



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

Inside Jimbo's Head™

Series 1, Cultural Christianity Versus Kingdom
Christianity

Episode 9, What Is Cultural Christianity? Part III,
Finishing the Proof & Delving into the Word

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Introduction:

Well, my friends. When I started talking about the marvelous, miraculous move of Father in Iran, I did not think I would do a third episode. I think I should always remember that when you plan something, plan the amount of time you think it will take . . . And then double it! Ok, I know. In my case, you think I should triple it.

Sometimes it's like that in life. Things rarely go the way we think they will. I guess Amazing Allen figured that one out in today's Frontline Production one-minute "laugh with a punch" comedy skit. The one thing I know for sure is things don't always go as planned with the young men and women I have the opportunity to serve throughout this area. The young man I talked about in the "Story from the Frontlines of Ministry" segment wasn't the first, and he sure was not the last.

Remember what answer I gave to why I keep going? "You were not called to be successful but obedient." Sometimes we forget that in life, even our lives in Christ. Often we think Jesus came to make our lives better or to give us the best possible of lives in this life. When we do that, we may not be like Amazing Alan, who had no safety bar. We may have a safety bar, but it is one made out of cardboard. It may work in some of the turns of life . . . But the looped-d-loops . . .

By now, if you have lived for a few decades, you know that a cardboard safety bar will not hold up under extreme pressure.

You see, my friends, I have another story from the frontlines of ministry that I have not yet even recorded. It is about a young man and his son who thought Jesus was all about taking care of them and meeting what they felt were their needs. That is the typical symptom of easy believism. Today, neither of them is living for Christ. Oh, they think they have faith but . . . These two people are people who I have been tempted to give up on, as well. But then I keep hearing in my inner person, "Obedience not success."

So, let's throw away the cardboard safety bars. Let's look once again at a place where easy believism has never taken root and where the order of the day is a faith that produces obedience. Oh, and a place where giving up is never an option, let alone a desire.

Inside Jimbo's Head Theme Music

Overview of Where We are Going

Welcome back. Let me just see if I can get Jimbo's head open just a little bit today.

Sound effects: Jimbo's head opening-up

I'm so sorry about that, but with all the seriousness of our talks on kingdom Christianity, I just have to laugh every once in a while. Even though that may not make you laugh, I have to stop recording when that sound comes on. Jimbo's head is a place well stuffed but also one scary place to enter. Thanks for hangin' in there with me. I hope, amid a little confusion, you are moving closer to authentic kingdom Christianity.

So today, we will (and I mean we will) finish our look at the Iranian church and get directly into the Scriptures. First, I will highlight the effects that took place in a group of Western missionaries after spending many hours on many occasions with the Iranian church leaders. You will remember, I hope, that these things are seen in the documentary film, *Sheep Among Wolves*, Volume II produced by FAI Studios.

Amid that review, I will also do a quick recap of the key aspects of this move of God that exemplify kingdom Christianity.

Then, sound the trumpet . . .

Sound Effect: Trumpet Fanfare

We will move into a Biblical study of the kingdom God. We must always remember how, no matter what we see happening in the world, only a Biblical view can lead us into the truth of kingdom Christianity. I can't wait to get to that. It will be a whole barrel full of fun . . .

Sound Effect: Monkey Sounds

Ok, maybe it won't be a barrel full of monkeys. But hopefully, you will enjoy it, and this study will bring deep life changes into both your life and mine. Oh, and yes. I am done with the sound effects . . . Let's get serious!

General Summarization of the Iranian Effects on the Western Missionaries.

So let's try to summarize how these western missionaries have responded to the Iranian miracle. As I do this, I will review what we learned in both of the last two episodes. This will be topped off with a major emphasis on what the Iranians call Discipleship Making Movements.

Have you listened to the last two episodes of "Inside Jimbo's Head?" If not, I strongly suggest you go back and listen to episodes seven and eight before you continue in this episode. Even if you have, you may want to review them before moving on. This is important because, for the sake of time, I will not quote many of the things said by both the Iranian leaders and the missionaries so transformed by spending time with them.

But Please, Please, Please remember that you cannot look at this as more information to shove into your intellect to spew out on others. You must make a commitment to Father, that as He shows you these realities, you are ready to act upon them no matter what the cost or consequences. You don't want to be stuck with a cardboard safety bar, do you?

None the less, you cannot act upon them with your human abilities. The only way to act upon them is by internalizing them and living/walking in the Spirit. The only way I know to do that is to spend much time in a quiet place alone with Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. As you do that, maul these things over in your mind while in quiet contemplation.

Ok, with that caveat, let's move forward. I can summarize the things said by the Western missionaries about how they were transformed by their time with the Iranian leaders in two points. First, kingdom Christianity must begin with a personal internalization in a believer that produces both repentance and active faith. We heard an authentic sense of repentance and a desire to actively change in many of the quotes I read in the last two episodes.

We also heard the wife of an older missionary say that the Lordship of Jesus must change our *entire* lives. News Flash! By "entire life," she meant our entire life, not just the part we reserve for a few hours each week while depending upon our native cultural realities the rest of the time. Oh, we may try to shake a little Jesus in those realities like salt and pepper to give them the right seasoning. However, that my friends, is not kingdom Christianity but its cheap counterfeit substitute, cultural Christianity.

Many of the Western missionaries also confessed that the kind of Christ-focused life that is seen in the Iranian disciples of Jesus was not happening in the community they are a part of, i.e., the American church. We also saw a strong commitment to prayer and obedience develop in the missionaries' lives as a result of their interactions with the Iranian church leaders. This is reminiscent of what the Iranian leaders said in episode seven. Their quotes lead us to the conclusion that:

- Following Jesus is a total life decision that accepts whatever happens, no matter how harsh the consequences.

- And a vibrant unwavering love for Jesus as Lord is the ongoing, moment by moment reality for authentic disciples of Jesus focused on kingdom Christianity.

The second point summarizing the missionaries' statements is this. We could hear their recognition because of their interactions with the Iranian church leaders, that the key to authentic Christianity is a focus on eternal things, not temporal things. This was one of the key aspects of kingdom Christianity exemplified by the Iranian church we discussed in episode seven as well.

Remember this quote from that episode?: "The church in the West is living for, how can we make this life the best possible life while the church in Iran is saying, 'Forget this life, I'm living for the next one.'" You see, my friend, as long as we are focused on our cultural aspect of trying to make this life the best possible life, we will not be able to handle those pressures. We simply are living as converts, not disciples.

But this is so much more significant when it comes to living the specific kind of life we are commanded by Jesus and His early followers to live. Paul tells us in Romans chapter eight that if we focus on the things of the flesh, it is impossible to please God. Get this. That is exactly what a life focused on making this life the best that it can be is all about—focusing on the flesh. In fact, that kind of focus leads to death!

However, when we have a life focused on the eternal things of the next life, the things of the Spirit of God, the things of the present kingdom of God, something happens. We live/walk in the Spirit and fulfill the righteous requirement of the law—thus honoring Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit with a life lived in conformity to Jesus.

Now please listen carefully, my friends. If all we do is remember the first point and this second point, if all we do is to focus on these two things . . . We will be well on our way to living the life Father has called you to live—the life only found in kingdom Christianity. Just to make sure you caught them, here they are again. First, our life must be one of internalization, repentance, active faith producing obedience, and a vibrant-unwavering love for Jesus. This must all then be coupled with a life focused on kingdom life, not this life versus making this life as good as it can be.

During the last two weeks and specifically in episode seven, we also saw three other aspects of kingdom Christianity exemplified by the Iranian disciples of Jesus. Their focus is always on the authority of scripture lived out in obedience without excuss, without a second thought, and without concern for the consequences of doing so.

We also saw their devotion to prayer, which was based on communion with the persons of the Trinity, not a laundry list of things they thought they needed but in reality, are nothing but wants that bring comfort, entertainment, adornment, and financial security based on our humanly created systems. This, as we will learn in a later episode is the key to living/walking in the Spirit, allowing Him to guide and lead a person in the life of ministry He has called each disciple of Jesus to live.

The final aspect of kingdom Christianity exemplified in the Iranian move of God was their commitment to disciple people for the purpose of conversion versus converting people with the intent of disciplining them. It is this one that I want to pick up on, for we see it described in many of the quotes by the Western missionaries concerning the changes in their perspective. I also want to focus on this because we really did not have time to break this one down in either of the last two episodes, and it is probably the most radical to our western evangelical ears of all the aspects of what Father is doing in Iran.

But please, remember this one crucial truth. Things like internalization, repentance, active faith, obedience, a vibrant unwavering love for Jesus all focused on the things of God may not be radical to our ears. We have heard them over and over again in most earnest evangelical environments. However, these things are very radical to our lifestyle. Why? Because we either ignore them as we busy ourselves keeping up with our native culture while our easy believism serves as the foundation of our lives, or we have been infected with the "I'll fly away" mentality.

General Summarization of Discipleship Making Movements

So let's wrap up this review with a look at DMM, Disciple Making Movements. This is what the Iranian church leaders call how they approach ministry. The key to this, as we have seen in the past weeks, is discipling to convert rather than converting to disciple as done in the West. I want to list a few aspects of what this is and how it works, as seen in those episodes. I will also be connecting those aspects with what the western missionaries said last week about how their perspectives on life and ministry have changed. Here are the six basic elements I recognized from the documentary film, *Sheep Among Wolves*, Volume II.

1. The disciples of Jesus in Iran tie their approach to ministry together with both the Great Commission commanded by Jesus and the way Jesus approached people as exemplified by His actions recorded in the Gospels.
2. The first moment the Iranian Christians are lead by the Spirit to speak to someone, they begin to disciple them in being thankful to God, to pray to God, the authority of scripture along with the obedient response it demands, as well as how to minister to one another. This happens whether or not the person has been converted.
3. Because of this, the DMM approach becomes a disciplined and an obedience-based discipleship versus the passing on of information. The disciple is trained to obey scripture every time they read it, and if they don't obey, they do not continue. They read the Bible expecting transformation, and if it doesn't happen, they don't continue.
4. The approach the Iranians take to discipleship is relational, not positional. In other words, they disciple from the standpoint of "living life with people" rather than lecturing them or giving classroom-type courses.
5. They are totally dependent upon the direction of the Holy Spirit in approaching people with the Gospel. Actually, we can see their dependency upon the Holy Spirit in every aspect of their lives.
6. After spending many hours on numerous occasions, the Western missionaries view the

Iranian approach to ministry and Christian life compared to their western approach to Christianity in the following ways:

- We must change our focus of ministry toward those outside of Christ, from conversion to discipleship-making.
- We must change our approach to how soon we allow people who are being discipled for conversion to reach out to others.
- Ministry and leadership must be decentralized. It must be moved from one or a small group of ministry experts to each person in the community of disciples seeing themselves equipped to pastor, teach, and evangelize by making disciples and thus planting churches.
- God uses ordinary people regardless of their biological or spiritual age.
- We must stop training leaders in classrooms and keep them in the crucible of direct ministry as they are discipled by another person. If a person has a passion for ministry—let them run for it. I would only add to this, “but stay right by their side.”
- Local churches must stop trying to build themselves up but must constantly be sending their members out to make disciples and thus planting new churches that are not based on buildings or other aspects of cultural Christianity.

Ok, I would like to wrap this whole discussion up with the point that most represents how the Western missionaries see the Western church’s approach to life and ministry. Ready? Remember this? In the West, we are trying to run the software of the gospel on hardware that does not work with the software. The screen reads over and over again, “Not Compatible,” and we are not even aware that we are staring into a blue screen. Ok, I added the “Not Compatible” and “blue screen” part but if that isn’t a picture of what is happening in the West . . . Well, go back and listen to the very first episode of “Inside Jimbo’s Head” entitled, “Houston We Have A Problem.”

I was going to stop there, but I must leave you with one final quote that demonstrates from real life the computer analogy. The most powerful thing I have ever heard, which both points to the fact that in America, we do not practice authentic Christianity as well as pointing to the power of kingdom Christianity as seen in Iran, is the following story told by a Western missionary. It relates what happened to an Iranian couple when they moved to the United States and tried to practice their lives as disciples of Jesus as they learned in Iran. Here are the words of that missionary.

The most impactful thing that he (an Iranian church leader) shared with me was a story about his wife, actually, something that his wife said that has really stuck in my head. He talked about how years ago, they had an opportunity to move to the United States and live there, so they did. And then, after being in the United States for a short period of time, his wife began to plead with him to take her back to Iran, which he felt was crazy. I mean, who wants to move back to Iran under all sorts of oppression, where the sharing of your faith could bring the end of your life or brutal incarceration or rape or all sorts of horrible things. Who wants to do that? I mean, who wants to move from the United States to Iran?

She told him, “there is a satanic lullaby here, and all the Christians are sleepy, and I’m feeling sleepy.” And that little story disturbed me because this woman was discerning a threat to her faith that was a greater threat than the kind of persecution that happens in Iran. That threat was spiritual sleepiness. That is a more dangerous situation than persecution. I had to ask myself the question, “Is that true? Is that true?” To her, lethargy and indifference was a greater threat than persecution. And it is! It simply is!

Delving into the Word

Ok, let’s open up our Bible, and ask the question we were trying to answer through the living example of the Iranian church, “What is kingdom Christianity.” In two of my books, *Communing with the Trinity* and *the Radical Jesus Prayer*, I go into depth on this subject. However, in concluding this episode and in the next two episodes, I hope to give you enough to help you start moving down the right set of tracks.

Here is some important background for studying the kingdom of God, as presented in the Bible. Jesus spoke in the clearest way possible about the kingdom of God, what it is, what it isn’t, and when it would come. Regardless of your standing on the future return of Jesus, these issues, so clearly laid out in scripture, must be your focus now. Why? Jesus made the “coming” of the kingdom key to our petitions when He taught His disciples how to pray. It is of the utmost importance that we, as Jesus’ followers, listen in the clearest way to what Jesus said and did concerning the kingdom. We must not make the same mistake as the religious leaders of His day. Their intense focus on the establishment of a physical kingdom caused them to miss what was right under their combined noses.

Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) was a Jewish convert to Christianity and a scholar. His best-known book is “*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.” In this classic work, he shows how these Jewish leaders saw everything in the Old Testament as leading to this one thing. They saw the underlying thread of all Old Testament scripture to be God’s gracious manifestation in the world—the kingdom established upon the earth. Here is a quote from Edersheim’s book.

The idea underlying all [of the Old Testament] is God’s gracious manifestation in the world—the kingdom of God, the meaning of all—the establishment of this kingdom upon earth. *THAT GRACIOUS PURPOSE WAS, SO TO SPEAK, INDIVIDUALIZED AND THE KINGDOM ACTUALLY ESTABLISHED IN THE MESSIAH.*¹

You see, my friends, throughout their rabbinical writings, the Jewish scholars understood that the Messiah would establish this kingdom. This understanding was correct. Jesus and his followers claimed that He was the Messiah. Yet look what Jesus said as he stood before Pontius Pilate in John 18:36 (NASB):

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

The emotional and intellectual psyche of the Jewish people focused on one thing. The establishment of the Jewish state, divinely appointed to rule the world, bringing justice and righteousness.ⁱⁱ They saw how God had brought them out of bondage in the past and desired liberation from Roman tyranny. The Messiah would bring this about once and for all by establishing His kingdom on the earth. Jesus, as the Messiah, became quite the problem. He spoke and proclaimed a spiritual kingdom. They . . . Huh. . . They wanted a physical kingdom. He lined up as the prophetic Messiah yet not in this one area. This area was the most important to them. Thus, they were not willing to let go of their eschatological framework.

Jesus challenged the belief system, the cultural mindset of the Jewish leaders in many personal ways. "Obviously, the Messiah must agree with us," they thought. "We are the well-educated leaders of God's people!" Yet this Jesus guy, who had no education, did not agree with these "well-educated leaders of God's people." Again and again, He pointed out what was lacking not only in their theology but in their personal lives. It looked more, and more like their dreams would never come true. "And anyway, who is He to tell US our lives are screwed up! He is just a carpenter's son from Nazareth, and nothing good comes out of Nazareth."ⁱⁱⁱ So instead of refocusing their cultural mindset and repenting, what did they do? They turned Him over to the Romans, their arch enemies, for crucifixion.

Now that we have the backdrop for our study, let's take a look at this kingdom. It is for this kingdom, the kingdom established by the Messiah, that we are to pray, "Your kingdom come." At least that is what Jesus said when He taught the disciples to pray. Probably a pretty good idea, huh? And maybe, just maybe it might be even better to understand the kingdom. What do you think?

Here are our two main concerns when thinking about the kingdom established by the Messiah. First, we must consider what constitutes this kingdom, and what significance does it play in our lives today as Jesus followers? Next, we must consider, when God will establish His kingdom—after all, Jesus said to pray, "Your kingdom come?"

Let's look at the first things first. We must establish that the Bible speaks of this kingdom with two main descriptors: The "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven." Are these two different things or the same thing with two different descriptive titles? While there exist differing views on this, I have found that looking at these descriptive titles and their use puts things into perspective. One way to do this is to compare how each of the Gospel writers uses these terms. When you do this, you will discover a striking reality often missed by the casual reader of scripture.

Now listen carefully. Please don't get lost in the weeds. Here are some important Biblical facts. Matthew is the only writer in the New Testament to use the term "kingdom of Heaven." Now I'm no Einstein, but that should seem significant to most readers in the same way it seemed significant to me. This becomes true if the reader comes with no preconceived notions.

Now Matthew also uses the term “kingdom of God,” but only four times. However, he uses the “kingdom of Heaven” thirty-one times. This is in contrast to Luke, who uses the term “kingdom of God” the exact same amount Matthew uses “kingdom of Heaven,” thirty-one times.

In reality, we find the term “kingdom of God” used in the Gospel accounts fifty-one times. In Acts, we find it used six times and in the epistles seven times. That is a grand total of sixty-four times the “kingdom of God” appears in the New Testament. Now, by contrast, Matthew uses the term “kingdom of heaven” only thirty-one times.

Thus, the term “kingdom of X” appears ninety-five times. Add to this the fact that the term “kingdom” standing alone appears thirty-three times. These references to “kingdom” all focus on God’s kingdom. That is a grand total of 128 times when the concept of a kingdom concerning the Gospel is used! Even the casual reader will agree there must be something important in the New Covenant about this term “kingdom!” Using the term “kingdom” happens over 50% more times than the word “blood.” I hope you understand the importance of the word “blood” to the Gospel.

Now hang in there with me. We need to take this one step further. When used in the Gospels, almost half of the time, we find the word “kingdom” standing alone in Matthew’s Gospel—eleven times. Thus Matthew used the terms “kingdom of heaven,” “kingdom of God,” or “kingdom” forty-six times. Ninety-one percent of the time, he used the “kingdom of heaven” or the generic term “kingdom.”

Now here is the question. Why did Matthew use “the kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom” rather than “kingdom of God” like the other authors of the New Testament? No one else used the term “kingdom of heaven”—not in the Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles, or the book of Revelation.

An answer seems to appear when we look at the original audience of each book of the Bible. Matthew’s Gospel was the only Gospel written with the Jewish people as the primary audience. In the Epistles focused on Jewish believers, the term “kingdom of X” never appears. However, Mark’s and Luke’s Gospel accounts had a Gentile audience as their focus. John’s audience was the church in general, and the term “kingdom of X” only appears twice with both appearances as the “kingdom of God.”

Remember, John’s writings were among the last books of the Bible written. The Gospel of John came 30 years after Mark and Matthew’s Gospel accounts.^{iv} Thus, the “kingdom of God” seemed to be the settled descriptive title in the church for the kingdom spoken of by Jesus. These facts all seem to indicate that when writing to a Jewish audience, the term kingdom or kingdom of Heaven was the term of choice. Why? This fits well with the Jewish thought of the reestablishment of a Jewish theocracy.^v Yet when writing to a Gentile audience, the term most used was the “kingdom of God.”

When referring to this event, the Jewish Rabbinic literature most often used the phrase “kingdom of heaven.” Thus with Matthew’s Gospel primarily having a Jewish audience, this term

would be retained or simplified to the kingdom.^{vi} Even though Jesus preached the kingdom as a spiritual theocracy rather than a physical theocracy, the Jewish people needed to understand. They needed to understand the kingdom Jesus brought was the same kingdom promised to them throughout their sacred writings.

The refocusing of the traditional Jewish Rabbinical notion of an earthly kingdom to a spiritual kingdom actually started with John the Baptist, and his call for repentance for “the kingdom of God is at hand.” Instead of rallying people to form an army and overthrow Rome, John told people to prepare for a spiritual kingdom. John called them to a change of life and a life of repentance. John was the forerunner or herald of Jesus,^{vii} who introduced Jesus, who continued this same call in all His teachings.

But get this! The kingdom Jesus defined was to extend to the Gentiles, not just the Jewish people.^{viii} (Three places you will find this is Luke 2:32, John 10:6, and Ephesians 3:6) Ready for this! Here it comes. The kingdom being extended to the Gentiles would include the Jew’s arch enemies, the Romans. Talk about a radical shock to the Jewish mindset!

Let me wrap this up with this statement. To use the “kingdom of heaven” would confuse Gentiles who were not familiar with the Jewish traditions and their use of that term. Thinking of heaven in terms of the kingdom would cause a misunderstanding of the meaning and timing of this new kingdom. And so it does for us Gentiles today. Yeppers, I’m talking to you eschatological wonks out there. Thus among the Gentiles, the term kingdom of God became the preferred term for Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.^{ix} The term kingdom of heaven became the preferred term among the Jews. Matthew used this term because it was the term they used when referring to the coming kingdom of the Messiah. If Jesus were the Messiah, He would have to establish that kingdom—the kingdom of heaven. And as we will see, He did!

Final Words and Jimbo’s Closing

Well, I hope that really wet your whistle. If you got nothing out of this simply remember, the term “kingdom,” when referring to God’s kingdom, appears twice as many times as the word blood appears in the New Covenant. Once again, you don’t have to be Einstein to see the significance of the term “kingdom” when referring to Christianity.

Now put that together with how the Iranian Christian woman reacted to the American church. Now you know why I make such a big deal about the difference between kingdom Christianity and cultural Christianity. One brings about a sleepiness of lethargy and indifference to spiritual things while the other . . .

Well, come back next week, and we will dig into this further.

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 Benson Commentary

ⁱⁱ Jeremiah 23:5-6

ⁱⁱⁱ John 1:46

^{iv} Jonathan Petersen, When Was Each Book of the Bible Written? February 1, 2016 Bible Gateway; <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/02/when-was-each-book-of-the-bible-written/>

^v Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Bible Hub; <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/3-2.htm>

^{vi} George Eldon Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959, p. 32. Also see Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.

^{vii} Edward Burbidge, The Kingdom of Heaven; What is it?, The King’s Herald, Bible Hub:

http://biblehub.com/library/burbidge/the_kingdom_of_heaven_what_is_it/chapter_i_the_kings_herald.htm

^{viii} Luke 2:32; John 10:6; Ephesians 3:6

^{ix} Stack Exchange, Biblical Hermeneutics