

Weekly Bible Study group – October 21, 2009

This week's reading assignment: John 3-5

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This week the group staff had a profound time of study and reflection on the message of Jesus in John 3-5. These chapters contain some very familiar language, at least for those of us who have grown up in the Christian tradition. We hear words like “eternal life,” “be born again,” etc. This week we set ourselves to the task of really listening to what Jesus was trying to communicate with these words.

The more I read, the more convinced I become that these different metaphors in chapters 3-5 are various ways to describe the same basic reality. That basic reality is that there are two kingdoms to choose between: the world's kingdom, which is bound to fail (in the words of John, it's “already condemned”), or God's kingdom, which Jesus is announcing in his words and his actions. All of the images in these chapters are describing, in some way, the difference between these two kingdoms. Having your citizenship transferred from the world's kingdom into God's kingdom is described in these key terms, which are all pretty much synonymous:

Eternal Life (Jn 17:3) = Being filled with the Spirit = Being born again = Seeing the kingdom of God.

Then in chapter 5 we see a common theme that runs throughout the New Testament when we're reading about the kingdom of God. It's the idea that people have to make a choice between God's kingdom or the world's kingdom. You can choose normal life, or an “eternal” kind of life. You can just be “born of the flesh” like everyone else, or you can also be “born of the Spirit” (which means being filled with God's life in a way that opens your eyes to a new reality all around you). The language of judgment highlights the fact that you can't have it both ways – you can't have part God's kingdom and part the world's kingdom. Because one of them (the world's kingdom) has been condemned, is passing away, won't last. So link yourself to God and God's world, and then you are a part of a system that will not fail. In other words, he's saying that the ship is sinking. If you stay on it, then you're sinking along with it. Jump ship.

Question to ponder: When Jesus talks about God's kingdom, he's not talking about some other-worldly place that we escape to. He's not talking about something that's spiritual instead of physical. He's talking about a new reality that is here, in the flesh, *in the real physical world*. So what do you think it looks like for us to choose to live in God's kingdom, here and now? How is it different from the world's kingdom?