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# THE PURPOSE

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If you are like me and you grew up in America, you were regularly reminded who you belonged to each time you said the pledge of allegiance or sang our national anthem in school or before sporting or civic events. It was clear our country did not want us to forget we are Americans. We recited the pledge day in and day out, allowing it to sink in, enabling each one of us to fully understand that no matter who we were, or what our background was—our history, gender, culture, or color—we belonged to this kingdom called the United States of America.

Even though the pledge had nothing directly to do with what was going on at that particular event or in the classroom, America wanted us to know it was only going on, and

we were only able to participate in it, because we belonged to its kingdom.

In the same way our culture and our country wants us to be regularly reminded about our citizenship in this kingdom, there is another kingdom—a greater and more perfect kingdom—we are a part of. It is the kingdom of God.

Now, if you are an American, you are most likely an American because you were born here. If you are a part of the kingdom of God, it is because you have been born again into His kingdom. That's why you do not want to miss having a full comprehension of the kingdom: it not only affects you, it is also the key to understanding the Bible. The unifying central theme throughout the Bible is the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. The conjoining thread from Genesis to Revelation—from beginning to end—is focused on one thing: God's glory through advancing God's kingdom.

When you do not have that theme, then the Bible becomes disconnected stories that are great for inspiration but seem to be unrelated in purpose and direction. The Bible exists to share God's movement in history toward the establishment and expansion of His kingdom, highlighting the connectivity throughout which is the kingdom. Understanding that increases the relevancy of this several-thousand-year-old manuscript to your day-to-day living, because the kingdom is not only then, it is now.

The reason so many of us believers are struggling is we

want God to bless our agenda rather than us fulfilling His agenda. We want God to okay our plans rather than our fulfilling His plans. We want God to bring us glory rather than us bringing Him glory.

But it doesn't work that way. God has only one plan—His kingdom plan. We need to find out what that is so we can make sure we're working on God's plan—His agenda, not our own.

Throughout Scripture, God's agenda is His kingdom. The Greek word used for kingdom is *basileia*, which essentially means “rule” or “authority.” A kingdom always includes three crucial components: first, a ruler empowered with sufficient authority; second, a realm of subjects who fall underneath this authority; and third, the rules of governance. God's kingdom is the authoritative execution of His comprehensive governance in all creation.

Therefore, the universe we live in is a theocracy. *Theos* refers to God. *Ocracy* refers to rule. A kingdom perspective means that the rule of God (theocracy) trumps the rule of man (homocracy). Psalm 103:19 (NIV) expresses it this way, “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” The kingdom agenda is *the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life.*

God's kingdom is larger than the temporal, political, and social realms we live in. Nor is it confined to the walls of the church in which we worship Him. The kingdom is both now

(Mark 1:15) and not yet (Matthew 16:28). It is near us (Luke 17:21) but also in heaven (Matthew 7:21) since it originates from above, from another realm. Jesus revealed that truth shortly before His crucifixion when He said in response to Pilate, “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” (John 18:36).

Since it originates from another realm, God established covenants within the world we live to implement it. These covenants are governmental systems or institutions designated as family, church, and civil government (state). God rules them all, and each one is to be accountable to Him and His standards as their sovereign. Whether or not mankind functions in alignment with His rule is another story.

Regardless, God has given the guidelines by which all three are to operate because He is the originator of all three. Failure to operate under His authority within those guidelines results in negative consequences. The three, while distinct in their responsibilities and jurisdiction, are to cooperate with each other with the common goal of producing personal responsibility and individuals who govern themselves under God. None of these governing spheres is to be viewed or is to operate as an all-powerful, centralized, and controlling authority over the others.

The foundation on which all three operate is an absolute

standard of truth. This standard of truth is nonnegotiable, non-adjustable, and transcends cultural, racial, and situational lines. Truth is fundamentally God-based knowledge since God is both the originator and the author of truth.

Not only does the kingdom agenda operate on this foundation of truth, but it also operates under the only all-inclusive principle presented to us for understanding the work of God and His kingdom. This principle is His glory. Romans 11:36 says, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Glory simply means “to be heavy” or “to have weight.” It denotes significance. Since all things come from God, are through God, and go to God, God’s glory exists intrinsically in Himself. Whether we ascribe glory to God or not is irrelevant to the amount of glory God has; His glory is already fully present in Him. However, we experience and access that glory when we place ourselves under His comprehensive rule. This is because then God radiates and magnifies His glory to, in, and through us.

A primary position for bringing glory to God is surrender to His sovereignty. To surrender to God’s sovereignty is to acknowledge His jurisdiction, along with the validity of His supremacy, over every area of life. God is accountable to no one. He either causes all things to happen, or He permits them to happen. Sovereignty means God never says: Oops, I missed that one. When we live by the principles of the

kingdom agenda, we experience God's hand in every area of life and witness His promise to work all things together for good (Romans 8:28).

We often limit our opportunity to experience God working all things together for good by defining God according to our purpose rather than His. Humanism and socialism, whether it be in the form of modern-day church-ism, materialism, me-ism, statism, liberation theology, or Marxism, offer an insufficient understanding of the purpose, work, and revelation of God. It attempts to box God into a kingdom confined within the perspective of man. Yet when the human condition is used as the starting point for seeing the whole of God's revelation, rather than a surrender to His sovereignty over the whole of the human condition, faulty theology and sociology emerges. We wind up with a God fashioned in the image of man.

A kingdom perspective does not view man's condition first and assign to God what we feel would best reflect Him. Rather, a kingdom perspective ascertains how God has determined to glorify Himself and then aligns itself with that despite our inability to always understand God's processes. God *is* good, all the time. All the time, God is good. However, God's definition of good isn't always ours. In fact, God often uses the very thing we call "not good" as a tool to bring about an ultimate purpose, and the resultant manifestation of His greater glory.

For example, according to the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, slavery in Egypt was an intricate part of God's program for the nation. We read, "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions'" (Genesis 15:13–14).

The point here is that God, in accomplishing His kingdom agenda, allowed a negative reality that could have been avoided if He had chosen for it to be. Yet the reality of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt accomplished a higher purpose of establishing God's theocratic relationship with them. This relationship was based on an exodus that would serve as a constant reminder of who had brought them out (Exodus 12:41). This truth served as a foundational relational principle in the future movements of God with the Israelite community.

God's sovereignty in the midst of what we do not understand is echoed elsewhere throughout the Bible. Another example is found in the life of Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph later said to his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

The freedom actualized through a kingdom perspective, that of embracing God's sovereignty, generates a faith more

powerful than any human weapon or system of philosophy could ever produce. It accesses God's grace to grant a freedom not incumbent upon externals. This is the only true, authentic freedom as it manifests God's ability to bring about good in any and every situation surrendered to Him.

While God is a God of liberation and justice—and while we should be about the same—a kingdom perspective recognizes that in His sovereignty, His timing is not always the same as our own. However, a kingdom theology also recognizes that while oppression and injustice remain in the world's systems, they should never be tolerated within the church of God or among members within the body of Christ.

In fact, whenever Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God during His earthly presence, He did so while simultaneously healing, helping, feeding, and freeing the hurting and the lost. Any church that minimizes legitimate social needs has failed to model itself after the One whom we have been given to follow, thereby reducing the glory it gives to God (Matthew 5:16).

While we may not always understand God's processes or His timing, a kingdom theology recognizes God's purpose does not change, and that purpose is to glorify Himself. The ultimate goal of the kingdom is always Godward. Therefore, living the kingdom agenda means the comprehensive rule of God is the final, authoritative, and governing principle in our personal lives, family lives, churches, and communities so God may manifest His glory while advancing His kingdom.

## A LIFE OFF TARGET

King Edward III of England came to power in 1327 at the tender age of fourteen. He would prove himself to be, over his fifty-year reign, a focused and disciplined military leader. Under his charge, England rose from the laughingstock it had become under Edward's father to one of the fiercest, most formidable militaries in the world.

Not only did Edward require focus and discipline from himself, but he required it from those underneath him. He is known for having banned football and sports of any kind so people could direct their energies to practicing the art of the longbow. The longbow, new to the battle seasons of the English wars at Edward III's time, was the most sturdy piece of offensive weaponry in existence. Its draw weight alone was close to two hundred pounds. The arrows were three feet long and had tips that could tear through both chain mail and plate mail.

Victory would come with the longbow, of course, only when the arrows hit their targets. Ripping up doors, fences, or the like would do little to gain the upper hand in war. As such, warriors spent considerable time practicing the aim of their craft.

In this setting, imagine if you would, that there was a particular warrior who was aiming his bow toward the side of a barn. He was target shooting, practicing as his king—Edward III—had commanded. It was here he would shoot time and

time again to hone his skill. When a passerby took a look at the side of the barn one day, he noticed that every single one of the arrows was smack-dab in the middle of the target. In fact, multiple arrows had all hit the target perfectly.

He asked the warrior, “How long did it take you to become so good at this?” To which the warrior replied, “Not long at all. In fact, it’s simple.”

Surprised at the frankness of his response, the passerby asked the warrior to show him how to do it. The warrior obliged and promptly shot twenty arrows, one right after another, at the side of the barn. The arrows landed anywhere and everywhere, but not within any target.

Then, without a second thought, the warrior walked over to the side of the barn and picked up some homemade paints and dye and started painting the targets around the arrows. He hadn’t hit the targets at all. He had simply painted around his arrows.

I know what some of you may be saying: “Tony, kings and kingdoms are interesting, but I’m an American and we don’t have kings anymore. None of this applies to me. And certainly not longbows.” But give me a second to explain. Because even if you do not live in a visual, societal kingdom, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you belong to a kingdom. You belong to a King. Understanding what a kingdom is and how it runs is essential to living successfully as a part of the kingdom you are in now. And this story of the warrior with his

painted targets, while fictitious, illustrates the situation our society is facing today.

Just like King Edward III could have never won the battles or restored order to his kingdom if he relied on warriors who simply painted targets around their arrows, God's kingdom and His agenda will fail to advance and have the impact it was designed to have on earth in history without the focus, discipline, and diligence of His subjects—which are us, today. Unfortunately, many of us do everything we can to give the impression our lives are on target when, in reality, all we have done is learn to paint well.

Not only are our nation, communities, churches, and families suffering as a result, but we are also suffering individually. Too many have sought to camouflage their emptiness and failure with materialism, the scramble for success and significance, and other pursuits. Some people even try to fill their emptiness through religious activities like church membership. They have learned how to look, talk, and act like Christians, but all of these things are simply “paint jobs” that try to obscure the fact we are a culture and a people tragically off target.

## WHEN GOD IS THE PROBLEM

A quick glance at 2 Chronicles 15 reveals why we are so off target both spiritually and socially because it reveals three

internal elements that plagued Israel, and which plague us today. I have taken the liberty of substituting America for Israel:

And for many days *America* was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law . . . In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of *America*. And nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for *God troubled them* with every kind of distress. (vv. 3, 5–6)

The nation faced an enormous decline because of its failure to recognize the one, true God, produce authentic teaching priests, and disciple their citizens in God's kingdom law.

In the situation of the Israelites, the first problem was that they wanted a convenient God, one they could control—a kingdom without a king. It was not that the majority had become atheists or snuffed out their sacrificial fires. Religion continued and rituals remained. It was that they had resorted to paying homage without alignment, reinforcing the culture's false view of a God who is harmless, distant, and has nothing significant to say about the educational, scientific, entertainment, racial, civic, political, familial, legal, or governing issues of the day.

The second problem the nation faced was a lack of teaching

priests. History doesn't record that there were no priests at all, just that the priests had stopped teaching the truth.

The issue of truth is all-important because a lack of truth leads to a "conscienceless" society. In the absence of truth, people lose their sense of right and wrong. Every person becomes a law unto himself, so chaos ensues.

The final problem in the nation was the lack of God's law. When a culture has a false view of God built on bad information, God begins to remove the restraint of His law, allowing evil to grow and spread unbridled. Even sinners who respect God's law won't do certain things. But once God's precepts are removed from or marginalized in a culture, the standard for a society is gone and the culture faces the consequences of turning against Him.

In Israel's chronicles, God was the cause of their distress, not the sinners in that culture, and not even Satan. It said, "God troubled them." In a situation like that, it doesn't matter who you elect or what programs you initiate. Until God's anger is assuaged, you will not be able to fix what is wrong or spend enough money to buy a way out of the dilemma.

As long as God is kept at a distance, He will not take over the control center of a nation, and unrighteousness will rule. He will be close enough for invocations and benedictions but not part of the decisions between.

The net result will be the devolution of mankind and a nation, as we are currently experiencing. The more we

marginalize God and His kingdom agenda, the worse things will get. This is what Paul referred to when he wrote, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). What America is witnessing today in the rapid deterioration of our culture is the reality that God is removing more and more of His restraint and revealing more and more of His wrath.

When God is the problem, only God is the solution.

## TIME TO BRING ALL OF LIFE UNDER GOD

What must we do to reverse this downward spiral we are facing in our personal lives, families, churches, and communities? It is time to return to the King, His rules, and His agenda. What He says transcends human politics, secular social movements, and religious traditions.

It is time to recognize the kingdom of God is not some ethereal fairy tale located in some far-off land. It is both here and now. And just as some of the kings and queens of ages gone past poorly ruled the dominion given to them while others ruled well—it is up to each of us individually to write our own personal, and even family, legacy. And it is up to all of us collectively to write the legacy of our churches, community, and nation.

May it not be said of us, as it has been said of many kings and queens in the past, that this one—or that one—was simply

unkingly. May it be said we accepted the responsibilities given to us as royalty and rulers under God to impact the realms He has given us for good, in His kingdom.

The Christian message, when communicated from a comprehensive, kingdom perspective, provides an agenda that can stand next to and above all other attempts to define the meaning of life, whether it be the individual, the family, the church, or the nation.

A kingdom agenda based on God's Word, rather than a secular agenda based on man's word, is the best way to make all of life work as our Creator intended.

Everyone has an idea and a viewpoint, but I believe God has spoken and He has not stuttered. There are two answers to every question: God's answer and everyone else's. And when they differ, everyone else is wrong. Thus it befits us to bring our lives under God's rule and passionately pursue His kingdom.