

01 Introducing My Good Friend, James!

A few years ago my older son asked me to his house to watch the Super Bowl. I wasn't too interested in it that year, truthfully, but I was surprised how exciting the game was and enjoyed watching. My wife even watched and enjoyed it even though her beloved Pittsburgh Steelers were not playing.

I did some research that year about the Super Bowl because when a person watches the game, they are not just watching a game. They are entering into a worldwide, cultural, media mega experience. I don't think all those words are an exaggeration. Consider these facts:

- The Super Bowl brings in \$300-600 million to the host city, and sometimes one billion dollars.
- The Super Bowl brings in 120,000-300,000 visitors to a city. In that year's game it was estimated that 40,000 came to the city, and that year it was in Miami, just to be part of the festivities surrounding the game without even going to the game. That year official events began days before the game and included such things as a country chili cook off, a Sabbath evening service and tailgate food Shabbat dinner, a celebrity bowling tournament, and live concerts. What does that have to do with football?
- Grocery shopping for Super Bowl parties is one of top grocery shopping days in the year.
- Hotel rooms booked can be in the hundreds of thousands and weeks in advance.
- 3500 working media covered the game and 400 of those were from other countries
- In one super bowl, much of the world watched the Super Bowl. There was a potential worldwide audience estimated at one billion people. A total of 54 international broadcasters to 232 countries and territories in 33 languages. Nineteen television and radio stations from 14 countries broadcast the game from Dolphin Stadium.

There's something else that amazed me about the Super Bowl that year – it was the side-by-side existence of good and evil. The game itself was good and fun. It was a game and good entertainment and many good things are associated with it. In fact, sometimes it has become a stage for someone to testify about the greatness of God and the glory of Jesus Christ. Many times I have heard Christians giving testimony for the Lord.

But while all this was going on there was also evil – fortunes were won or lost in gambling on the game, drunkenness was the order of the day for many. My wife heard that Super Bowl game day is the busiest day of the year for strippers.

What a contrast! Light and Darkness! Good and Evil! Righteousness and Ungodliness.

All this illustrates something vital for every person to understand – we live in a world where two kingdoms are at work, two forces at work, where two cultures compete for our affection and devotion. One is the kingdom of God and the other is the kingdom of the world.

There once was a time when there was no clash of competing forces because the world was in darkness except for one tiny little nation called Israel cultivated by God to be His light in the world.

But the coming of Jesus Christ changed all that. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world and he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” In other words, “You will know what life is about by following me. You will know why you were created and what your purpose is. You will know the true God through me.”

After Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose on the third day, He commissioned His followers to go into all the world and to spread that light in the darkness. Paul, in writing a letter to the Christians living in Philippi stated

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life... – Philippians 2:14-16 niv

Are you looking for purpose in life? Jesus Christ invites you to embrace His kingdom, His values, His way of doing things and He says you will stand out like beautiful stars on a clear night.

But you have to embrace His kingdom, His values, His culture, His way of doing things. In short, you have to follow Him.

This series, The Upside Down Kingdom will show you how to do that and our text for guiding us in living by the values and culture of the kingdom of God is a little book tucked away in the back of your New Testament. I am referring to the Book of James. It was written by a man whose life was turned upside down by the resurrection of Jesus and written to Jewish Christians living throughout the Roman world. They were like little communities of light shining in the midst of the darkness around them. James writes his letter to encourage and remind them how Jesus wants them to live.

I want to share some examples of this practical wisdom in sort of an overview, but before I do that I need to say something to some of my listeners. Some of you who hear my words today do not yet know the Lord. You do not yet have a relationship with the living Jesus who has risen from the dead and is Lord of all. Why not? What are you waiting for? Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus is Lord. He offers you forgiveness and he offers you a new life of purpose and living by this radical kingdom agenda.

What more could you ask for? A relationship with the living God, the promise and hope of life everlasting, and in this life connection with the greatest cause in the world. Today, I am asking you to make your choice for Jesus Christ. Make him your Lord, receive his forgiveness, and start living according to his kingdom agenda. Call upon now. Say something like this – “Lord Jesus, I have been going my own way. I have been living by my agenda. I have sinned. Forgive me of my sins. I recognize you are the Lord. You have lived the perfect life. You died for my sins. You have risen from the dead. I embrace you now as my Lord. Rule my life and show me how to live for you.”

Friends, if you prayed this, let us know and we will help you grow. And if you have questions about what it means to embrace Jesus as Lord, call us and we’ll explain it to you in greater detail.

Jesus is the door to eternal life, but his goal is not to whisk us away to some non-material Paradise which has nothing to do with earth. His ultimate goal is bring heaven to earth, to transform this

planet. While we look forward to the renewal of all things, he calls us to showcase the new heavens and the new earth. By that I mean He calls us to live by the values and the culture of the kingdom of God while we live in this world that is still fallen and in much darkness. To the world, this way of living seems backwards, seems upside down. Thus, we call this series, The Upside Down Kingdom – although we know that it is the world that is upside down and the kingdom of God has come to make things right side up.

Let me give you an overview of this book. Many people think that James is just a bunch of random thoughts strung together. But some scholars have noted this. The introduction to the book is verses 2-11 and presents an outline for the topics that will be covered. There are four of them.

1:2 speaks about the trials of life. It says: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.” James will have a lot to say about temptation and trials in verses 12-27.

1:3-4 speaks about the testing of faith. It says: “the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James will have a lot to say about having the right kind of faith in chapter 2.

1:5-8 is about wisdom. It says: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” James then speaks on this in much greater detail in chapters 3-4.

Finally, 1:9-11 is about the poor. These verses say: “But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰ and the rich man *is to glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.” James speaks about this topic in chapter 5.

Trials, faith, wisdom and the poor. How we approach these four topics is crucial. This is just the tip of the iceberg. There is much more in this book and I hope you will begin reading it, thinking about it, and applying it in your life. Don’t wait for all my broadcasts. Start now. And you will find that James presents an alternative lifestyle to the world, the lifestyle of the kingdom of God.

As we begin this book, let’s pray and ask the Father of the Lord Jesus, by His Spirit to guide us. “Heavenly Father, you have sent your eternal Son, the Lord Jesus, into the world to deliver us from darkness and from lies. You have sent him to deliver us from the kingdom of the evil one and to bring us into your kingdom of love. We confess today that Jesus is Lord. We confess that he alone died for our sins, he alone rose from the dead, and he alone has been enthroned at your right hand to reign over heaven and earth. Jesus is Lord. We thank you for the Spirit that comes from him and you. We ask in the name of Jesus that that Spirit would teach us about his kingdom and empower us to live as a demonstration of the coming perfection when all the kingdoms of the world will bow in

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submission to Jesus. As we go through this book and study about the upside down kingdom, empower us to live as kingdom people. We ask this for your glory in your world. Amen.”