

Talk Notes

Title: The Kingdom of God 8 – Thy Kingdom Come in Commerce.

Meeting: Freshwaters

Date: 17th September 2017

Introduction

In my first 7 talks on the Kingdom I focussed on what the bible tells us about the Kingdom of God – in my remaining talks I want to focus upon how we can work out the principles of the Kingdom in all aspects of life today.

Heart 4 Harlow seeks to advance the Kingdom of God in Harlow and in this respect has 5 areas where it is seeking to make a difference. They are in:-

1. Commerce – shops & business
2. Civic – MP, Council, Government, Politics,
3. Art, culture and education – School's, College, Uni, Arts groups
4. Charities, Community Groups, health and social care
5. The Church.

I am going to explore each of these in turn to ask the question 'How can we bring the principles of the Kingdom of God to make a difference in each of these areas.

The Bible and Commerce

Firstly let's take a look at what the bible says about commerce.

Our work comes from God

Work is part of the purpose of mankind

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. – **Genesis 2:15** NIV - The first calling to mankind was not as priest or church leader or worship leader, but to work and take care of His creation. Your work is part of your God given calling and purpose, let Him reveal to you how His Kingdom can be extended through your work.

God gives us the skill to do our work

He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers. – **Exodus 35:35** NIV –God not only called us to work, but He provides the skills for us to do our work well. What are your God given skills? – It might be caring for people, communicating with people, it could be administrative or managerial, it could be creative – now that could be to do with the arts, but it could also be creating safe homes,

good living and working environments – a building site labourer shares in the purpose of creating homes and workplaces and places for leisure. These are just a few examples, don't just think of your job, but think also of its purpose – then pray for that to be further enhanced by the Kingdom at work through you.

Our attitude to work

Laziness

The craving of a sluggard will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. – Proverbs 21:25 NIV

A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied. – Proverbs 13:4 NIV

Diligence

Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. – Proverbs 10:4 NIV

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty. – Proverbs 21:5 NIV

Motivation

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters . . . – Colossians 3:23 NIV

Sabbath

Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed. – Exodus 23:12 NIV

As much as God called us to work, He also called us to rest. Now I am not a big cheerleader for the 'keep Sunday special' campaign. I understand why people feel strongly about this and I respect them. What I am far more interested in, however, is that we all find our Sabbath – that is regular time, preferably every week, when we do not work. Where we have time for prayer and reflection, for family and friends, for leisure and fun.

An interesting by-product of Christians changing the celebration of Sabbath from Saturday, the last day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week, is that we could be said to be woken from the place of rest, rather than rest from the place of work. In rest we are refreshed, re-envisioned and ready to be fully engaged in our work.

Fairness

The coming section on fairness and justice may have particular relevance to business owners, but are also relevant to employees and customers. Businesses are made up of individuals who have responsibility for the decisions they make and they can either

influence their company towards what is right and just or towards what is exploitative, unjust and oppressive. We are also responsible for those we do business with – including our role as customers.

Regarding workers

Do not defraud or rob your neighbour. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. – Leviticus 19:13 NIV

For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.” 1 Timothy 5:18

“So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty. – Malachi 3:5 NIV

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. – James 5:4 NIV

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. – Luke 16:10 NIV

If we are an employer we have a responsibility to pay our workers fairly – however as workers we also have a responsibility to give value for money to our employers and to recognise that if our demands are excessive then the cost may be less jobs (as you sack Peter to pay Paul) and less investment in the future prosperity of the company.

To customers

Do not have two differing weights in your bag—one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house—one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. – Deuteronomy 25:13-15 NIV

The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favour with him. – Proverbs 11:1 NIV

Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow. – Proverbs 13:11 NIV

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. – Proverbs 16:8 NIV

There is a great temptation in business and commerce to cheat those we are doing business with. To cut costs, to deceive, to make our profit at the expense of others. Prosperity at the expense of others is not the way of the Kingdom – God’s way is for all to prosper as we treat others with fairness and equity.

Justice

If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? – Job 31:13-14 NIV

Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice. – Psalm 112:5 NIV

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. – Proverbs 16:8 NIV

Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labour. – Jeremiah 22:13 NIV

Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. – Colossians 4:1

Oppression

One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich— both come to poverty. – Proverbs 22:16

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him. – Ephesians 6:9 NIV

Justice is a sure foundation for business as well as society. Injustice and oppression may bring short term gain but in the long term such a business will not prosper.

Action

So what can we do to bring god's Kingdom to the area of business and commerce?

As employers/bosses

- Fair pay
- Treat staff fairly – including work/life balance
- Treat customers fairly
- Don't just be motivated by money but also by justice and righteousness
- Honesty and integrity

As employees

- Don't be Lazy
- Work with diligence
- Work as if for the Lord
- Work/life balance
- Honesty/integrity
- Sharing faith

As Customers

- Consider issues of justice and righteousness when deciding who to buy from
- Make your views known
- Don't join the 'race to the bottom'
- Don't be carried away by slick marketing
- Live within your means

Conclusion

God's Kingdom is about all of life, there is no sacred and secular. Let the attitudes of the Kingdom pervade your place of work and your supermarket trolley. Use the influence you have, as an employer, a worker and a customer to see the values of the Kingdom grow.