Church and Kingdom Part 4

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[0:00] from John 4, and this is where Jesus meets the woman at the well. The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

Her father's worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.
You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.
For the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.
Well, may the Lord bless us and keep us with that reading as it leads us into 1 Kings in a moment. But before then, let's listen to this next hymn together.
[1:21] 1 Kings chapter 12, beginning at verse 25.

5. As you make your way there, I'd like to point out that I'm going to be referring to the prophet Amos and the book of Amos because that is clearly connected with this period in Israel's history, and Jeroboam in particular, and the northern kingdom.
I'm also going to be speaking about Romans 13 and 1 Timothy 5. And there's going to be multiple passages that come out of this message that are directly related in some way or other, either thematically or historically with 1 Kings 12.
So 1 Kings 12, beginning at verse 25. 1 Kings 13, verse 25. Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there.
And he went out from there and built Penil. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now the kingdom will return back to the house of David.
[2:53] If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of these people will turn again to their Lord, to Rehoboam, the king of Judah.

And they will kill me and return to Rehoboam, king of Judah. So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold.
And he said to the people, You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
And he set one in Bethel, and the other he set, he put in Dan. Then this thing became a sin. For the people went as far as Dan to be before one.
He also made temples on the high places and appointed priests from among all the people who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the 15th day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah.
[4:03] And he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he made, that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made.

He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the 15th day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart.
And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings. Well, over the last few weeks, as I said, we've been trying to appreciate the biblical teaching on church and kingdom.
Rather, a responsibility as the church within the kingdom of God or as the kingdom of God in the world in which we live. What is the relationship between the two?
We began by recognizing that we are not under obligation to the world, but because we belong to God, we are voluntarily to engage in the conditions of the world in the same way Jesus, who

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became a servant, that Jesus was not under any obligation to the world to do what he did.
[5:39] But that was the very defining mark of Jesus' ministry in that he declared that he had not come to be served.

He had every right to be, but that he had come to serve. And of course, that very teaching and that very reality is then brought over into the church as a model to copy, as a model to imitate.
And so we have this wonderful passage on just so happens to be paying taxes with the lesson being that while they are not under obligation to pay, they are, however, to be servant-hearted, and therefore they are to voluntarily engage in the conditions of the world.
But they are not, of course, to render to God the things that are Caesar's, and they are not to render to Caesar the things that are God's. They are to render to Caesar that which Caesar has his image on.
Now, of course, this whole point is how does the church build? If the church is to build, what is it that we are building? And of course, we are building that payday of the Lord, that culture, that Christian culture and community built up by the Word and the Spirit.
[7:04] And so we have a new culture and a new community that is built by the Word and the Spirit. Now, this building is undertaken in a very serious way for two reasons.

One, because the building of a culture matters, the building of a community matters, and secondly, the double motivation is that we will be judged according to how we have built.
In other words, we will be judged according to our works. Now, the works must be understood, of course, in what we are actually called to do, not what we render.
We are not judged according to what we have done. We will be judged according to whether or not we have built the way that we have been told. So it's quite possible to be a person with multiple works, none of which qualify because they do not relate to the way that we are meant to be building.
So we are judged according to our works. We are judged according to how we have built, how we have done it. Have we done it according to God's design and plan, or have we just done our own thing?
[8:23] Now, of course, this building project is not without opposition, which is what we saw last week. And the opposition often comes with thoughts and intentions of others whose thoughts are not captive to obey Christ.

Rather, their thinking is raised against the knowledge of God. Now, they may not know that it is raised against the knowledge of God if they do not know God's word, or they may know that they are raised against what God has said, directly opposed.
Well, whatever the case may be, Paul understands that the church has to work through and in opposition. And this is both tiring for two reasons.
It is difficult to work and to build in a time of opposition. It is more stressful, perhaps, when that opposition is internal rather than just external.
And so what we come to today is, of course, the conclusion that you can't help but come to. And that is that there is no boundary line here between what we do as we gather together for worship concentrating on those four primary things in particular of the word of God, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and of prayers, and what we do out with the church in our work life, in our marriages, wherever we may be, whatever we may be doing.
[9:57] There is no boundary line. And so every thought must be made captive to obey Christ, whether we are gathered together in worship or whether we're out in the workplace, because what we do in our private lives determines what happens in the church.

And what we do in our church has the capacity or the ability to be able to change what happens in the world. Therefore, the truth remains that God sees us throughout the week.
There are no boundary lines. One side affects the other side. And as we have seen throughout history, that the worship of God by the people of God does have the means to be able to change the world, because that is how God designed worship.
God has called us to worship him in such a way where it can have a positive change on the world. But at the same time, we are warned against the fact that the church has the ability to be conformed to the world, and therefore, our worship of God is modified by being shaped by the world.
And so what this text before us allows us to see is that the possible boundaries that you think exist do not exist, that what we do in the world affects our worship of God in the church, and our worship of God in the church should affect what happens in the world.

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[11:32] There are no boundary lines. We cannot invent worship. We cannot create boundaries. And we are not to think that what we do in one side will not affect what happens in the other side, that what we do in our private lives will not affect what happens when we gather together for worshiping God.

One side always affects the other side. The question is, of course, which is done to the glory of God? Now, if we are worshiping God in spirit and in truth, just as God desires us to, John 4, then that worship has the ability and the power to be able to be used to change the world.
If, however, that we have been changed by the world, then that cannot but help change our worship of God. And so there are strongholds to be brought down.
What Jeroboam has established is that he has invented a new form of worship in order to keep the people where he is.
Well, let's just look at this just as a summary. Jeroboam, as a king, is not a good king, but he may be able to boast of several achievements.
[12:56] He has won many battles, and for a king, that is a sign of intelligence, it is a sign of great skill. Humanly speaking, he could be looked upon in that way.

Jeroboam has also accumulated a great amount of wealth, and therefore, the wealth that he has accumulated could be seen, humanly speaking, as this is a direct result of God's blessing upon him as a king.
So there are many things here to consider about what Jeroboam has actually accomplished, but in the book of Amos, we learn that it was the sin of the northern kingdom that caused Amos to go from the south or just on the border of Judah and Israel to the north to preach against it.
The reason being is because the sin of Israel had come up before God, and it needed to be addressed. And Amos was going around declaring the sins that were committed, and Israel were rubbing their hands together, thinking how good it was that everyone else was being addressed apart from them.
But finally, Amos turns, full circle as it were, to the northern kingdom and addresses them in their sin. And so what we have here in 1 Kings 12 is a record of that sin, that in particular, Jeroboam has invented worship.
[14:29] He is not worshipping God in accordance with the decrees of God, but he is now declaring a new form of worship, and without a doubt, a worship that has been influenced by Canaanite practices.

He's established two golden calves, and people are to come and bow down and worship them. He's placed one at Bethel, or he's placed the other at Dan, verse 26.
And the reason that he did this was to prevent the people that were near him from going down to the house of David, indeed returning to the house of David, verse 26.
For if they go down to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, they might not return, verse 29. That's his chief concern. Therefore, what can I do to keep the people?
And what he does is he establishes a new form of invented worship. Two golden calves. One he places at Bethel, the other he places at Dan.
[15:41] What is interesting to all of us here, no doubt we've noticed, is how is it possible that Israel couldn't commit the same sin all over again many, many, many years later?

In other words, we are aware that this is a reflection of the same sin, almost an exact copy of the same sin that they committed after the Exodus, where they made a golden calf and bowed down and worshipped it.
Now, of course, the sin, especially if you go and read that account and this account here, it's not that they believe that God was the golden calf, and it's not that they believe that God is these calves that brought them out of Egypt.
They're more sensible than that. They have a better knowledge than that. You know, they at least, in part, know who God is and perhaps a great deal, but rather the sin that they are committing is that they're trying to worship God through the golden calf, which is the very thing commanded against in the commandments of God, that they're not to make any image and bow down and worship it as though they're worshipping God through it.
It is commanded against. It is forbidden. And so, in one sense, how is it possible, we might ask, the question raises itself, for these people who should have known their history to commit the same sin that the people committed when they left Egypt?

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[17:16] I mean, this is a whole new generation of people, a whole new generation of God's people. How is it possible that they can repeat the same sin that a previous generation committed?

And I guess there are two possible answers. Number one, they don't know their history. They don't actually know that that happened in the past. In other words, they are so far away from where they are meant to be that they don't actually know that that happened.
Secondly, that they do know that that happened, but they're not too concerned. In other words, that they're quite happy with this new invented form of worship because it suits their particular needs. But the sin is obvious. They're trying to worship the true God of Scripture through a way that God is forbidden, that God has actually commanded his people not to do.
So either they're not living consciously under the word of God that they know, or they're not living under the word of God because they just don't know it. Whatever the case may be, whether a sin of ignorance or a deliberate sin, it makes no difference difference that this is a sin before God.
[18:42] It's quite possible that some people may be caught up in a memory hole, that they have been able to be convinced by Jeroboam because they don't know any better.

And I guess this is really a calling for clear teaching in the church and to have a comprehensive understanding of God's word, that the whole counsel of God is to be taught to the whole people of God so that we don't commit the same sins that the people of God did of old, that we can actually learn from those errors and don't repeat them.
Perhaps that's the issue here. Well, more importantly is how this is then related into the church today. This is an Old Testament account where Old Testament people are doing something that they are not meant to be doing.
because they don't remember their history. And is it possible that the church today is repeating this same particular kind of sin, though in a different way, because of the same possible reasons? Either not living clearly in light of the word of God or we're not living in light of it because we don't actually know what it says. Now, since the prophet Amos travels across a boundary from Judah to Israel, it gives us a wonderful illustration of the fact that God has no boundaries.
[20:14] Not that God has no boundaries, though that's true, but there are no boundaries to the way people live. As if that what they do in the church is on one side of the boundary and what they do in the world is on the other side of that boundary and never the twain shall meet and never shall one affect the other.

The very fact that Amos has been sent from the south to the north to address them is a very clear reminder that there are no boundaries, that what we do in one area can be addressed by God and what we do in another area can be addressed by God.
I guess simply put that the word of God not only has the authority to address you in the church, it has the authority to address you in the home. That the word of God not only has the authority to address you as you gather for worship, it has the authority to address you as you practice your work, as you commit to your work in the world.
This is seen, if I can use another illustration, in the book of Haggai, where Haggai is called to speak to the people of God who have left the house of the Lord in ruins only to concentrate on their panelled houses.
Now, the issue is not one of panelled houses, but rather one of priority, one of order. What we are meant to see even in that situation is that there is no boundary, that God is able to address his people in their own home, about a matter of the church.
[21:58] And that's what we see in the book of Haggai. In fact, a direct comparison is made, that how can they leave the house of the Lord in ruins while they concentrate on their own panelled houses?

It's a question of priority and order. But it's also something to be observed that there is no boundary, that God's authority is able to address his people wherever they are, whatever it is that they are doing.
The lesson for the church is that we may believe that we have crossed a boundary when we come to gather and worship God together. And we may think that whatever we have left on the other side of that boundary is not brought in and neither affects our worship of God.
But that's not true. That's not true. God has designed worship to change the world and we are to recognize that how we live in that world affects our worship of God when we gather.

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Therefore, when Amos preaches to the people of God here, that the worship of God is not acceptable by them, it's not because of how they have gathered, but it's rather because God has seen them throughout the week.
[23:16] It's not because of what they are singing or how they are praying or what they're doing when they gather, though in part that is true, but it's also the fact of what they have been doing elsewhere.

God sees his people throughout the week. And God, in Amos, we're told, puts his hands over his ears. We're given this image of, if I can modernize it, of the people of God praising God and singing and praying, and God placing his hands over his ears because he does not want to hear or receive their worship of him.
Why not? Well, because of what's happened outside the gathering. And that's what we have here in 1 Kings 12, an unacceptable form of invented worship, thinking that what we do on one side doesn't affect our relationship with God in a gathered worship or across the boundary.
boundary. But this is clearly not the case. So when we actually look at what the worship of God is, we're not to be confused. We are not to think that we've crossed some mystical type of boundary, that what we have done in one area doesn't have an impact of what will happen in the other.
And it is true to say that the order of service does determine the worship of God to some degree. Acts 2, 42, that we should be gathering to hear the word, we should be gathering in fellowship, we should be gathering in the breaking of bread and in prayers.
[24:54] And that does determine the order of service, that does determine what the worship of God looks like when the people of God gather. But that is not the only thing that determines our relationship before God.

Because God sees us throughout the week. week. And therefore the type of unity and strength and blessing that we look for never turns up.
Because sometimes we think we can't do things because we're not blessed. We don't have the resources. We're not blessed with resources. That's the wrong question to ask.
What 1 Kings 12 shows us, what the book of Amos shows us, what the book of Haggai shows us, what the New Testament shows us on numerous different occasions, is that if people live consciously under the Lord of God, then the blessings will flow, then strength and unity will be given.
And then you can do the things. Then you can build, then you can do what you have been called to do. But many times we can't because we're pursuing the wrong thing or think that one part of our life is separated from another.
[26:10] And therefore what we are meant to learn here is that God has the authority to cross over any boundary we might think that exists. And often those boundaries only exist in their mind.

They don't exist in the economy of God. They don't exist in reality. They only exist as we have invented them. What Jeroboam has done is that he has invented a form of worship.
He has tried to create this kind of boundary between the north and the south. But Amoth, the prophet from the south, is almost declaring there are no boundaries. God has authority to address you wherever you are over anything.
And therefore the call of God to build, as we have been looking at, to build the paidea of the Lord, to build this culture, to build this community, because we will be judged according to how we have built, means that we are to understand that there are no boundaries, that what we do in the world is an extension of what we are doing in the church, that we go out into the world out of the strength of our gathered worship to serve God voluntarily in a world that we're not obligated to serve.
That's the calling. So what then of the danger of relinquishment? And this is very much a New Testament issue, less of an Old Testament one, though you can see it in both covenants.
[27:46] The danger of relinquishment is where you have given something over, either to the state or to someone else, a responsibility that is yours.

The danger of relinquishment is that we come up with ministries which actually rob people of the responsibility that they are actually to carry out.
Has the church been guilty of this? Of course. Of course the church has been guilty of this. Because the church has become a place where services are offered.
It is no longer a place where service is given. Well, what's the difference? Well, people far more readily come to a church that has more to offer, a list of services, rather than come to serve.

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And therefore, this danger of relinquishment is easily seen. The problem with it is that while it may create large gatherings of people, it actually dilutes the responsibilities that parents, in particular, individuals have to undertake, the danger of relinquishment.
[29:09] The church has not only rendered to the state the things that belong to God, they do the same thing within the church as well. They're rendering to Caesar the things that belong to God, and they are rendering to God some of the things that belong to Caesar.

For instance, if we take the command in the New Testament, that if a person does not work, he does not eat. Exceptions given in charitable cases, of course.
But that is the word of God which remains. It is not responsible, therefore, to invent a state and relinquish that person to the state so that he can be fed on a daily basis.
Of course, a person should be fed to get back on their feet so that they can work again. But what should not be relinquished along with that is the responsibility that God puts upon an individual in the relationship between their work and their meeting.
That's the challenge. And it's a fine challenge to make because often we misunderstand grace. Grace is not a lowering of the standard so that everybody can do their bit.
[30:26] rather grace is identifying what the standard is and how it has been met for us in Christ Jesus. It is a charitable act towards another individual.

Likewise, when we think about the widows who are genuine widows in 1 Timothy 5, they are to be supported. They are to be looked after.
We are not to relinquish them to the state. They are to be supported by the people of God. And then, of course, we read, but if someone does not provide for his own, that is his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
again, we are not to rob that responsibility. We are not to relinquish it away to the state, to perhaps certain benefits.
We are not to invent a new form of living because that is not a form that God approves of. And this is what 1 Kings 12 is really about, trying to invent something to keep the people, trying to invent something to do it differently, trying to invent something that actually damages not only our worship of God, but actually damages the people in the long run as well.
[31:59] We are not to relinquish those things to the state. We are not to render the things of God to Caesar. And that is, of course, what has happened. These people, like Jeroboam, are inventing new ways of living.

These people, like Jeroboam, are trying to invent new ways of approaching God, new ways of rendering things. And what they are actually doing, like Jeroboam has done, is he has rendered the worship of God to idols.
He has rendered the things which belong to God to the world, to idols, to golden calves. Like those in the New Testament who render the things of God to Caesar, like us, who may have done, the danger of relinquishment is a danger that actually, if left alone, robs the church of the blessing of God.
It's true that God has established governments, but when you read Romans 13, they are very, very limited in what they are called to do. Go and read this afternoon 1 Timothy 5 and read it in the context of what the church was called to do, and it is the word of God that remains even if a state is established.
It is the word of God that remains even if a state, government, has been established to take care of those needs. The reason is because it is possible, the reason we must know this, is because it is possible for the church today to commit the same kind of sin that Jeroboam did, only in a different way, by inventing new ways of living, new ways of approaching God, boundaries that don't exist.
[33:49] But here are a few considerations as we close. It doesn't take long to realize when you read God's word from beginning to the end of the New Testament in particular, but of course the whole Bible, to recognize that what people do outside of their gathered worship has a direct impact on their gathered worship before God.

Neither does it take us long to recognize that the gathered worship of God people, when they are worshiping God properly, has a tremendous impact on the world around us.
And therefore, one is able to affect the other. If the church worships God properly, then their worship of God can shape the world. If, however, their worship is not proper, then it will have no influence in the world.

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Likewise, if the way that we are living in the world is a way that honors God and brings glory to him, then that will have an impact on our worship of God when we gather together.
Therefore, if we live in the world in a way where we shouldn't be, where it doesn't bring glory to God, that too is brought into the church as we gathered for worship.
[35:10] God in John 4 clearly taught us that what he's looking for is a people who will worship him in spirit and in truth.

And I say that with a clear observation that if we were on balance to observe what we see, we do not see a world that is shaped by the worship of God, by the people of God.
What we see more often than not is how the world is shaped worship, how the world is actually shaped the people of God.
The problem, the blessings that we look for aren't there, because the whole thing has become corrupt. And therefore, what we are pursuing is God, not the blessings.
The blessings will come, the unity, the favor, the strength, all of that will come. But it will come as we put God first. So here's the exhortation.
[36:18] God's people are a people who are called to worship him in spirit and in truth. And it's easier not to ask the question, God's because the answer might just have a massive impact causing us to change.

But the reality is this, that what we do privately affects what we do corporately. And what we do corporately will affect what we do privately.
Because whatever we're dealing with in life, we're always dealing with God. We're always dealing with God. There are no boundary lines. things. And so the authority of God's word not only has the right to speak to God's people in the church, it has the right to address us in the home, in the workplace.
Therefore, let us understand clearly, it is wrong to invent new ways of doing things contrary to the word of God, because they rob the church of the blessings that God seeks to give.
Rather, the church is to be consciously living under the Lord, of course, and under the word, from which the blessings will come. For that is how we worship God in spirit and in truth.
[37:40] Amen. Well, as we close, we'll listen to this final hymn.

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