

Introduction:

How well can you walk with just one leg? You can get crutches, but it's never quite as good as walking on two legs, is it? I have discovered that I have been preaching a one-legged kingdom. I have missed an entire half of the kingdom's mission. Perhaps, "entire half" is overstating. I've given concession on this other half of the mission, but I've substituted crutches where God wanted a leg. To me, there has always been only one aspect of the mission of the Kingdom of the Gospel: spread the Gospel of the Kingdom. However, there is another aspect expressed in **Acts 2:44-45** and **4:34-35**. I knew these passages were here and gave a nod of concession to them, but I have learned these passages are far more mission defining than I knew. They show us the other half of the kingdom's mission.

Discussion:

I. The failed kingdom.

- A. To fully understand the other half of our kingdom's mission, we need to see the failure of God's kingdom in the Old Testament. That begins for us in **Deuteronomy 15:1-11**
 1. In **15:4**, God says, "But there will be no poor among you." However, **15:11** says, "For there will never cease to be poor in the land." Which is it? Are we really to believe within seven verses, Moses, the author of **Deuteronomy**, would make such an egregious contradiction? Surely not!
 2. **Deuteronomy 15:4-5** says there will be no poor in the land, because the Lord will bless them. However, God will only bless them if they are careful to do what He has commanded. Then He commands them to care for the poor among them in **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**.
 3. When the Israelites followed God's command and practiced open-handed generosity, God would bless Israel so all of Israel could be cared for. Thus, there would always be Israelites who were poor and needy, but because the kingdom of Israel would care for its own, there would be no poor and needy.
 4. God's way of taking care of everyone in the kingdom was not by financially blessing everyone, but by blessing some greatly and allowing them to generously care for others. There would always be people who needed that generosity, but through that means, there would be no poor and needy among them.
- B. However, the Israelite kingdom failed. Israel violated this again and again. Consider just one passage from among many that shows God's railing judgment on Israel's failure: **Zechariah 7:8-14**.

II. The successful kingdom.

- A. Note specifically, "There was not a needy person among them" (**Acts 4:32-35**) This is not just a neat statement about that first congregation. Christ's kingdom was succeeding where the Israelite kingdom had failed.
- B. This is so profound, the first two internal problems Luke records were threats against this success.
 1. In **Acts 5**, Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be seen as part of this successful kingdom. But they lied, keeping back some of the price of the land for themselves. Notice **Deuteronomy 15:9** and **Acts 5:4**. Moses warned the people against unworthy thoughts in their heart causing them to begrudge giving. Peter rebukes Ananias and Sapphira because they "contrived this deed in your heart." Ananias and Sapphira had unworthy thoughts in their heart which led them to give grudgingly. God judged them.
 2. According to **Acts 6:1**, some of the widows were being neglected. The kingdom had been successful, but now it was failing. It wasn't failing in doctrine, in worship, or in evangelism. It was failing to care for its needy citizens. This kind of failure was unacceptable.
- C. This is a kingdom issue, not a congregational one (**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**). When the Jerusalem saints couldn't care for themselves Corinthian Christians and others cared for them. Notice how similar the point of this passage is to the point of **Deuteronomy 15**. As Moses rebuked those who were grudging in their giving, Paul encouraged cheerful giving. Moses and Paul both point out when their respective audiences cared for the poor among them, God would bless them. This is not a "health and wealth" teaching that God will give you double or quadruple or a hundredfold for everything you give. Rather, when kingdom citizens care for one another, God blesses the kingdom so its citizens can care for one another (**2 Corinthians 8:13-15**).
- D. In **Matthew 25:31-46**, the goats were not separated from the sheep over worship, doctrine, or evangelism, but over caring for their brethren. "As you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

III. Two takeaways.

A. The first takeaway hits me squarely between the eyes.

1. I have been preaching a one-legged kingdom. For all my years of preaching, I have recognized Christ's churches are authorized to provide benevolent aid to saints. How could I possibly read **Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35** and not say that. However, I have always viewed it as concessional, not missional. To me, the singular mission of the Kingdom of the Gospel was to spread the gospel of the kingdom. Yes, if some tragedy happens, or someone gets in a real financial bind, a church is allowed to care for the needs of kingdom citizens. But it is a last resort sort of thing, not what we are about.
2. That is not the picture presented by **Deuteronomy 15; Acts 2, 4**. The mission is not just to grow the kingdom, but to care for it. This is not just a congregational mission, but a kingdom mission. I'm looking at some of the most generous people in the world. This is a mission I think we want to fulfill. I know we do, because when there is some major tragedy, as has happened with hurricanes over the past few years, money comes out of the woodwork to provide for our brethren. In fact, I'm convinced if we had a plan to help brethren here and throughout the world, we would be amazed at the contribution numbers we would end up with. When we look at our budget's line item for benevolence to our brethren here and worldwide, would anyone think we see this as a leg of our mission? Are we trying to walk one-legged?

B. The second take away is to offer a corrective to a culturally-driven Christianity.

1. Jesus Christ established a kingdom, not a civic club. Our culture wants to relegate Christ's church to just another civic club like Rotary, Kiwanis, and the Lions Club. These are civic clubs with goals to shower the community with good works and benevolent service of one kind or another. That is not Christ's kingdom. Churches are not benevolent weigh stations for the world, but kingdom outposts.
2. Please don't misunderstand. Kingdom citizens are zealous for good deeds, ready to help urgent need (**Titus 3:14**). Kingdom citizens do good to all people as they have opportunity (**Galatians 6:10**). Kingdom citizens even love their enemies (**Matthew 5:43-48**). All that being said, what let's people know we are disciples of Jesus is our love, not for everyone in the world, but for one another (**John 13:35**). Kingdom citizens are a blessing to everyone they meet. But kingdom blessings are for kingdom citizens.
3. We are a kingdom. And while we live within the kingdoms of the world, we are a city set on a hill. In **Deuteronomy 15:3**, God made a distinction between the foreigner and the brother. Having noted that, the Old Testament repeatedly talks about the Jews providing for the sojourner (e.g. **Leviticus 19:10; 23:22**). While sojourners did not proselytize to Judaism, they were taking shelter among the Jews and under the Jewish God. They were making a declaration that the blessed place to dwell was within the land of Yahweh among the Jews. And while the Israelite kingdom was to care for sojourners among them, there is never any teaching or plan to be a benevolent institution for the other kingdoms of the world. Instead, they were supposed to stand out to those kingdoms. They were supposed to be a city set on a hill that showed life was so grand in the kingdom of God that the members of the other kingdoms would come and dwell in God's kingdom. And that is the key we need to grasp today. This other half of the kingdom mission is not to disburse the kingdom's blessings to all the other kingdoms of the world. Rather, it is to demonstrate so compelling a vision of our loving and caring relationship with one another that members of all the other kingdoms, having developed such a thirst and hunger for the blessings the citizens of our kingdom experience, want to come sojourn with us.

Conclusion:

We are part of the Kingdom of the Gospel. Let us walk on both legs of our mission. Let us grow the kingdom. Let us also care for the kingdom. If you are outside the kingdom, please understand that you are sitting around some of the nicest, most generous people you will ever meet. If you are in a hard way, they will care for you. I've seen them do it again and again. But understand that kingdom blessings are for kingdom citizens. If you want to experience the full blessings of the Kingdom of the Gospel including the care of the brethren and the forgiveness and victory over sin Jesus offers His kingdom, you must enter this kingdom. Can we invite you to join us? Can we invite you to bow your knee in allegiance to Jesus our King? Can we invite you to follow in His footsteps? Putting your sins to death and being buried with Jesus in water, which we call baptism, and then be raised to walk in allegiance to Jesus as King? God wants to bless you. He provided you a Kingdom where blessing resides. Will you be part of it today?