
CASTLES AND KINGDOMS

In feudal times, knights held castles at the discretion of the king.

- If the king summoned the knight to help defend or expand the kingdom, he came.
- If one castle was threatened, the other knights of the kingdom came to defend it.
 - But woe be the knight who chose not to respond the king's call:
 - putting his castle ahead of the kingdom.
 - His castle was now forfeit and the rest of the kingdom, under the king's guidance, would work together to remove the castle-minded knight,
 - and replace him with someone who was first and foremost kingdom-minded.

There is great speculation as to whether King Arthur was a real, historical figure, or just one made up to represent those kings who worked to unite England.

- The concept of the round table, though, was to show that no one knight, no one castle, was more important than any other.
 - All castles were equal to each other and each was always secondary to the kingdom itself.

Nevertheless, within a kingdom, there could be power struggles.

Anyone who has a belly button has control issues.

- This need-to-be-in-control—to get our own way—can often result in power struggles.
 - And it has been this way since the beginning of time.
- The Israelites argued with Moses about which way to go, and what to eat, and who to worship.
- The kings of Israel—the politicians, if you will—gave into pressure from the people and turned away from GOD and GOD'S laws.
- Even the priests and the Pharisees, who wanted the people doing things their way, made religion more about what you do than about WHO you worship.
 - So, JESUS tells this Parable of the Tenants to confront the religious leaders of HIS day and us today,
 - and to teach that power struggles happen because of the wrong focus.

Let's consider two different points of focus.

The first is castle-mindedness.

In JESUS' parable, the workers in vineyard were castle-minded.

- They were focused on themselves and what they wanted.
- They wanted the power and to be in control.
- They wanted the wealth for themselves.
- They didn't want to have to obey or be beholding to someone else.

The religious leaders who heard JESUS' parable were castle-minded.

- They wanted the people to do what they said,
 - and do it how they said to do it without asking why.
- They wanted the control, even if it wasn't GOD'S will.
 - So, when JESUS comes and challenges their authority, and says that GOD'S priorities are different, they put JESUS to death.

Today, churches and church members can easily slip into castle-mindedness.

- They expect the congregation and the larger church to take care of them
 - instead of thinking of the needs and mission of the Kingdom.
- They think about what will benefit them, rather than what might be a blessing to the Kingdom of GOD.

In his famous inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

- That's a kingdom-focused statement.

The opposite can happen in churches.

- The office secretary of a small church was told that if she wanted to keep her job, she would have to leave the church where she had been a member for many years and join the church where she worked.
 - Another giving member was more important than encouraging their employee to be faithful wherever she worshiped.
- Many churches with pre-schools or schools often give a discount on tuition to people who are members of that church, rather than giving a discount to families who are members of any church.
 - Families end up leaving the churches where they have been involved because the discount can make a big difference financially.

These are examples of what I call "sheep stealing."

- There are pastors who, when asked, will provide pastoral services to members of other churches,
 - instead of encouraging those folks to seek the ministry of their own pastor.
- There are churches that withhold their benevolence that supports the many ministries of the synod or national church,
 - because they don't like one policy of the denomination.

These actions damage the church and the Kingdom of GOD.

- They fail to celebrate what GOD has been and is doing, because they are more concerned with what will be best for them.

The second focus is kingdom-mindedness.

Kingdom-mindedness puts the larger group ahead of any individual or castle.

- When the landowner planted the vineyard, put up the well, built the wine press, and offered it to the tenants, he was looking at the bigger picture—the kingdom.
 - Certainly, what he did would benefit himself when he received his portion.
 - But it would also benefit the tenants who might otherwise have no income or purpose;
 - instead, they would work and taste the fruits of their labor.

Kingdom-mindedness doesn't always make sense—often it doesn't.

- What church, for example, would buy an organ for another church in their community—a competitor, so to speak—
 - when they, themselves are trying to pay off their mortgage.
 - Trinity Lutheran in Long Beach did that three times.
 - Kingdom-mindedness.

- When someone comes here looking for a church and I realize that their needs might be better met at church of a different denomination, I send them there.
 - What's important is that they are being fed and contributing to whole of the Kingdom.
 - Over and over, there are congregations that struggle to meet the financial demands of their own budget, yet who continue to include benevolence to the synod and each year look to increase it that giving,
 - so that new congregations can be started, new pastors trained, and pastoral support, justice work, and social programs around the country and throughout the world will be provided.
 - These are examples of what it means to be kingdom-minded.
- Kingdom-mindedness always sees and seeks to support the bigger picture of GOD'S Kingdom.
- It always seeks to give the praise and glory to GOD, rather than keep it for themselves.
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What happens when we become too castle-minded?

- JESUS tells in the parable that the vineyard will be taken away.
 - The prophet Isaiah tells that when only bad or sour fruit is produced, the vineyard will be destroyed.
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I know a church that had to sell its property because the treasurer, whom everyone trusted and no one checked, embezzled \$500,000.

- She was castle-minded, but so was her church that didn't want to insult her by providing checks and balances that would have protected both the church and the treasurer.

I know many churches that become big and successful, and then leave their denomination and go independent,

- because they don't want to give to their denomination and support the little churches in their denomination.
 - Often, though, when their charismatic pastor leaves or retires, they struggle to find a replacement for their founder.
 - Many of us saw that very thing happen with the Crystal Cathedral,
 - and today, they are no more.
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GOD has given us a wonderful vineyard in which to work and provided all the necessary resources we need to produce good fruit.

- Our efforts can be done solely for the sake of our castle.
- Or we can recognize the source of our blessings,
 - and seek to give to GOD that portion that is due.
- Both as individuals and as a congregation, we can seek to respond in gratitude to the KING and strive to further the Kingdom of GOD.
 - Do we want the vineyard for ourselves, or do we want to show our gratitude to the owner who gave us all that we need to produce the very best wine?
 - Do we want to be a castle, or do we want to be an active and contributing part of the Kingdom?