

# Forgive Us: Christian Nationalism

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Preacher: Anthony Parrott

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Again, good morning. My name is Anthony. It's good to see you. It's good to hear you laugh and be here and be pleasant, and it's a joy to be here.
- I am a geriatrician, and so I cannot help but love a BuzzFeed list. And so the BuzzFeed list that I am going to inflict upon you today is expectations versus reality. So Heidi, go ahead and show us the first expectation. Kids having fun with a sprinkler.
- Show us the reality. Very grumpy kid. Show us the next expectation. A giant teddy bear six and a half feet tall. Show us the reality. Legs for days.
- I know the announcements mentioned there was a tender date. All right, next expectation. A beautiful dinosaur pillow. Show us the reality.
- There's a pillowcase with the screen printed. Can you imagine? So today we're going to talk about expectations and reality. Expectations about what John the Baptist hoped for and the reality. We're going to talk about white Christian nationalism and, you know, the opposite of that, like not being terrible. And we're going to talk about what to do about all of these things. So if you have a Bible, I invite you to flip it open or turn it on. We're going to be in the book of Matthew chapter 11. The words will not be on the screen. So this is an invitation to download that Bible app. If you have to hit the Bible app and it's like, we took this off your phone because you haven't used it so long. No shame. It will read out. The wifi is fine.
- [ 1 : 5 5 ]     And you can go to the book of Matthew chapter 11. So Matthew is one of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And so far in the book of Matthew, Jesus has given the Sermon on the Mount.
- He has started to do his itinerant ministry. So he's traveling from town to town to preach the gospel of the good news. He's preaching and teaching his healing. And he has a cousin, probably like a cousin once removed or second cousin or something like that, named John the Baptist, who is the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth. John the Baptist was this fiery preacher who made the mistake of complaining about and prophesying against Herod, who was the sort of puppet king over Judea at Galilee.
- And John the Baptist finds himself in prison. Okay. So with that, we pick it up. Matthew 11, verse two. Now, when John heard about the thing that Christ, aka Jesus, he sent a word by his disciples to Jesus asking. John the Baptist is in prison. John had disciples. So the idea of disciples was not unique to Jesus. Lots of rabbis had people that would come to them and say, let me learn to be like a rabbi. And John the Baptist was one of those teachers who also had disciples. John goes to prison.
- His disciples are like, what do we do now? Some of his disciples, like Andrew and Simon Peter, end up following a new rabbi named Jesus. Some of his disciples are the ones who are caring for John in prison. The way that prison worked in the Roman Empire is that the state, the empire, did not pay for your provision to live in prison. But you depended on family, friends, or in John's case, disciples to support you. If they don't show up, you die. Okay. So John has disciples. John sends them and asks through the disciples, verse three, are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?

Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another? So John has some doubts and he's expressing these doubts. John's message was that after me, John said, somebody would come who is greater than me, whose shoes I'm not even worthy to untie. And through the person who comes after me, that's when all of these big things will happen. We'll talk about those big things in a moment.

[ 4 : 33 ] And so John baptizes Jesus and says, this is the Lamb of the Wild who's come to take away the sins of the world. John goes to prison. Jesus is doing his ministry. And now John is languishing in prison, asking what's going on. Verse four, Jesus responds, go. Report to John what you hear and see. Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking. People with skin diseases are cleansed.

Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. The poor have good news. God will proclaim to them. Happy are those, Jesus says. Happy are those. Blessed are those who do not stumble and fall because of me. Then John's disciples go. They go and report back to John. And Jesus speaks to the crowds who were always following Jesus. He starts talking to the crowds about his cousin, John. Verse seven, what did you go out to the wilderness to do? So John had a popular ministry.

He was sort of like a freak sideshow rabbi who was living in the desert, eating locusts and honey and dressed in rough camel's hair. And people would go out and sort of venture to see this guy yell and scream against the authorities and ask for repenting. So Jesus says, what did you go out to the wilderness to see? A stalk blowing in the wind. What did you go out to see? A man dressed up in refined clothes. Look, those who wear refined clothes are in the royal palace. What did you go out to see?

A little bit more context. What did you go out to see? A stalk blowing in the wind. Herod would distribute coins in his name, currency. And the symbol of the house of Herod was a stalk blowing in the wind.

Okay. So what did you go out to see? A stalk blowing in the wind? No, you didn't go out to Herod. A man dressed up in refined clothes. No. John's dressed in camel hair, about the worst clothes you could possibly do. Look, those who wear refined clothes are in their royal palaces. So we're still referring to Herod. No. What did you go out to see? A prophet. And yes, I tell you, Jesus says more than a prophet. He is the one of whom it is written, welcome, Cindy, my messenger before you. So we prepare your way before you. So Jesus says that John's fulfilling the prophecy of the Hebrew prophet Malachi, that a messenger would come and prepare the way for the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, who would come and fulfill all the promises, all the expectations of Israel. Jesus continues, verse 11, I assure you that no one who has ever been born is greater than John the Baptist.

[ 7 : 09 ] Yet, whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. So you have to sort of jive with Jesus's logic here. Look, Ron's great. There's no one greater than him. He's the one in prison. And also in Jesus's economy and Jesus's way of shaping the world, like children are the most honored. The four are the most honored. And so, yeah, Jesus was, or John was popular and famous and managed to baptize a lot of people. And he's great, no doubt about it. And also don't forget, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Pay attention to verse 12. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is violently attacked as violent people ease it.

We'll stop right there for now, verse 11. So, John's in jail. John is seeing the ministry of Jesus, who some people are claiming to be the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the prophet who is to come to fulfill all of these expectations of Israel's continued exile, continued oppression by the Roman Empire. John is languishing in prison, sees Jesus's ministry, and begins to wonder, maybe I was wrong. So send out disciples and say, are you the one? Because I'm not convinced, sort of reading between the lines. And Jesus responds, look at what's happening. Sick people aren't sick anymore. The poor are having good news proclaimed to them, which was Jesus's initial sermon of proclaiming good news to the poor. You make up your mind, John. Am I the one who's promised or not? Clearly, from John's perspective, he's not convinced. He's in prison.

John had a message about the Messiah that seems to be a little bit different than what Jesus is up to. So we'll flip back a few chapters to Matthew chapter 3, if you're willing to follow me there.

Matthew chapter 3 is about John's message. Matthew 3, verses 5 through 12. And I'm going to just sort of jump around a little bit. John says that the angry judgment that is coming soon, the axe is already at the root of the tree. But John's using this poetic image of, there's judgment that is coming, and the axe chop down all the things that are wrong with the world.

Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire. The one who is to come is going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be cooked.

[ 9 : 56 ] So John has an image of the one who is to come, and the one who is to come after John, the one that John believes that he is the messenger for, the forerunner for, the prophet in preparation of. The one who is to come, the Christ, the Messiah, is one who is going to burn it all down and start over again.

And this goes with this idea of messianic expectations, which we can't spend a lot of time here, but messianic expectations are basically exploring what did first century Jews, Israelites living in Judea, Palestine, and the Diaspora, spread around the Roman Empire, what did they think Messiah was going to do?

And there's lots of different traditions that's being traced. You can follow the root of Jesse through the prophet Isaiah. You can talk about the heir to the throne of David through many of the prophets.

You can talk about this anointed one who seems to be like inhabiting the presence of Yahweh God coming to Jerusalem, to Mount Zion, to reestablish a temple and a kingdom and a throne.

All of these different varying ideas in the Hebrew scriptures about the Messiah, about Christ, about the anointed one who is to come. And the expectations are that he's going to be a king like unto David.

[ 11 : 09 ] David, who took over Jerusalem and established the throne there, who prepared for the temple and made the temple a holy place. A Messiah who is going to finally end the exile.

Yes, the Jews had been let go from Babylonian captivity, allowed to come back to Israel, and yet there's still an empire oppressing them. The Messiah would kick them out.

So John has this idea. And then Jesus shows up. And instead of taking butt and taking name, he's preaching.

John's on the Messiah coming as a cleaning force. Clear out the bad Israelites, the ones who weren't faithful. To kick out the Roman Empire, the Roman Empire, the soldiers and the centurion, to establish a new kingdom.

But instead of building an army, Jesus is giving servants. Instead of building an army, he's healing the centurion's servant. Instead of kicking out the religiously suspect and shaming the poor and getting rid of the tax collectors and the disabled, that he's making friends with them.

- [ 12 : 23 ] He's not casting out the soldiers. He's casting out demons and evil spirits instead. Jesus' primary message is about a kingdom, but it's not the kingdom that people expected or even necessarily want.

So let's talk about the kingdom of heaven a little bit. The kingdom of heaven is the primary message that Jesus comes to proclaim. If you do like a concordance search or a search on BibleGateway.com or whatever, you'll see the word kingdom show up hundreds of times throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John.

It's the number one thing that Jesus does. Now, sometimes folks will say that the kingdom is not real. It's not physical, not political.

They'll use words or sayings like, my kingdom is not of this world. Jesus says this to Pontius Pilate on the day of his death. My kingdom is not of this world. Or our citizenship is in heaven.

Phrases, Bible verses like that. They'll say the kingdom of heaven is not a political or worldly or real or physical thing. That's a misunderstanding of what Jesus is up to. Because Jesus is doing real, physical things that have political implications.

- [ 13 : 31 ] Now, it's a sort of backwards kingdom. It's a king with no throne. It's a land with no borders. It's owned by the poor, which should sort of like be weird in our brain. Diseases are cured and deaths are forgiven and the oppressed are liberated.

The oppressors are converted. There's alternative economies that is really painfully slow, which actually is like a lot of government that we know of today. But like it's still on purpose.

Okay. It's like a mustard seed that very slowly grows into a plant. It's like yeast and dough that slowly works its way out. It's this intentionally purposefully slow reality.

And so Jesus comes and proclaims that God's rule, reign, will is breaking out of heaven onto earth. Other biblical writers talk about the idea of a new creation, that the creation is happening again, that all the stories of Genesis 1 and 2 are happening all over again in Jesus.

It has no standing army. It has no tax system. It doesn't seem to have much of a hierarchy. But it's real. It's physical. It's political. It's a threat to Rome.

- [ 14 : 37 ] And it still requires power of some sort. Power is a necessity in order to make a difference in the world. But it's a power restrained by love. Martin Luther King Jr., of course, talks about this.

He says, power without love is reckless and abusive. And love without power is merely sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love, implementing the demand of justice.

And justice at its best is power, correcting everything that stands. So those ideas are what Jesus is up to when he is proclaiming and enacting a kingdom.

So I want you to note, before we get too much further, that when we're talking about the kingdom of heaven, what we're talking about is not the absence of power or the absence of a political reality. The kingdom that Jesus is establishing, real and physical.

It has political implications, implications on the ground, where people actually live today with their body. And it's a threat to the empire that Jesus is a part of. It gets him killed.

- [ 15 : 39 ] It gets Paul killed and Peter killed. And the myriad of martyrs and disciples who are killed because they believed in this kingdom and were working to make it. But John appears, again, reading between the lines, to be disappointed.

Jesus brings us up this idea, you know, blessed is he, happy are those who are not stumbling because of me. And Jesus seems to note a hint of doubt in John's question.

Are you the Messiah? Are you the one who was promised? Or should we be waiting for someone else? Because, again, reading between the lines, Jesus, I don't see the army. I don't see the sword.

I don't see the throne. You're not charging Jerusalem. What's going on? So Jesus brings up this really interesting point. This is back to our first passage, Matthew 11.

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been treated violently, and violent men take it by force. Now, probably all of us have encountered violence in some real, handable way.

[ 16 : 45 ] We've had friends who have suffered violence. Perhaps we have suffered violence. Emily and I, we've witnessed a shooting. I'm sure many of you have friends or acquaintances who have witnessed or been part of some sort of stabbing, mugging violence in some way.

You've experienced abuse. Okay? That's, I want to name. We talk about violence. We're not talking about merely like something many miles away and things that we've never seen. We're talking about things that we, and Jesus is talking about things that we've seen.

Real. And Jesus is naming this reality that the kingdom of heaven is being proclaimed and enacted through Jesus and his disciples and through the ministry of John, and now violence is happening.

John's thrown into prison. Probably not a great place. And violent men, violent people, are trying to co-opt this kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming and enacting by violence and by force.

Some translations use this idea of wandering the kingdom. Take all the good stuff that Jesus is up to and then wander it. And I wonder, there's a hint in my mind of like, Jesus, who has Judas Iscariot there, and Judas Iscariot, we know, is in charge of the purse for Jesus and the disciples, which by the way is funded by women, wealthy women who are supporting Jesus.

[ 18 : 02 ] Judas Iscariot. Judas gets it. That's right. Women be repping. Judas gets a hold of the purse and starts taking the money, wandering it for him.

I think there's all sorts of hints going on here with Jesus' great violence. John, of course, is a victim of that violence. That Herod doesn't want to upset the crowds who like Jesus, so won't directly arrest Jesus at this point in Jesus' ministry.

And so gets a little bit of, you know, the fame and the glory for a lot, you know, being so benevolent to let Jesus do his thing and feed 5,000 and heal the people. Meanwhile, puts John in prison and eventually the capital.

And then for the first 300 years or so, the Christian, the people who are identified with the way of Jesus, Christians variously known throughout Roman history as followers of the way or Galileans, followers of the Galileans, the Christians are the recipients of violence for about 300 years.

They're the ones who, that when somebody picks up a stone to throw it, they get in the way. And so when there is a, refugees, the Christians are the ones who take them in. When there are disease, they're the ones to create hospitals to care for them.

[ 19 : 20 ] The Christians are the recipients of the violence. And then the Roman Empire stopped using its sword to control and beat down Christianity, but then starts using the sword to enforce Christianity.

And the Christians of 300 and 400 A.D. are happy to... So the emperor becomes a Christian who doesn't put down a sword, but baptizes it instead.

And so the Christians were known for power with, let us join with those who are on the margins of society and have power with and create alternative communities and alternative economies so that everyone can flourish and instead became about power over.

Instead of power plus love that King talks about, power plus prejudice. So, what does this have to do with white Christian nationalism?

White Christian nationalism is what happens when you combine power and prejudice with religious language and race. and then you give it power and that...

[ 20 : 26 ] And then, with the time that we're living in right now, is when that power begins to slip away and someone wants to... It's what happens when violent men try to take the kingdom of God and plunder it and make it theirs by violence.

So, let's give a technical definition. This comes from, well, a bunch of different books. I can give a bibliography white Christian nationalism, number one, is a strong moral traditionalism based on creating and sustaining social hierarchies that revolve around race, gender, and sexuality.

So, it's about moralism, it's about tradition, and it's about making sure that people know their past, where they are in the straddle of society, the layers of society, and this is based around race, gender, and sexuality.

Number two, it's about authoritarian social control. The world's a chaotic place, and at times, society needs strong rules and rulers to make use of violence or at least the threat of violence to maintain order.

So, it gives this sense of benevolence, we're just here to put things back in order, but it's using violence or the threat of violence and authoritarian social control to do everyone that so-called favor.

[ 21 : 42 ] Number three, it's about strict boundaries around national identity, civic participation, participation like voting, and social belonging that fall along ethno-racial lines.

A quote-unquote Christian nation is generally understood to be one where white, natural-born citizens are held up as the ideal and everyone else come out. Now, there is such a thing as Christian nationalism more than just among white folks.

It can be a belief around black folks, other people of color, but there's a massive difference between the political vision of white Christian nationalism and the other racial varieties.

And the number one predictor of Christian nationalism that espouses violence and the reduction of white is white. So, that's a definition.

Now, we've got to talk about deep story. So, deep story is the sociological idea of a mythology that is born around your beliefs to give those beliefs the idea of like a historical route or basis to prop them up.

[ 22 : 50 ] So, white Christian nationalism has a deep story and it goes like this. America was founded as a Christian nation by white men who were traditional Christian who based the nation's founding documents on Christian principles.

that is a forefounding myth or deep story of white Christian myth. Now, there are hints and elements of almost truth in nearly every phrase in that paragraph, but it's enough to then twist it into something that's not actually true at all and it leaves out a why.

Number two, the U.S. is blessed by God which is why it has been successful. Part of the deep story, part of the mythology. Why are we the largest economy of the world?

Why do we have the largest military in the world? Why are we the, you know, all of these things? Well, it's because we're blessed by God. And why are we blessed by God? Point number three, because this nation has a special role to play in God's plan.

So, a couple weeks ago I talked about dispensationalism, this particular way of reading the arc of scripture that leads towards an end-time scenario with Armageddon and all of those sorts of things and violent end to all of God's enemies.

[ 24 : 08 ] And dispensationalism, when it came to the United States, was taken up to mean and the United States has a special place in God's plan. We become the main character of Hebrew Bible Old Testament prophecy.

Number four, these blessings are threatened by cultural degradation from un-American influences. So, when your deep story, your mythology, has those four elements, we were founded as a Christian nation, we're blessed by God, that's why we're successful, the nation has a special role to play, but those blessings are at risk because they're at threat from un-American influences, there is no cost too high to pay to reclaim America.

And therefore, the kingdom of heaven has been treated violently and violent and then take it by force. Use religious language, equate America with the kingdom, and then take the language of Christianity, co-opt it for political power, and use violent to make it.

That's why there's this very fascinating thing happening in polls and religious surveys of America, where more and more non-Christian are identifying as evangelical and Christian national.

Because identification has less to do with a theological vision of God and God's character and more to do with a political vision of America. So, if you're white and your whiteness is threatened by un-American influences that threaten our place in the world stage, well then, sure, help me in as an evangelical, even though I don't believe in God or Jesus or couldn't name you one theological truth.

[ 25 : 54 ] Help me in because when I identify with good Christian people, they're going to have my back and make sure that I don't lose my place in society. Jamar Tisby, a historian, says white Christian nationalism is the greatest threat to the witness of the church in the United States today.

Because the church is now just a tool and a weapon to enforce white supremacy than, you know, the place where God will and good... Gorski and Perry, two sociologists that write about Christian nationalism, actually go far further than Tisby.

They say this, the United States can't both be truly a multicultural democracy, a people, a people, and a nation of nations, and a white Christian nation at the same time.

That is why white Christian nationalism has become a serious threat to American democracy, that the most serious threat it now faces. Who wants to go back to the BuzzFeed article to this one?

Now, in this room, watching online, there are lots of people in this church who love the United States, or if you don't love it, at least you want to work to make it a better way.

[ 27 : 07 ] You work for improvement, you work for the rights of all, justice, all of that. You too, probably, have a political vision for America. And what we're not saying is that that is wrong.

We're not preaching against patriotism. We're not preaching against the necessity of power and political reality in order to make people's lives better. Nationalists would love for you to believe that there's only one way to be a patriot.

Jill LaFleur writes this, she says, because it's difficult to convince people to pursue a course of aggression, violence, and domination, nationalists pretend their aims are instead protection and unity, that their motivation is just simple patriotism.

This is a lie. Patriotism is animated by love and nationalism by hatred. To confuse one for the other is to pretend that hate is love and fear is courage.

So, there are some differences between Christians who advocate to make America great again and merely Christians advocating for justice. Some differences include, number one, as long as anybody is up for the work of bringing about justice, they can be part of God's work.

[ 28 : 24 ] They don't have to subscribe to the Apostles' Creed or, you know, the Bible says it, that sublots it, I believe it, sort of thinking. It is a pluralistic reality of what it means to implement good in society, as opposed to a Christian nationalist that say, Christians must be supreme.

Number two, hopefully, you believe, we can believe that ends don't justify the means. If the means aren't just, if the ways of working towards justice aren't themselves just, then the ends inherently cannot be just either.

Metaphors puts limits or entirely eliminates violence and creating inequality are the means of creating justice, as opposed to a nationalist perspective that says, by any means, not.

Number three, we believe, here at the Table Church, in collective liberation. No one's free until we're all. We believe in giving rights to immigrants and LGBTQ folks and giving reparations to black folks.

Then, by doing so, that doesn't reduce the freedoms and rights of either natural citizens or straight cis people or those of European extent. When everyone prospers, everyone prospers.

[ 29 : 34 ] Your prosperity does not come at the cost of my rights. But a nationalist says, my rights and mine a lot. There are many kinds of Christians from the four, many kinds of Christians to put God's sovereignty as the most important aspect of God.

Because God is sovereign, God can do whatever God wants and get whatever God wants to get. And this, unsurprisingly, forms, create, a certain kind of Christian that reflects that kind of God where the ends justify the mean and there is no cost too high and if God is sovereign to get what God wants, then...

But, if God is, instead of God of love, that has priority in her divine agenda, that will just create a different kind of Christian where love restrains power.

So, what do we do? A couple responses. Number one, as I was reflecting on all of this sort of personally, it's my deep belief that Christian nationalists need to be saved too.

I don't want to create a pariah or a boogeyman in my mind of some sort of evil person that I want to burn in. Christian nationalists often are our own family members.

[ 31 : 00 ] former friends or neighbors or people we went to college with or people who work down the hall from us. And, my belief is that they are in a domination system that's going to eat them from the inside out.

My belief that evil is self-defeating and people who I love who have been swallowed up by these lies are going to be eaten up by a self-defeating system. So, even though they're willing to say the ends justify the mean, eventually they too will find themselves sacrificed on the altar of someone else's power.

And so, it's my belief that I have to work toward their liberation as well. So, what do we do in an election year where so many things are at stake? We have to take action.

But that action can and must happen in different ways. We can't all act in the same way in order to prevent the sort of nightmare scenarios of what happens when white Christian nationalists take charge.

Deepa Veyer is part of an organization called Building Lizard. She wrote about the social change ecosystem has 10 roles necessary in building Lizard.



[ 32 : 11 ] So, I want to go through these quickly. You can think of it as an Enneagram for organizers. But there's 10 different possible roles where you can be part of building a movement for justice but not everyone is doing the same thing.

The Weavers are those who see through lines see the through lines of connectivity between people places, organizations, ideas, and movement. Experimenters are those who innovate and pioneer and invent.

They take risks and they course correct as needed. If you're familiar with A-Pest or 5-Pew, these would be the apostolic. You have the frontline responders who address community crises by marshalling and organizing resources and networks and messages.

You're type A people who love a good spreadsheet. They're the ones who are showing up to do the work of care. You have the visionary who imagine and generate boldest possibilities, hopes, and dreams that remind us all of our direction.

Sometimes these are the bosses who are like, I have a dream and I don't know how I'm going to make it happen. They draw other people nuts. But you need the visionaries to set a course of direction that we can implement.

[ 33 : 17 ] Builders are those who develop and organize and implement the ideas and practices and people and resources in the service of a collective vision. Your visionaries and your builders are often the people who fight together the most, but they're both the most necessary.

You have caregivers who nurture and nourish the people around them by creating and sustaining a community of care and joy and connection. The disruptors who take uncomfortable and risky actions to shake up the status quo to raise awareness and to build power.

You're the healers who recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas called by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices. The storytellers who craft and share our community stories, cultures, experiences, histories, and possibilities through art, music, media, and movement and guides who teach, counsel, and advise giving gifts of well-end discernment and wisdom.

So go ahead and put the next image up on the slide. You have all 10 of these all centered around equity and liberation and justice and solidarity, which those four words are an awful lot like the mission and vision of the table church.

We need everybody to be participating in their role so that we can move toward the vision that we want to see, so that we can move towards collective liberation for all, so that we can work towards the renewal of all things.

[ 34 : 37 ] So, try and summarize a little bit. We need to care for those who have been lost in the division of Christian nationalism. We need to play our own role and then we need communities of connection and protection.

Things like mutual aid and safety circles and small groups, safe outside the system, which is part of the Audrey Lord Project, is how do you provide care and protection without using the police, particularly if you're a person who is in a body that the police might see a big threat.

This is why churches have historically done things like small group, not as just a way to like have a nice dinner together, but like when the sky does start falling, whose number will you call?

Now I offer one more word of hope. It comes from Luke 17. The Pharisees asked Jesus, when God's kingdom is coming? He replied, God's kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noted.

Nor will people say, look, here it is or there it is. Don't you see? God's kingdom is already a monkey. God's kingdom is already a monkey.

[ 35 : 50 ] This is the thing that requires faith and some hope to actually believe and then to put into practice. God's kingdom is not going to happen by storming the capital book.

God's kingdom is going to happen when we care for each other well. And because we care for each other well, we care for those outside these walls well. The church is a colony of heaven among an empire of death.

When we say our citizenship is not of this world, that doesn't mean we're hoping to escape this world. It means that we are joining in God's already active work of renewal. The heaven is making inroads to this planet.

It means that we believe that God is already up to new creation. Second Corinthians says if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. New creation is here already. The old things are going away and look, everything is becoming new.

So our job isn't to do this work alone. It's to see where God is already at work and to join in. We're novel and it's not all up to us. We trust in God's millennial work of making beautiful things out of the ashes.

[ 36 : 58 ] Would you pray with me? Messiah, Christ, anointed one, sometimes we too are like John and we come asking you, are you really it?

Is this all we all have to hope for? Because sometimes, Jesus, we'd love for you to also pick up the sword, to also make things happen faster, to also just put up blocks and boundaries and get rid of all of the things that are out to hurt us and harm us.

But Jesus would rather instead see your work healing and preaching good news to the marginal. Join in to see your kingdom without a throne and your land without borders and your new kind of economy as a place worth investing in, inviting others into, and not giving up hope.

God, there are those out in the world that would dare to use your name called harm. May we be bold enough to say no, God, and to give it away.

may we be the vain to any system of harm, to any people who would try to use your name. And God, may we be a place instead in the things life.

[ 38 : 26 ] Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.