

## STANDARD B: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN CHRIST”?

# Lesson 2: How Did Jesus Establish the Kingdom of God?

### Introduction

Jesus judged and overcame all the powers that were opposed to God’s righteous reign. He established the Kingdom of God. Now Jesus calls us to live under the righteous reign of God.

### A. Jesus Demonstrated the Authority of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus went to Jerusalem as the climax to His ministry. Early in His ministry, He had made that destiny plain to His disciples (see Luke 9:51-53). Jesus’ first action after He arrived in Jerusalem was symbolic. He borrowed a donkey and rode on it into Jerusalem. The disciples walked along with Him as He rode. A large crowd followed. They began to praise God out loud for Jesus’ powerful deeds that they had witnessed. They hailed Jesus as “the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38).

Jesus chose to ride a donkey on purpose. His action reminded the people of the prophet Zechariah’s words: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus refused to silence His disciples when the Pharisees asked Him to do so (Luke 19:39-40). The shouts from the crowd claimed special authority for Jesus. They understood it to be authority like the ancient kings of the line of David. But Jesus rode a donkey, a symbol of lowliness. The authorities sent from Rome to govern the land in that time did not ride donkeys. They rode powerful and magnificent horses. They ruled by wrong power and force. By riding a donkey, Jesus gave an object lesson on the nature of His authority. His authority was very different from the authority of the current rulers of the world. He entered Jerusalem not as a powerful conqueror but as a humble servant.

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He had faced this very issue. In His temptations in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13), Jesus confronted other ways of exercising power. In one of the temptations, the devil offered Jesus the authority and splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. The devil claimed authority over all of those kingdoms. Thus, he could offer worldly recognition to Jesus, if Jesus would worship him. Jesus refused to do that. He made it clear that His way, which was God’s way, of using authority would not be as people in the kingdoms of the world do.

**Question:** Why did Jesus choose a donkey on which to ride when he entered Jerusalem?

**Question:** What was the difference in the way Jesus and Rome's leaders viewed "power"? How does this compare to today?

## **B. Jesus Showed How the Kingdom of God Differs from the Kingdoms of the World.**

The way Jesus responded to His temptation is consistent with what He declared about the Kingdom of God. On many occasions Jesus told His hearers that the Kingdom of God had come (see 9:27). The nature of the Kingdom Jesus announced contrasts directly with the kingdoms of this world. The poor are given special place in God's Kingdom (Luke 6:20). Hungry people are blessed in this Kingdom, and they will be filled. People who mourn are also blessed in this Kingdom. They will laugh (Luke 6:21). One can enter this Kingdom only by receiving it with the simplicity of a little child (Luke 18:16-17).

Often in Jesus' ministry, He showed just how different the Kingdom of God would be from what many people expected. Here are some examples:

1. In the Kingdom of God, humble people, not proud people, will be its citizens. At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, the angel told Mary she would give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). Mary was just a humble, young girl. She went to visit her relative Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-40). While there she sang praises to God (Luke 1:46-55). A major affirmation of Mary's praise to God is that "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53).
2. In the parable of the great dinner (Luke 14:15-24), Jesus told of some important people who had been invited to a feast. But they refused to come, so they lost their opportunity. Their places were filled by many that people thought were undesirable—the poor, crippled, and blind. They were brought in off the streets of the town and from the roads of the countryside to enjoy the feast the host had prepared.
3. The people who claimed to be the most religious should have quickly accepted Jesus. But many of them actually rejected Him. Instead, people who were thought to be religiously hopeless often accepted the Good News that Jesus offered. People who were publicly recognized as sinners often pressed close to Jesus to hear what He would say. What they heard gave them hope (see Luke 15:1-32; 18:9-14; Luke 19:1-10).
4. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angel announced it to an unlikely group. Shepherds, who were not often respected in society, were living out in the open

with their flocks. To them the angel announced the Good News: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

5. More than once Jesus received criticism for His willingness to associate with “tax collectors and sinners” (see Luke 5:30-32; 7:34; 15:1). He welcomed in God’s name those who were religious and social outcasts. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). He pictured a social and religious outcast as fulfilling the command to love one’s neighbor.
6. Jesus responded to a dispute among His disciples over which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). He told them “the one who rules” among you must become “like the one who serves” (Luke 22:26). This quality of life is exactly opposite to the ways of worldly kingdoms. “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them,” Jesus told His disciples (Luke 22:25). But it must not be that way among Jesus’ followers. They are to follow His example. He said, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27).
7. Jesus renounced and rejected all kingdoms that stand against God’s righteous reign. Mary’s song anticipated He would do just that (Luke 1:46-55). God’s ways are not the ways of the world. Jesus refused to accomplish His mission through the wrong use of power. He steadfastly refused to compromise with the methods of worldly power that are contrary to righteousness.
8. Jesus welcomed into fellowship all those who were powerless and insignificant by the world’s standards. They were far more ready to experience the reality of the Kingdom of God than were the strong and mighty people. The Kingdom of God would be a gift of divine grace, not an earned or merited reward. Those who had nothing, who were nobodies, and who recognized their complete dependence on God were in good position to receive God’s gracious gift. The powerful and mighty people were kept from that position because of their self-sufficient attitudes and lives. Their values and commitments were opposed to God. They would not yield to God’s authority over them. They refused to become dependent upon God by accepting God’s grace as a gift.

**Question:** What is the Kingdom of God?

**Question:** Give three examples of how the Kingdom of God differs from the kingdoms of the world.

### **C. Jesus’ Died to Establish the Kingdom of God.**

Jesus’ commitment to a very different understanding of power and authority led finally to his own crucifixion. The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem arrested Jesus (Luke 22:47-54). Then they met to question Him and reach a decision about what should happen to Him. The council of elders asked Jesus whether He was the Messiah (Luke 22:67). He replied: “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But

from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God” (Luke 22:68-69).

In the Book of Luke, the title *Son of Man* refers to various activities of Jesus. Often it indicates His humility and lowliness. But in Luke 22:69 Jesus speaks of an exalted status alongside of God, which He would soon have after His death and resurrection. He claimed that His humble life as a servant would gain divine approval. His way of power was in fact God’s own way. Jesus’ claim resulted in a further question from the council of elders: “Are you then the Son of God?” (Luke 22:70). Jesus replied, “You are right in saying I am.” The council then concluded that they needed no further testimony. Jesus’ own words were self-incriminating (Luke 22:71). They were ready to crucify Him. Jesus had been obedient to His Father in all things He said and did. What He taught regarding the Kingdom of God directly contradicted the old kingdoms that were ruled by greed, hate, lust, and force. Jesus substituted lowliness and humility for wrong power. This was the threat that Jesus posed to the kingdoms of the world, whether represented by Jerusalem or Rome. This was why Jesus was crucified. He was killed by the method reserved for total outcasts.

**Question:** Why is Jesus referred to as the Son of Man?

**Question:** Why was Jesus crucified?

### **Conclusion**

Jesus’ life and destiny provided a challenge to those who were His followers. He called each one to take up the Cross and follow Him (see Luke 9:23-25). They must live as those already dead to the wrong power and authority of the kingdoms of the present world. They were to live with one another as humble servants of each other. Today, disciples hear the same call for allegiance and loyalty. The kingdoms of the present world still operate by wrong power and control. Jesus challenges His followers to live today in ways that contradict the old values and ways of life. That is the high privilege of all who belong to Jesus.

**Activity:** Discuss with your teacher the differences between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world. Think about how you can let the Kingdom of God be seen in your life. Talk with someone about how you will make this happen.