



*The Podcast Focused on
Revitalizing Conventional Christianity
—One Person at a Time*

Inside Jimbo's Head™

Series 1, Cultural Christianity Versus Kingdom
Christianity

Episode 10, What Is Kingdom Christianity? Part
IV, The Biblical Perspective Continued

The following is a transcript of Inside Jimbo's Head from Season 1, Episode 2 of the Hello, Jimbo Speaking™ podcast first aired February 18, 2020.

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Introduction

Alright, my friends. Let's open up Jimbo's head one more time.

Sound Effects: Opening Jimbo's Head

Sorry about that. But as you know, my head is old and squeaky, full of bats, and all types of scary things. Ok, ok, let's try to get serious.

The first thing that popped out of my head today had to do with both this week's "Story From the Frontlines of Ministry" and the comedy skit by Frontline Productions. Bet you didn't expect that, huh?

One thing I have learned from ministering to disconnected higher risk youth is the whole idea of patience. Last week I shared with you how a man who was my pastor for many years told me, "We are not called to be successful but obedient." By the way, that being "successful" part, well, that's all about cultural Christianity. While I have learned to be patient with many things in my life, including the kids I minister to, the one place patience seems to alluded me is in the realm of the church.

When it comes to seeing the church move from a cultural Christianity to a kingdom style of faith

and practice, I get very impatient. I have to admit one thing. The reason I am so impatient for this change to take place is somewhat selfish. I cannot become all Father has called me to be without being a part of a community of kingdom-minded disciples. By the way, neither can you. That may sound strange to many because we live in such an individualistic culture, but the statement stands as true from a Biblical perspective none the less. You see where we find individualism in the modern church . . . Well, that is the seepage of the American culture into the church.

Now, when I listen to the Story From the Frontlines of Ministry we heard today, Father always speaks some special words into my inner person. "If you love the young people you minister too with my kind of love and patience, why can't you have the same kind of love and patience with my people?" Ever since He first spoke that into my heart many years ago, I always fall down in repentance.

The hardest thing for many people in America, who want to be disciples of Jesus, to learn is that we can't have our cake and eat it too. Ok, I know that is a trite old idiom, but it is true. We cannot live by the standards of the kingdom culture and by the standards of the American culture at the same time. Often we want Father to be like the dad from the Frontline Productions' comedy skit who gave everything to his child that she asked him to give her. That doesn't work in a human family, and it definitely doesn't work in Father's household.

So what do I do when I lose patience with American Christians putting American cultural standards above kingdom cultural standards? Well, I use to pull out my hair, but I have none anymore. Some times I cry and stamp my feet—well, not really. Here is what I have learned over many years of impatience. I have learned to take solace in the teachings, commands, and example of Jesus while knowing that His Word will not return to Him void. I believe it will happen, and that someday I will be a part of such a community of disciples.

So let's turn to that word as we continue to answer the question, "What is kingdom Christianity."

Sound Effects: Introductory Music for Inside Jimbo's Head

Last Words on the Iranian Church

Ok, my friends, let's get inside Jimbo's head and continue answering that question, "What is kingdom Christianity?" from a Biblical perspective. But first, I want to add one last thought on the Iranian example of kingdom Christianity. Last week we finished up looking at the exciting example of kingdom Christianity going on in Iran. I hope you had a chance to watch the documentary film, "Sheep Among the Wolves, Volume II. It has given me great hope that we can live together in kingdom Christianity here in America.

Now, I have had some people say that this can only happen in Eastern culture. They always point out that their culture is based on community, and the church is under extreme persecution. There was a time when I used to believe this same thing. However, that would mean I would have to believe many issues of the Bible are only culturally relevant, and I cannot buy into that mistaken idea. Recently, I discovered that Francis Chan has been allowing Father to move him

from a cultural Christianity perspective to a kingdom perspective for several years now. He is doing a new work in the San Francisco area and shares his thought on the basic premises of this kingdom Christianity ministry in his new book, "Letters to the Church." Here is what he says about what he has discovered to be a more excellent way and if it is possible in America.

For years I honestly didn't have faith that it was even possible for a church to possess the love and unity I saw in Scripture. People kept telling me this couldn't happen in America. I would see examples of this in places like China, but church leaders would tell me it worked there only because people already lived communally and because they were experiencing persecution that forced them to bond. There was always a part of me that doubted those voices, but it was only a few years ago that I mustered up the courage to try. It was harder than I expected, but it's also been more rewarding than I could have dreamed. This can happen wherever you are too. Holy Spirit love and unity are not confined to persecuted countries.¹

I highly recommend this book if you are trying to move in these directions in your life. I also especially recommend it if you are trying to move in these directions as a group of Disciples who follow Jesus. I am convinced that only as a community of disciples of Jesus living in communion with the persons of the Trinity and each other, will we ever reach this destiny, which Father predestinated us to experience.

Continuing to Look at the Terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven

Ok, now let's get down with the Word. Last week I shared with you why we need to realize that the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" mean the exact same thing. They both point to the kingdom that was to be established by the Messiah. Jesus, as the Messiah, established that kingdom. We will see that next week. However, He established a spiritual kingdom rather than the physical kingdom, which was expected by the Jewish people because of a wrong interpretation of the scriptures by their leaders. For you theological wonks, they had their eschatology all messed up. Sound familiar? Ok, don't answer that. We don't need to get into that kettle of fish today. Save it for next week.

Now there are three more things I need to point out about the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven," including one comment on the concept of a spiritual kingdom.

1. Let's deal with that last area first. One major problem we have in the West is that when we hear the term "spiritual," we think that thing is not real. That may not be true for all, but the following is true for most. We don't think things spiritual are as real as things physical. Remember another old idiom, "He is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good?" If that is true, Jesus really blew it. There is one reason for this attitude among most people in the West, whether or not they want to believe that this represents their attitude toward the spiritual versus physical. Here's that reason. We have a mindset based on a rationalistic intellectualism. This mindset denies the mystical as either not real, or in the case of many Christians, they see such things as deceiving and coming from the enemy. I will talk much more about this in the next series, which I will entitle, "Communing with the Trinity." Oh,

here's a thought. You can always pick up my two-volume book by the same title in which I go extensively into this subject.

2. The next two points I want to make about the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are two more proofs that they refer to the same thing. In Matthew chapter nineteen verses twenty-three and twenty-four, you will read the following:

And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

3. You will remember this passage as Jesus' response to His disciples after His encounter with the rich young ruler. Here Matthew shows Jesus using the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" interchangeably.
4. The third reason I want to give for why these two terms are interchangeable goes along with the first one I shared last week. The usage of these terms is almost always based on the audience the specific Gospel writer was addressing. I gave you a specific proof of that last week. But this week, I want to give you one more way of seeing this Biblical reality. If we look at parallel passages found within the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we see the same thing—"kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are interchangeable terms. Now on a podcast, this can become very confusing. However, if you pick up either my *Communing with the Trinity* book or *The Radical Jesus Prayer* book, you will discover I have laid out an easy to read chart comparing all nine times we find these terms used interchangeably between the three synoptic gospels. Here I will just give you a few examples.

The first comes from the passage we have already used. In Matthew's gospel, he has Jesus using the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom heaven" interchangeably. Yet in Luke's gospel account, in chapter eighteen, verses twenty-four and twenty-five, which deals with the same incident, we see that Luke has Jesus only using the term "kingdom of God" in both phrases. Matthew used the "kingdom of heaven" in the first phrase and then the "kingdom of God" in the next.

The second and last example I will share with you in this podcast can be found by comparing Matthew chapter nineteen verse fourteen with both Luke chapter eighteen, verse sixteen, and Mark chapter ten, verse fourteen.

- Matthew quotes Jesus using the "kingdom of heaven" terminology when He said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."
- Luke quotes Jesus in the same incident as saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."
- Finally, Mark quotes Jesus saying this, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

You will remember that Matthew's gospel is the only one focused on the Jews, while Luke and Mark were focused on a Gentile audience. To the Jews, the term "kingdom of heaven" is the term which was used, for the most part, in the rabbinical writings for the kingdom that would be established when Messiah came. However, the Gentiles would not have this information and would be confused. If Mark and Luke used the same terminology as Mathew, they would think Jesus was talking about heaven instead of the spiritual kingdom He established in His first appearance.

Once again, the reason we, in the West, get confused is that we are Gentiles. Of course, the easy believism gospel focused on going to heaven, and the "I'll fly away mentality" sure don't help matters.

Here is the bottom line. The terms "kingdom of heaven," "kingdom of God," and "kingdom" speak of the same thing. Each writer exchanged one for the other, depending on the audience. The only exception is when the term "kingdom" without God or Heaven attached to it is used about the kingdom of Satan or the kingdoms established by humankind. Here is the best way to understand these things. The kingdom is God's kingdom, it is a spiritual, not a physical kingdom, and it has the hallmarks of heaven.

What is the Gospel?

So here is a question for you. What is the gospel? I once had a pastor from a very strong Evangelical denomination ask me that question. In fact, his is the same denomination in which I hold my ordination. As I began to explain the gospel to him, he stopped me mid-sentence. "No! You are telling me what the Gospel is all about. Here is what the gospel is. It is ten words. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave." I always find it interesting how pastors trained mainly in theology can split such hairs.

However, with that said, we often get confused concerning the gospel. The pastor who tried to stump me had the facts down right. Plain. Simple. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. However, most of us think the gospel is all about going to heaven, especially when that is the basic information used in presenting the gospel. Thus the problem with easy believism and its ugly child, the "I'll fly away mentality," is born.

Now don't get me wrong. Yes, there is a heaven, and if we are in Christ, we go to heaven when we pass from this world. But despite the focus of the church for generations, especially the Evangelical church and the way it presents the gospel, that is not the Biblical emphasis of the gospel.

There are three terms used referring to the term gospel. There is the "gospel of God," the "gospel of Jesus Christ," and the "gospel of the kingdom." The Gospel was instituted by God, carried out by Jesus, and brings us into the kingdom. However, in the scriptures, the term "kingdom" is associated more than any other designation when they talk about the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus, His disciples before His resurrection, and His disciples after the resurrection.

Once again, a very long list of scriptures is laid out in either of my two books I mentioned earlier. However, I would like to give you a taste of what I am referring too concerning the ministry of the church, the gospel, and the kingdom of God.

Concerning the ministry of John the Baptist, we read his message summarized in Matthew chapter three, verses one and two like this: "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Concerning the summary of the ministry of Jesus before His death and resurrection, we find many passages. Here are but a few.

- In Luke chapter eight, verse one, we read: "Soon afterward, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him."
- Luke also tells us of these words from Jesus in Chapter four, verses forty-two through forty-four. "When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place, and the crowds were searching for Him and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. But He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose. So He kept on preaching in the synagogues in Judea.'"
- Matthew summarized the ministry of Jesus with this three thousand foot view: "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"
- Mark gave a very interesting overview of Jesus' ministry in chapter one, verses fourteen and fifteen. "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Here we see that Mark called the Gospel preached by Jesus the "gospel of God." However, he immediately defines the gospel of God in the same way Matthew and Luke do in giving us an overview of Jesus' preaching and teaching. "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
- Thus all three synoptic Gospels agree on the main points of Jesus' preaching: the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God is at hand, repentance, and active faith in the Gospel. Thus we see from no higher authority than Jesus that the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the gospel of God all have one main focus, the kingdom of God.
- When Jesus sent his disciples out from Him to minister before His death and resurrection, we read this summary of His command to them in Matthew 10:7. "And as you go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of God/heaven and its availability was the message they were given to preach.
- Even in Jesus' post-resurrection ministry on earth, Luke lets us know the key emphasis of His message He gave to those He was sending into the world as His representatives. We find this account in Luke's book of Acts, chapter one, verses one through three. "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. After His suffering, He presented Himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the

kingdom of God.”

So, this was the message of Jesus. But what about those who were chosen by Him and were so close to Him.

- In Matthew chapter twenty-four, verse fourteen, Matthew summarizes the key instructions given by Jesus to the disciples just before His ascension. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come”
- So did they follow through with this command? Well, we know at least one did. In Acts, chapter eight, verse twelve, we read the following. “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, men and women alike.
- We also see numerous examples of how the focus of Paul’s preaching and teaching was the kingdom of God throughout the book of Acts. Here is but one example. The very last thing we see of the apostle Paul is found in Acts chapter twenty-eight, verse twenty-three and verse thirty and thirty-one. Here is how Luke summarized the preaching and teaching of Paul. “When they (Jewish leaders in Rome) had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening, he (Paul) expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

So at this point, if I asked you, “What is the Gospel?”, what would be your answer? Whatever you say about it, I hope somewhere you would say the key elements are the kingdom of God, along with the completed work of Jesus. So if that is true, why do so many never mention the kingdom of God when presenting the Gospel? That question Well, it is pointed at you, my Evangelical friends. By the way, today, many never even talk about repentance. So, ever wonder where easy believism and the “I’ll fly away mentality” come from?

What is the Kingdom of God, and What Significance Does it Play in the Life of a Disciple of Jesus?

So, I think we have time to look at one more Biblical point about the Kingdom of God before our time runs out. What I want to share with you next can best be summarized by the following question. If the kingdom of God is such an intrinsic part of the Gospel, what is it, and how should it affect the life of a Disciple of Jesus? We will spend the rest of this first series of podcasts answer the second part of that question. However, I would like to share with you a list of thirteen points I made to answer that question in my previously mentioned books. I made this list after looking at all the scriptures I had used in the chapter on the kingdom of God. Remember, we did not go over all of them here.

- The kingdom, the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of heaven all refer to the kingdom the Jewish people expected. This was the kingdom prophesied in the Old Covenant that the Messiah would establish.
- While the Jewish people expected a temporal kingdom, both John the Baptist and Jesus ignored that expectation. They focused on a spiritual kingdom. This challenged the Jewish leader's strongest held theological and cultural concepts.
- The cry of the kingdom referred to by both John the Baptist and Jesus is "Repent," not "To Arms." (Matthew 3:1-3; Matthew 4:17)
- The scriptures summarize the preaching and teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples with one term, the kingdom of God. This includes the instructions given by Jesus after His resurrection to those who would represent Him after His ascension. (Acts 1:1-3)
- The kingdom of God carries with it the concept of the acts of God. When God acts, the kingdom is there. (Matthew 9:35; Luke 11:20; Luke 9:2; Luke 10:8-9)
- Where Jesus is, so is the kingdom. (Luke 17:20-21)
- Jesus and John the Baptist used the term "At hand" when referring to the time of the kingdom's coming. (Mark 1:15). By the way, we will talk about the mean of "at hand" in the next episode.
- Preaching, i.e., proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, was a key to the purpose for which Jesus came into the world. (Luke 4:42-44)
- Those who receive the blessings of the kingdom of God are greater [eminent for ability, virtue, authority, power]ⁱⁱ than those who received the blessings of the Old Covenant. There is a distinction in economy between the Old Covenant and the New Kingdom Covenant. According to Jesus, John was among the greatest men born under the Old Covenant until the coming of the kingdom. Now the least in the kingdom are greater than John. (Matthew 11:1-15)
- The kingdom of God is not static but grows like a mustard seed, allowing many to find rest in its branches. (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)
- The kingdom of God expands permeating any culture in which it comes. This is like leaven in the making of bread. (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21)
- The kingdom of God is the Good News. The Good News is the kingdom. (Luke 16:16; Matthew 24:14)
- The Gospel of the kingdom of God takes the place of the Law and the Prophets. Yet the Law will never change. (Luke 16:16-17)

That, my friends, forms quite a picture of the kingdom and how it should affect your life. The establishment of the kingdom of God is what the gospel is all about, and it is right here, right now. (Again we will speak in-depth about that next week). If you are in Christ, you are in a new kingdom. You have been translated out of the old into the new. That which you should proclaim is the gospel of the kingdom of God. You, as a kingdom dweller, are greater than the greatest under the Old Covenant. Where God is so is His kingdom; thus, if the Holy Spirit dwells in you, you are in the kingdom—the kingdom is in you. (By the way, Paul makes it quite clear in Romans

chapter eight that you cannot be “in Christ,” in other words, be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you.) But let me go on. The kingdom must permeate all of your life in the same way yeast does when added to bread. That kingdom should form you into a wide tree where many will find comfort and rest. As the kingdom of God permeates through your life, changing your cultural values, it will likewise permeate into and through others. So still think you can base your life on your native cultural values?

One last thought on what constitutes a kingdom. There is this brother in Christ, Scott McKnight, you should become familiar with. He is an American New Testament scholar, historian of early Christianity, theologian, and author who has written widely on the historical Jesus, early Christianity, and Christian living. He is currently Professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard, Illinois.

Scott defines five essential necessities for a kingdom to exist. He says, “a kingdom implies a king, a rule, a people, a land, and a law.”ⁱⁱⁱ This is true throughout not only history but throughout the Biblical narrative. To expedite things (believe it or not), let me reformat these necessities for a kingdom in a slightly different way. A kingdom must have a *KING* who rules. It also must have *STANDARDS* by which the king rules and a *PEOPLE MAKING UP THE COMMUNITY* of the kingdom over which the king rules.

Now, my friends, in light of all you have learned about the kingdom of God and what constitutes a kingdom, can you see why obedience is such an intricate part of the Gospel?

You see, if all you think is that the Gospel is a message to get you from here to there by way of the cross, you might not understand the importance of obedience. And guess what? Most Christians, especially my Evangelical friends, may talk about obedience, but when push comes to shove, they either become legalists or purveyors of the gospel of easy believism. Theologically they may understand that faith produces obedience, but in practicality . . . Well, let’s just put it this way. To most, obedience is not as important as praying that prayer and really meaning it.

Now you may have a better idea of why I see the move of God in Iran as a living example of kingdom Christianity. I believe, in just two more episodes (ok, don’t hold me to that), we will start a sequence of episodes within our present series, looking at very specific practical ways cultural Christianity has seeped into our churches and lives as American Christians. In that sequence of episodes, we will also see the difference kingdom Christianity makes in each of these areas and how it, and it alone, is the antidote.

Yet, at the heart of this, the question that lies before you today and as we move into that sequence of episodes is this. Are you ready? Please don’t kick the listening device you are using to listen to this podcast across the room. Here we go. Will you be obedient to what you see clearly laid out in the words, actions, and direct commands of Jesus and His early followers, or will you simply make excuses as to why you can’t and try to hold on to that one-way ticket to heaven easy believism makes you think you possess?

I want you to constantly remember your fellow disciples of Jesus in Iran. If they obey Christ, they are subject to rape, torture, and death. Yet, when they read a command of Jesus or one of His early followers, they immediately obey with no questions asked, no second-guessing, nor no concern for the consequences. And get this! They see this attitude lived out in real life as a prerequisite to conversion! Why? The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom of God. Nothing more nor nothing less. In a kingdom, you must obey your king. If not . . . Well, you have watched enough movies to answer that question yourself.

You see, my friends, faith is always active, not passive, and active faith always expresses itself in obedience leading to the good works Father predetermined that we should walk in. Biblically speaking, it is not a choice between faith and obedient works. It is always active faith producing obedient works that glorify Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the only reaction and outcome of the gospel that counts in any way, shape, or form.

Final Words and Jimbo's Closing

Well, my friends that about wraps things up for this week. Next week we will spend the entire episode of "Inside Jimbo's Head," looking at the question, "When will the kingdom of God come?" You really don't want to miss that one!

So until then, please let me remind you to subscribe to this podcast, click the support button, and consider making a small monthly donation to my ministry with hurting youth and young adults. Please also consider leaving us a message with your responses to what you are learning or what you think about this podcast. And be sure to check out the Hello, Jimbo Speaking website at jimbo-speaking.org, where you can get transcripts of each of the "Inside Jimbo's Head" segments as a pdf download as well as many other interesting things.

So, as I do every week, I want to encourage you that as you move through your life, go out there, and by God's grace make it a great week that honors and glorifies Him in the way He tells us to honor and glorify Him.

Settle for nothing less.

See you next week.

ⁱ Chan, Francis. *Letters to the Church* (p. 84). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, *mégas*, Blue Letter Bible:
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3173&t=ESV>

ⁱⁱⁱ McKnight, Scot. *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (p. 76). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.