



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network Spiritual Guidelines on Kingdom (3)

Foundational 'Kingdom' Thinking

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October 2017

Last month we challenged you to 'Think Kingdom' rather than be stuck only in the mould of the institutional church! We spoke of the need to change our 'mindsets' and the way we think: so that we see things as the Father sees them: in Kingdom concepts rather than in the ways of the world. This should be the call to all believers especially as they read the parables of Jesus and try to understand their deeper meaning. Jesus always started where people were - if he was in the countryside he used farming illustrations. This same principle applies today when we read the parables of Jesus in the context in which they were given. His teaching comes alive for us in a new way and it opens up a new vision so that all can obtain a fuller understanding of the Kingdom of God.

The challenge last time was to accept the thinking that even lowly fishermen could become fishers of men; that believers were to be 'salt and light' to bring about change and new structures are needed to contain this new thinking. As we move on in each session we will be encouraging you to see how the teaching of Jesus applies to you in your situation today and to become involved in sharing these and further insights with others - and with us too. We look forward to hearing from you.

What Kind of Foundations?

We have already discussed some of the basic principles of this 'Kingdom' way of thinking: and this week we want to look at the foundations Jesus laid for us to build on - and build wisely. The obvious parable that comes to mind is that of the two house builders who built on different foundations. This is well loved by children everywhere, and both Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49 tell it as the climax of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Everyone easily picks up the contrast between *'the wise man who built his house on the rock'* and *'the foolish man who built his house on sand'* and they can apply it successfully to everyday living - particularly in the building industry.

But the full parable reads *'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete'* (Luke 6:46-49).

For believers, in many ways, the start of the parable is more interesting than the parable itself. Jesus, rather unusually, puts his expected interpretation first before he tells the story - in fact he sounds slightly impatient that the people do not immediately pick up what he means. Most of those who were listening to him would have been Jews, and his own followers, who considered themselves to have some spiritual understanding, but they were content to accept a simple explanation rather than delving more deeply.

Secrets of the Kingdom

When reading parables we need to recognise that the story is only used as an illustration of the need for much deeper thinking by those who *'have the ears to hear'* (Mark 4.9). Jesus goes on to remind the disciples that *'The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you'* (Mark 4.11) and then goes on to tell them that everything is said in parables *'to those who are on the outside'*. This is not new teaching but had been given to the Hebrew people at the time of the giving of the Law. *'The secret things belong*

to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law' (Deut 29.29). The believers have been entrusted with these secrets (1 Cor 4.1).

Action Follows

James also picks up on the need that having understood the secret, action should follow. *'Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word and does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does'* (James 1.22). And of course one of the immediate actions needs to be repentance but we also need to understand more deeply what the writer of Hebrews says *'let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death.....And God permitting we will do so'* (Heb 6:1-3).

Laying the Right Foundations

So we must understand that this is not really about the physical building of houses with good planning and building regulations so that we will be able to withstand natural events, even hurricanes and storms, but it is all about building our own lives on the right spiritual foundations - and anchoring our lives to the bedrock of the faith so that we too can live victoriously.

We may be able to look at other building analogies later but the challenge of this particular parable is that we find our security in living our lives by listening to, understanding, and obeying Jesus and his teaching. If we build upon the rock we will be unshaken by adverse circumstances. We are to dig down deep into the truth of God and anchor ourselves to the foundation stone of our faith *'For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ'* (1 Cor 3:11).

Peter's recognition of Jesus as *'the Christ, the Son of the living God'* at the springs of the River Jordan (Caesarea Philippi) where Jesus taught them about the springs of living water (Matt 16.16; Mark 8.29; Luke 9.20) is the great cornerstone of the Gospel and it is the life and teaching of Jesus on which we build our lives if we are to weather successfully all the storms of life.

The Corner Stone

The Bible is full of references to foundation stones - whether they are God laying the foundations of the world, man laying foundations for the building of cities, the Temple or the altars - but it seems to be only when we come to the New Testament that we find more explicit references to the building of our characters and lives on the right foundations, including the cornerstone.

In Isaiah we read that the Sovereign Lord foretold *'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; and the one who trusts will never be dismayed'* (28.16). Paul also tells us in Ephesians that we are to become *'fellow citizens with God's people and members of Christ's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone'* (Eph 2.20).

Building on the Foundations laid by Others

Paul's ambition was to *'to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation'* (Rom 15:20). This is not possible for us all although there will always be those who are not yet believers and Paul reminds us that if we do build on the foundations of others *'each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ'* (1 Cor 3:11). We can, of course, all learn and benefit from each other and from previous generations (just as the 'tells' in Israel remind us of new cities being rebuilt on lost cities). But everyone needs to affirm their faith for themselves - God does not have any grandchildren - we are all his children and need to have that direct relationship with our Father.

One Final Word

Believers are laying foundations, not only for this life, but for the coming age *'so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life'* (1 Tim 6:19) and also for the life hereafter *'the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God'* (Heb 11:10).

Further comments on Kingdom thinking from readers, whether on this aspect or others, are always welcome.

*This paper comes to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in October 2017
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