

Opening: When Worlds Collide at the Center

If you spread out the map tonight and zoom in on Jerusalem, you're looking at a place where stories, roads, and rival kingdoms collide (Luke 19:28-44). Jerusalem sits on the spine of the hill country, perched just south of the Central Benjamin Plateau, a kind of "saddle" in the hills where north-south and east-west routes meet.¹ Because of that geography, power has always converged here, trade, armies, ideas, and empires all squeeze through this narrow zone.

By the time we get to Jesus riding a donkey over the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem is like a pressure cooker (Luke 19:28-40). Rome holds the military power, Herod's dynasty clings to political power, the temple leadership guards religious power, and different Jewish factions, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes are all fighting for the future of God's people.²

Into that convergence rides Jesus of Nazareth, proclaiming another kingdom, God's kingdom, right in the middle of all the others. The question under all of our texts this week is simple but searching: *When rival kingdoms converge, which kingdom do we actually trust?*³

Jerusalem the Convergence: Roads, Factions, and Rome

Dr. Cyndi Parker describes Benjamin's territory, Jerusalem's backyard, as a narrow diamond draped over the hill country, with Jericho and the Rift Valley to the east, Gaza and the coastal highway to the west, and north-south routes threading right through the middle.⁴ Because Benjamin sits in a "saddle" in the hills, roads from Jericho climb up and meet the north-south ridge road here, then spill down toward the coastal plain and the empires beyond.

Jerusalem itself, Parker notes, is at once powerful and vulnerable.⁵ To the east, the city drops off quickly toward the Mount of Olives and the Judean wilderness, with no easy east-west road running straight through the city. To the west, short wadis fall toward the Shephelah valleys, the Aijalon, Sorek, and others that act like swinging doors, opening and closing with each new empire.⁶ Control Jerusalem, and you pinch the traffic between the plateau, wilderness, and coast.

Ray Stedman helps us see what has changed during the "silent years" between Malachi and Matthew.⁷ Persia gives way to Greece under Alexander the Great, then to the divided Greek kingdoms, then eventually to Rome. The royal line of David fades; the high priesthood becomes a political appointment; factions form: Pharisees guarding tradition, Sadducees aligning with political power, Hellenists compromising with Greek culture, and later Zealots ready to take up the sword.⁸

By the first century, when Jesus enters Jerusalem, Rome's eagle standards are never far from view.⁹ Herod's family, descendants of Esau through Idumea, sit on the throne only by Rome's permission, while the temple has become both the beating heart of Jewish hope and the contested stage on which all these powers perform.

¹ Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land (Historical Geography)*, BS600-11, "Benjamin."

² Ray C. Stedman, "The Four-Hundred Silent Years," in *Adventuring through the Bible*, October 2, 1966.

³ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 233-235.

⁴ Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land*, BS600-11, "Benjamin"; BS600-12, "The Shephelah."

⁵ Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land*, BS600-11.

⁶ Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land*, BS600-12.

⁷ Note to self, UPDATE: Stedman, "The Four-Hundred Silent Years."

⁸ Daniel 11; Note UPDATE: Josephus, *Antiquities*

⁹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke 18-24* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 69-72.

From a Bowen Family Systems perspective, Jerusalem is an anxious system under chronic stress: multiple “selves” (parties, rulers, movements) triangling around fear, threat, and control.¹⁰ Rival kingdoms are converging, and everybody is watching for a Messiah who will take their side.¹¹

Palm Sunday: The Wrong Kind of Victory Parade (Luke 19).

Luke 19 shows us Jesus deliberately stepping into that convergence.¹² He sends disciples to fetch a colt, fulfilling Zechariah’s promise of a king who comes humble and riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Luke 19:30-35). Pilgrims crowd the road, shouting, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” language that sounds dangerously political under Roman occupation (Luke 19:38).

But look where He’s coming from. He crests the Mount of Olives, that eastern ridge overlooking the city and the Temple Mount, with the wilderness dropping off behind Him. From this vantage point, Jesus can see the city as the prophets saw it: a place of promise and peril, beauty and blindness.¹³

And He weeps (Luke 19:41). “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace!” Jesus cries, “but now they have been hidden from your eyes.” [Luke 19:42]. The word for “peace” is *eirēnē*, shalom, wholeness, the very thing Jerusalem’s name seems to promise but cannot deliver on its own.¹⁴

Friends, this is the clash of kingdoms. Jerusalem wants peace through control, through clever alliances and careful compromise. Jesus offers peace through surrender, through a cross.

In Bowen terms, Jesus is the most differentiated person in the most anxious city on earth.¹⁵ He knows who He is, He knows His mission, and He stays lovingly connected without getting swept into their reactivity. Where we would escalate, He weeps (Luke 19:41-44).

Temple, Trials, and Cross: Rival Kingdoms Laid Bare (Luke 19-23).

What happens next in Luke is all temple-centered (Luke 19:45-48). Jesus walks straight into the place that sits at the collision point of Rome’s power, priestly authority, economic interests, and people’s hopes.¹⁶ He drives out the money-changers, quoting Isaiah and Jeremiah as He declares, “My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a robbers’ den.” [Luke 19:46; Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11.).

This is not Jesus losing His temper; it is Jesus staging a prophetic sign-act.¹⁷ He is saying, in effect, “The system at the center of your life has become misaligned with the heart of God, and judgment is coming.”¹⁸

From that moment, every group takes its shot at Him. The chief priests and scribes challenge His authority (Luke 20:1-8, 20). The Pharisees try to trap Him with questions about taxes to Caesar, “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” hoping to force Him to choose between Rome and the people.¹⁹ The Sadducees devise clever riddles about resurrection that they don’t really believe in, trying

¹⁰ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford, 1985), 220-35.

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 492-498.

¹² Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 232-238.

¹³ Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 239-241; cf. Luke 19:41-44.

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 239.

¹⁵ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 219-223.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 242-245.

¹⁷ MacArthur, *Luke 18-24*, 95-98.

¹⁸ Luke 19:43-44; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 413-416.

¹⁹ Luke 20:20-26; MacArthur, *Luke 18-24*, 117-21.

to expose Him as naïve (Luke 20:27-40). Even the people's expectations become another kingdom pressing in: "Give us the kind of Messiah we want, powerful, nationalistic, victorious." [Luke 23:35-39].²⁰

Underneath each question is the same demand: *Join our kingdom, Jesus* (Luke 20-23). Be our champion, our proof, our weapon, our mascot. But Jesus refuses to be co-opted (Luke 23:1-5). He will not become Rome's client ruler, nor a zealot general, nor a temple politician, nor a safe religious teacher who leaves the status quo intact (Luke 22-23).²¹

Instead, He stands before Pilate and Herod as the true King who looks nothing like the kings of this world.²² He is mocked, beaten, and sentenced to death between two criminals, a failed revolutionary on one side, a hardened thief on the other (Luke 23:32-38). The inscription above His head, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS", is meant as a joke, but heaven takes it literally.²³

From a Friends perspective, this is holiness revealed as *faithful presence* in the place of maximum conflict.²⁴ Jesus does not withdraw from the convergence of rival kingdoms; He walks right into it and bears their violence in His own body (Philippians 2:5-11). The cross is where every human kingdom, religious and secular, throws its worst at God, and God answers not with more violence but with self-giving love.²⁵

Pentecost: God's Kingdom Revealed in the Same City (Acts 2).

If the story ended with a cross, the rival kingdoms would win (Luke 23:44-49). But in Jerusalem, the convergence point, God's kingdom is revealed in power three days later (Luke 24:1-7). The empty tomb, the risen Christ, and the ascension all point to one reality: the crucified Jesus is now the exalted Lord (Luke 24:36-53; Acts 2:32-36).

By the time we reach Acts 2, Jerusalem is again crowded, this time for Pentecost (Acts 2:1-6). The same city that rejected Jesus now hears Spirit-empowered preaching in a dozen languages (Acts 2:7-11). Peter stands up, not a calm leader by temperament, but a man whose fears have been re-ordered by grace, and proclaims that the Jesus whom they crucified, God has made "both Lord and Christ."²⁶

Notice where this happens, likely in or near the temple precincts, the same contested sacred space where Jesus drove out the money-changers, where He debated with leaders, and where sacrifices were offered day after day.²⁷ Now the sacrifice is complete, and the Spirit is poured out (Acts 2:17-21, 46).

In Friends' language, the Light of Christ is no longer centered on a single building or a single altar but poured out on "all flesh" sons and daughters, young and old, servants and free.²⁸ The "temple" is becoming a people, a Spirit-filled community living out the kingdom in everyday life (Acts 2:17-18, 42-47).²⁹

²⁰ Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 279-282

²¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 529-535.

²² MacArthur, *Luke 18-24*, 269-275.

²³ Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 283-86.

²⁴ Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, 137-40.

²⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 359-64

²⁶ Paul N. Anderson, *Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 101-104.

²⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 885-887.

²⁸ George Fox, *Journal*, in *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John L. Nickalls (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 33-35.

²⁹ Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, 169-71.

Wesley would say this is sanctifying and missional grace on display; God not only forgiving sinners but forming a people who embody holy love in the middle of the world's empires.³⁰ Bowen would add: the Spirit is increasing the community's capacity to stay non-anxious, deeply connected, and clearly centered in Christ even as pressure mounts.³¹

Paul Back in Jerusalem: Old Factions, New Courage (Acts 21-23).

Fast-forward to Acts 21-23, and we're back in Jerusalem with Paul. Decades have passed since Pentecost, but the same fault lines still run through the city.³²

Paul comes bringing an offering from Gentile churches to the poor in Jerusalem, a beautiful act of cross-cultural generosity (Acts 24:17). Yet rumors swirl that he teaches Jews to abandon Moses, and a mob seizes him in the temple courts (Acts 21:27-31). Roman soldiers intervene, not out of love for Paul but to keep order in the volatile convergence of empire, faith, and identity (Acts 21:31-36).

Then Luke gives us this almost comic scene in Acts 23, where Paul realizes his audience is split between Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6-10). He mentions "the resurrection of the dead," and instantly the old party lines flare up, the factions turn on each other, and the Roman commander has to pull Paul out for fear they'll tear him apart.

Same city. Same rival kingdoms. Same temple mount. But look at the difference in Paul (Acts 21-23). The man who once used Jerusalem's power structures to persecute the church now bears joyful witness to Christ in front of mobs, councils, and governors.

He is, to use our familiar language, calmer in anxious spaces.³³ He stays connected to his own people, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city" while clearly owning his new identity in Christ (Acts 22:3). He doesn't demonize Pharisees or Sadducees; he simply keeps putting Jesus' resurrection at the center (Acts 23:6).

In other words, Paul becomes in Jerusalem what we are called to be in Marion: a differentiated disciple, bearing witness to God's kingdom in the middle of political, religious, and cultural anxiety.³⁴

Bringing It Home: Where Do Our Kingdoms Converge?

So what do we do with all this Temple Mount geography, intertestamental factions, Palm Sunday, Pentecost, and Paul's trials? Let me name a few "convergences" closer to home.

1. Our internal Jerusalem.

Every one of us has a kind of "inner Jerusalem," a place where competing kingdoms meet (Romans 7:21-25). There's the kingdom of my comfort, the kingdom of my reputation, the kingdom of my political tribe, the kingdom of my fears, and then the kingdom of God, quietly but persistently calling, "Follow Me" (Luke 9:23).³⁵ Holiness here doesn't mean we never feel the pull; it means we keep choosing Jesus as our true King even when every other kingdom is yelling for our loyalty.³⁶

³⁰ John Wesley, "The General Spread of the Gospel," in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 485-500.

³¹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 234-239.

³² Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 3107-3112.

³³ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 233-236.

³⁴ Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 47-52; Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, 186-190.

³⁵ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York: Gotham, 2012), 154-158.

³⁶ Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, 195-198.

2. **Our congregational Jerusalem.**

Churches can become convergence points, too.³⁷ Different expectations, traditions, and temperaments collide in one community. Some of us are more “Pharisee”, we love the traditions and guard the boundaries. Some are more “Sadducee”; we want to keep peace with the powers that be and avoid anything too supernatural. Some lean “Zealot”, we want to fix things *now* and don’t understand why everyone else is so slow.³⁸

Friends' holiness does not mean pretending those differences don't exist; it means learning to listen to Christ together, in the Light, and to stay at the table even when it's tense.³⁹ It means letting the Spirit make us a Pentecost people, many languages, one message; many gifts, one Lord; many stories, one kingdom (Acts 2:5-11, 42-47).

3. **Our public Jerusalem.**

Finally, our town, our nation, our world are full of convergences: media wars, cultural conflicts, election cycles, economic fears (Psalm 2:1-4). Everything in that environment trains us either to pick a side and fight or to withdraw into cynicism.⁴⁰ The way of Jesus is different (“Sermon on the Mount,” cf. Matthew 5-7).

We are called to live as people of the kingdom in the middle of all that, not above it, not under it, not fused with it (Philippians 3:20-21). That means speaking truth without contempt, practicing justice without hatred, and showing mercy without naivete (Micah 6:8).⁴¹ It means, as we've said in this series, being a *faithful presence*, calm, courageous, prayerful, willing to bear some of the world's pain instead of returning it.

Invitation: Let the King Weeping over Jerusalem Reign in You

As we close, I want you to picture Jesus again, standing on the slope of the Mount of Olives, looking over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). He sees the walls, the temple courts, the Roman fortress, the markets, the crowded streets. He sees the different parties scheming and maneuvering (Luke 22:1-6). He sees what will happen forty years later when Rome comes and tears it all down (Luke 19:43-44).

But He also sees Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). He sees a remnant filled with the Spirit, breaking bread together, listening for His voice, living a different kind of life at the exact same geographic center (Acts 2:42-47). He sees Paul, years later, standing courageously in that same city, bearing witness before councils and governors (Acts 23:11).

And He sees you (Hebrews 12:2).

He sees the convergence in *your* life, the pressures, the loyalties, the fears (Psalm 139:1-4). He sees the rival kingdoms that promise peace but cannot deliver it (Jeremiah 2:13). And still, He rides toward you, humble and persistent, not to crush you but to save you.⁴²

So here is the invitation tonight:

- Where have you been asking Jesus to “join your kingdom” rather than surrendering to His? [Luke 19:11-27].

³⁷ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 221-227.

³⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 534-536.

³⁹ Fox, *Journal*, 40-42; Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, 214-218.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 22-27.

⁴¹ Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 89-92.

⁴² Matthew 11:28-30; cf. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part One* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 137-139.

- Where do you feel most anxious, most reactive, most tempted to grab control instead of trusting His peace? [Philippians 4:6-7].
- Where is He calling you, not to withdraw from the convergence, but to walk into it as a person rooted in His love? [John 15:4-12].

Let's offer those places to Him (Romans 12:1-2). Let's invite the same Spirit who fell at Pentecost to fall on us again, to make us a people who reveal God's kingdom in the very places where rival kingdoms converge.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, true King,
You wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the things that make for peace.
We confess that we also chase lesser kingdoms and trust lesser lords.
By Your cross, forgive us. By Your Spirit, center us.
Make us a calm, courageous, holy people in the middle of our own convergences,
so that in our homes, our church, and our city,
Your kingdom may be revealed.
In Your name we pray.
Amen.

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