap the nine with leprosy again. Like him, we do our good deeds with high hopes that people will see the reality and effect of the kingdom of God in us. But we do them with unconditional love.

1. Take a few minutes to think through your attitudes, thoughts, feelings, speech, behavior, relationships, and deeds. In which area do you most need to Reflect the kingdom more accurately? How will improvement occur?
  
2. What are some possible opportunities you might receive to Reflect the truth and reality of God's kingdom ...
  - a. With your neighbors
  
  - b. With people at school or work
  
  - c. With people in clubs or groups you are part of
  
  - d. When you are out and about at stores or malls or restaurants

Practical Application (#1). Add to your prayer sheet and prayers a request that God will give you opportunities to reflect his kingdom to others and that you will be "watchful" and alert to see them (Colossians 4:2-6).

Practical Application (#2). Add "Reflect the truth and reality of God's kingdom" to your briefing anytime you are about to venture out of your house. Remember, whatever your other business may be, ultimately you are going out to SHARE God's kingdom.

Practical Application (#3). Jot down a few reflections on any opportunity you get to Reflect the Kingdom, whether large or small.