The Kingdom Focused Church (Part 1):
Build Your Kingdom Here
Psalm 127:1msg, Matthew 6:31-33, Psalm 103:19

INTRODUCTION (ME, WE, & THE STRUGGLE)

Let's read Matthew 6:31-33:
When I arrived at my second full-time ministry position the church was already in the process of building a new building. The small church building they were meeting in each Sunday was packed to the brim and the church had easily out grown their small facility. I was excited at the prospect of being a part of a thriving and growing ministry. My excitement began to fade quickly though, as I started to see that the ministry model that had fueled the church's growth was all based upon attracting people to a building where they could be impressed with a nice production on Sunday mornings, and have top of the line programs for their children on Wednesday nights. You say... well what's wrong with that? Well, every focus was on achieving the goal of more people at the production and in the programs. We preached seeker friendly messages that focused on the latest trends of making your marriage better, and your bank account fuller. We drew in students and kids with large giveaways and basically bribed them with cash to attend church. Make it more fun, more flashy, and more full! Every week in staff meeting I was judged, not based on how well I was mentoring or discipling, but on how many people I could get there! It was clear that I was not here to build God's kingdom, I was here to build the Pastor's kingdom and bring him a measure of fame and achievement. I was a disposable means to an end and if I didn't produce then I would be replaced.

There are a lot of churches like that one, and hopefully God will make the rules by which they were governed. Israel was a theocracy. The Lord himself a people, he chose Israel, and within that “kingdom” although they could also be referring to the nation of Israel. When God established for his sovereignty to govern... and that would be everything. The kingdom of God is the Universal reign of God over all creation. When you look through the Bible you will see that there are various usages of “kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven”. The kingdom of God could be referring to the Rule and Reign of God in the People of God. When you look through the Bible you will see that there are various usages of “kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven”. The kingdom of God could be referring to the Universal reign of God over all creation. Psalm 103:19 states that his kingdom rules over all. In this sense, God's Kingdom is whatever he sovereignly governs... and that would be everything. The kingdom of God could also be referring to the nation of Israel. When God established for himself a people, he chose Israel, and within that “kingdom” although they would later have kings... it was established that God was their king and he made the rules by which they were governed. Israel was a theocracy. The kingdom of God could also be and is most commonly referred to as the...
coming earthly reign of Christ at his return. Some refer to this as the millennial reign.

These are good and true.... But for the New Testament Church, for us, the kingdom of God is best seen as the present rule of Christ in the lives of his people. Gene Mims defines the Kingdom of God as “the reign of God in the lives of His people, enabling them to serve Him wholeheartedly and to live the kind of life Jesus died to give us.” In the New Testament Jesus refers to the fellowship of Christians as the “church” only 2 times, but uses the term “kingdom” 90 times. Why? Because he wanted to remind us that being a part of the church means that you are not in charge of that church... God is. God is king.

In America we may find it hard to grasp this concept of a “kingdom.” We’ve never had a king. Great Britain gets it. For thousands of years England was ruled by a Monarch who had final say and ruled with total autonomy. If the king wanted it, he got it. Israel also understood kingdom, but more so in the sense of God as king rather than some cruel dictator. Although Israel failed time and time again to be faithful to God as king, they would never have said that God wasn’t in control. The bottom line is this... there is a king... God, and we are his loyal subjects. Gene Mims further expands upon this understanding of living in the Kingdom of God. (TKFC pg.44)

Another thing to note is that the kingdom was the main focus of Jesus’ earthly life, teaching, preaching, and ministry. He was consumed with it. Look with me just at a couple of passages in Matthew. In Matthew 3:2, and 4:17 Jesus is seen preaching “repent, the kingdom is at hand.” In Matthew 4:23, and 9:35 we see Jesus healing and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. In 5:3 he says, “blessed are poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom.” In 5:20 he preaches to his disciples that “unless your righteousness exceeds the pharisees you will not enter the kingdom.” And... in 13:11 Jesus tells us, his followers, “to you it has been given the secrets of the kingdom, but them it has not.” Christ was clearly focused on the kingdom of God. So... If the kingdom was the focus of Christ's ministry, is there any doubt that it should be the focus of our ministry?

In a sense being in the kingdom is being a Christian, it is gaining salvation. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the salvation of Christ.” “unless your righteousness exceeds the pharisees you will not be saved.” “to you it has been given the secrets of the salvation of Christs, but to them it has not.” But, it goes further – it tells you what salvation looks like as well. Salvation is the state by which we have given rule and reign to Christ in our lives... in it's simplest terms... you have made Jesus King of your life... you have made him your Lord! So... Together, all believers, having Jesus as their king... are a part of the kingdom of God! So, the question that is most prevalent at this point is this... Have you submitted yourself to the rule and reign of Christ in your life?

So, to build God’s kingdom, means simply to allow him to rule and reign in our lives as the church. But remember, we are merely the hammer, God must do the work. Building the kingdom of God, simply means that we are counting on Jesus to build his church. We can't save people, but we can depend on Christ with all that we have, to save people, bring them into his kingdom, and build his church. The problem happens when we get in the way... when we try to take control... when we try to rule. Remember... Unless the Lord Builds His Church, We're just building shacks.

So now we know what the Kingdom of God is... but what does it do? Well... The Kingdom Focused Church Has One Agenda; God's! Matthew 6:31-33 tells us to seek his kingdom first, rather than all the secondary things... important things, but still secondary. The focus must be his kingdom. Rather than seeking his rule and reign in the lives of all mankind... we find ourselves seeking other things first. We could be seeking numbers... getting our building full and having a person in every seat. We could be seeking money... making sure there is enough in the bank to keep us afloat. We could be seeking programs... making sure that we are attractive to people. We could be seeking approval... making sure that we don't offend anyone with our message. We could be seeking comfort... making sure that no one feels challenged. We could be seeking our own preferences... making sure that everyone gets what they want. But if we are seeking those things, we are most definitely not focused on his kingdom first. If we are seeking his kingdom first, then we are to seek his agenda; his rule in our lives and his rule in other's lives first! This is true... The Great Commission is God's Agenda... so it is our Agenda if we are not focused on seeing people evangelized and discipled then we have lost our focus. We are in danger of losing our focus when we hear phrases like this... “I don't like the music... why can't we just sing what we used to sing” – the music style is not the focus!!!! “the pastor doesn't wear a suit... I just don't think thats right” - the dress style is not the focus!!!! “they can't sell the building... that's my church”... the church is not a building and the building is not our focus!!! "we've done outreach to those people before and none of them attended our church" - we don't reach out to people so they attend church we reach out so someday they may come to know Christ... church attendance is not our focus "If you don't keep the big givers happy they will leave and we will be broke" - true... but money is not our focus "My needs aren't being met.. I'm not being fed" - I'm trying my best to love you and feed you... but your needs are not the focus “If we could just get out to the property we'd be fine" - hey, I think that God is moving us there in his timing... - but the property is not our focus.

You see God has called us to be hammers... or called our church to
be a hammer. But many are tempted to be paintbrushes. Many in this world want the church to be a paintbrush. You see hammers accomplish the purpose of driving home the focus. Paintbrushes are merely there for cosmetic purposes. A hammer can frame a home that you can live in... a paint brush makes it a little more appealing and comfortable. A hammer is necessary...a paintbrush isn't. And its not that paintbrushes don't help, and that a little paint can help accomplish great things... but it can't be the focus. Do you see what I'm saying. We need paintbrushes in the church... but not at the expense of hammers. We need to be careful to never allow the method become the focus. When it comes to the Kingdom, the why and the what are more important than the how!

Application (Resolution, You)

So what does it look like to have a Kingdom Focused church? Well at Third Avenue Church, we believe a kingdom focus is this... "depending on Christ we will reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely transformed." But in general... for all churches... focusing on the kingdom is simple.

First, there are primary focuses... and then secondary focuses. Let's start with the three primary focuses; evangelism, discipleship, and worship. In evangelism we are showing the rule & reign of christ in the world to those who don't currently know him. We must bring those outside of the kingdom into the kingdom. Here at Third Avenue we believe this is best done through relational outreach. This means that we will begin relationships with those in our everyday circles for the express purpose of sharing the Gospel with them. But we must be careful to not use this method as an excuse to not share the Gospel when given the opportunity. We could just sit on our hands waiting for relationships to develop, while God is giving you opportunities to give the Gospel message. We mustn't be more focused on how to share the Gospel then simply sharing it.

Really quick... look with me at a story I had never heard before about Kublai Kahn and Marco Polo. (TKFC pg.78)

So first we are called to evangelize, but then we are called to disciple. Discipleship is the act of training believers to obey the rule and reign of Christ in their lives. Discipleship means complete transformation and includes the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification but also the work of the church to be accountable and train immature believers. At Third Avenue we call this intentional discipleship and we aim to do this through small group community and mentoring relationships.

Then of course we are called to Worship. We are called to celebrate the rule and reign of Christ all of the time. We celebrate his rule and reign by being dependent on him in all things. Therefore our worship means we love the word, we love prayer, and we live a lifestyle of joyful obedience.

These of course lead us to our secondary focuses. These are by-products of the primary focuses. They are not possible without the primary focus... and come naturally from a church that seeks to evangelize, disciple, and worship. There are two. Fellowship and Ministry. Fellowship is the unity we share as subjects under the rule & reign of Christ. This is the unity of the body because their focus isn't on preferences but is on the primary focuses of worship, evangelism, and discipleship. Ministry is our desire to serve others because our King is gracious to us and calls us to act upon our love for humanity. We serve others and love people, because we love God... we seek to reach them in ministry for the purpose of seeing them come to know Christ! All of this together is what it means to be a hammer in the hand of God. *Is our church trusting in his agenda, obeying his commission, and avoiding the distractions of non-essential issues? Unless the Lord Builds His church, we're just building shacks*

Conclusion (Resolution, We)

In John 14:31 we see that Jesus obeyed the rule and reign of his father. Jesus is our example... he has showed us what extreme obedience to the rule of God looks like in that he submitted himself to death on the cross. If Christ can submit to God... and he is God... how much more can we submit ourselves and our church to his rule? We allow Christ to build his kingdom through us and reign in us for his glory.

Let me close with this... When the Roman Empire was in its heyday, it was a huge kingdom that kept getting bigger. The Caesars continually sent out their armies to take new territory. When a new territory came under Roman control, the Romans would use force to try to make that new territory as much like Rome as possible. They would build Roman temples and institute the Roman religion, which involved the worship of Caesar. They would institute Roman education, arts, and culture. They built Roman baths. They would do everything they could do to make the new territory just like Rome. Why? They did it so that if the Caesar ever came there, he would feel right at home because the territory was just like his own home. That is what the Kingdom of God is. The Kingdom of God is when everything in Heaven is instituted on the earth, so that God's government, teaching, worship, glory, and power are manifested here on earth, and the earth looks just like Heaven. After all, the King is coming back here one day. When He does, we want Him to feel right at home... just as if He were still in Heaven. That's why Jesus prayed, in what we often refer to as the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom: Come! Thy will: be done on earth as it is in Heaven!"
Hammer or Paintbrush – both are important but one is more important – let's be hammers, let's allow our church to be a hammer; a tool in God's hand with one job, one agenda, one focus.... reaching our world with the Gospel! Let us be a kingdom focused church. **We are a church focused on the Agenda of God, led by the Spirit of God, to build the Kingdom of God!**