

Series: THE ANSWER NO ONE EXPECTED!—March 13, 2011

WITHOUT CASTLES, THRONES AND ARMIES

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1. Every so often—something unusual—unexpected happens in history. And you **ask** yourself, “How’d that happen?” A recent example would be the Facebook phenomenon that played a role in the revolution happening right now in Egypt—running concurrently with the movie, **The Social Network**. **Very** strange! A geeky 19 year old Harvard student, who hardly has any friends, comes up with the ultimate social network—one that now connects 500 million people. And this network connects people who change the whole political landscape in a Middle Eastern nation.

-A repressive European system dubbed **The Iron Curtain** seems to be absolutely unchangeable—and unstoppable. A massive nuclear build-up, sabre-rattling, threats, and economic sanctions don’t seem to even phase this **Curtain**—pounding on it makes it stronger. And then, one day, Christmas Eve, Romania—a bunch of people standing outside a Baptist Church holding candles refuse to move when they’re threatened., “No more!” And that was the start. This immense, impenetrable steel curtain came crashing down in **months**—not decades!

-And you have to ask the question, “Is there **more** to this story?” I mean, think about it; if someone had told you that Apartheid in South Africa, would be dismantled without violence—mainly through the influence of an African bishop named Desmond Tutu, no one would’ve **ever** believed you. My sense is that God is behind most—actually—**all** of the good surprises in the world.

2. The writings of the prophets in this ancient book called the Bible tell us that there is one more **massive** surprise coming. And that surprise is that all the evil and sadness and war and injustice and disease and death—the whole broken, sickening mess—will end. The **surprise** is that **shalom** will win that day—and things will be **as they should be!** The **bigger** surprise is that it’s already started. And the even **bigger** surprise is that right now, as we speak, the Kingdom of God is silently infiltrating every single part of this world. And it’s because God Himself has intervened in a way we **never** expected.

- a. The major problem in our world is **not** religious fundamentalism, or communism, or greed. This stuff is just the front for the spiritual evil that lies **behind** it—something that has dominated the earth since the distant reaches of time. The Bible calls it, **The kingdom of darkness**.

-The kingdom of darkness creates—and has created untold misery and death and the twisting of everything good—almost since the start of humanity. It’s headed by Satan and all the spirits and wickedness that are under his control.

-But there’s an even greater problem. We **want** to be kind and good and selfless—but our **bent** is to join the darkness. What comes naturally in us is greed, selfishness, lust, bitterness—and the list goes on. The sad truth is that we both suffer—and **create** suffering. Nothing has been left untouched.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:22 TNIV)

-Anyone here ever experienced childbirth? I experienced it vicariously when I was holding Lori's hand—and, in one of her final contractions—her grip almost brought me to my knees. **"You will pay for doing this to me!"** But I digress.

- b. And the question is—**Why?** Well, humanity used the gift of free choice to believe a lie about the One who loved them—and the lights went out. Surprisingly—God didn't say, "Man are **you** gonna pay for this!" No—he immediately launched a rescue operation. He promised that **one** day a man would be born who would **crush the snake's head**. That is, Satan—the one who deceived them—would be crushed for good—by a human.

-We've followed the trail through history over the past months—that started with Abraham—the one God would use to bless all nations. Then David came—the man after God's own heart—and God promised a Kingdom that would never end. But...not yet. The people defected, the temple was destroyed, the land God had given was taken over and possessed by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. It looked from the outside like God had rejected them forever.

- c. As their hope got dimmer and dimmer—the promise that God would send an Anointed one—one who would bring what they all longed for—Shalom—got brighter. The promise was that they would be blessed. They would flourish—and evil would suffer a humiliating defeat. That was their **hope**.

3. When Jesus was born—anticipation that something was coming was **high**—mainly because of the agony and oppression people felt. From the writing of the prophets—and the speculation of the rabbis—the expectations of this **Messiah** as he was called—were nothing short of apocalyptic. The dream was that Israel would **surpass** her former glory—and the darkness would be driven out by this descendant of David—who would come with power and slaughter the enemies.

-And you can understand those expectations. The dream Daniel interpreted for the Babylonian King said that this Messiah would **smash** the kingdoms to dust and fill the earth. It becomes clear in Daniel's prophecy that there is a cosmic battle going on between darkness and light. That is—until this All-Powerful Son of Man appears—and **all** nations bow before Him.

- a. Imagine knowing all this—and then hearing whisperings that shepherds saw angels—announcing the birth of a Saviour. Imagine hearing whisperings that a bunch of foreigners have come—saying that a Jewish king has been born—and they're looking for him.

-But then everything quieted down. The Romans continued crucifying anyone who got in their way. And Jesus, this baby who was miraculously born, lives a life that, in our culture, nobody wants: **Average**. If you want an idea of where

he lived and grew up—think Kentucky; think of people who speak with a twang and have gun-racks in their pick-ups—and horns that play Dixie.

-Jesus, for **30 years**, shows no signs of being a King or a Son of Man who holds court for all the nations. He's just—well, an apprentice carpenter; stone mason. He sleeps, has favourite foods and good friends, callouses on his hands—washes his face, goes to the synagogue, helps his family, dresses warm on cold days, light on warm days—just like everyone else. God came in the back door—and **no one** suspected it!

- b. I'm not sure what exactly happened—or what he said to his family—or how he closed his business—or what his siblings thought—but one day Jesus walked away from it all. He showed up at the Jordan River, where a well-known relative of his was baptizing people.

-When Jesus showed up—John said, “Why are **you** being baptized?” But what happened that day at the river was **not** normal. When Jesus came out of the water, the Heavens split open, the Holy Spirit came on Jesus in visible form—and **that** day God spoke from Heaven:

This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy! (Matthew 3:17 NLT)

- c. After being tested by Satan for 40 days in the wilderness—Jesus comes back. And his first public message is summarized by these words:

“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the *Kingdom of Heaven* is near.” (Matthew 4:17 NLT) What did He mean?

4. That message—the message about the ***Kingdom of Heaven*** or the ***Kingdom of God*** being near, approaching, growing in quiet under the surface--seems to form the backdrop for Jesus' life and message. When Jesus said, ***The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven is near***—that raised images of all these prophecies of the past ***finally*** coming true. Isaiah had talked about it being ***Good News*** that God reigns! That there is a sphere of reality where everything that God ***wants*** to happen—***happens!***

-The problem is that this also conjured up, in people's minds, the re-establishment of David's Kingdom—when Israel was in her glory days. For God to make that happen, he would have to reclaim his land, reclaim his people, reclaim his temple—establish peace, and rule the world. This was exciting stuff! ***It was everyone's dream!***

-Of course, to get all those things done, Jesus would need an ***exceptional*** army—with an exceptional captain—brave, armed, and bigger than life! I mean, how do you bring about a new kingdom—without force?

-Someone pulling together something like that would probably say:

I'm gathering an army to drive out the Romans, punish sinners, reclaim this world as God's property, and rule it with justice—enforced with an iron fist. Does anyone want to join me?

-Or, if it was going to be an other-worldly kingdom, someone pulling that off might say: ***I'm getting a group of righteous people all polished and ready to get beamed up in the desert. Get your lives cleaned up, and then meet me at the temple. The angels will come and scoop us up out of this mess—and those who are left behind will face the consequences.***

-But that's not what Jesus says or does.

- a. In his opening message describing his community—it becomes clear that, if this kingdom ever gets off the ground, it will be **way** different than anything anyone has ever seen. It won't be made up of the winners. You know, the well-educated, well-spoken, well-heeled, well-disciplined people who usually get chosen. This group will be dominated by people who are losers, spiritual zeros. -It will be an upside down kingdom—that will, if it works, flip the world upside down. But it won't happen by the people who have been bullied getting revenge. The world will be dominated by the meek; by people who show mercy and make peace, not war.

-And there will be a price tag. Those who are part of this Kingdom will be persecuted—sometimes hounded to their deaths. And when that happens—when they are pressed and squeezed and punctured by those who can't stand them—they will leak love and forgiveness and grace. But love **will** prevail—in the face of astounding odds.

-And the **strange** thing about Jesus' call to follow Him is that it didn't have **anything** to do with religion, or the temple—or the capital city of Jerusalem—or the re-establishment of the nation of Israel as a world power. In **fact**, this kingdom would be very soft and vulnerable, by the world's standards.

- b. The most fascinating message Jesus communicated about this kingdom He came to establish—is that He didn't come to **destroy** the sinners. See, popular thought in that culture was that if they could **just get rid of all the screw-ups**—the people who had solidly bought into being **part** of the problem—the thieves, swindlers, child-molesters, murderers, and racists—then God would be free to once again make Israel His home. Jesus said, "I didn't come to judge and destroy these people—I came to **save** them! Forgive them. Change their lives—and their eternities. **Offer them the Kingdom!**

-What was even **more** amazing—disturbing, really, is that, ultimately, Jesus made it clear that He didn't come to destroy the Romans—the neighbourhood bullies that made everyone's lives both humiliating and miserable. Jesus said strange things like, "If a Roman soldier demands that you carry his pack a mile—mess with his head—carry it **two** miles!" "Have an enemy who hates and persecutes you? Pray for them!"

-And his **question** was to everyone was, **Will you follow Me?** Will you build life **My way?**" It wasn't about performance. It wasn't about a new list of rules that Jesus brought down from the mountain. It was about how people needed to repent—change their minds about the things that were destroying their

lives—and deceiving them into thinking that everything was okay. Jesus asked, “Will you turn away from all the things that prop up your life and your ego—your knowledge, your religious performance—all your academic and marketplace achievements—and **let Me lead?**”

5. So—**what is this Kingdom Jesus came to establish?** Simply put, it’s the range of God’s effective will. It’s where things are the way God wants them to be. For example—I have a kingdom—where my effective will arranges things the way **I** want them to be. Like my car. I usually have a CD playing—and when I stop and start my car—it goes back to where I left it. I’ve arranged the mirrors, the seats, the insurance and owner’s card in the glove compartment—for the extremely rare case I would ever get stopped by the police. Why? It’s my kingdom.

-I walk into my office—and the books are arranged as I want, the computer station is ready for my laptop, pictures of my family, things made by my Dad surround me—why? That’s my kingdom.

-I walk into a home at the end of a workday—and there’s an easy chair waiting—with my slippers beside it, a glass of diet coke with ice—and chicken cooking on the grill. Why? Because I accidentally walked into the wrong house!

- a. I have a kingdom—you have a kingdom. It’s the range of my effective will—and yours is the range of your effective will. That’s a **good** thing. This freedom, this choice is one of God’s gifts. And our kingdoms merge and intersect with each other. These clumps of kingdoms form families, neighbourhoods, school systems, companies, governments, countries. When you put all these kingdoms together—they form what the Bible calls, **the kingdoms of the earth.**

-Question: How are things going in the **kingdom of the earth?** Not real well these days. Afghanistan is still a mess. Kaddafi is still threatening his citizens with retaliation. Hunger, polluted water and disease still ravage a good bit of Africa. The sex trafficking with kids is **still** going strong—growing, apparently, by one child being trained for it every 2 minutes. By the end of today, 33,000 kids will die simply as a result of the poverty they were born into.

-And that’s just the **outside.** We have some pretty impressive homes in this part of the world. How do you think things are going in those homes? We have some pretty impressive steel and glass towers here in Toronto—how do you think things are going there? Think kindness and goodness and love and justice reign? And how’s the **economy** kingdom? Not **too** bad now—for people here. Terrible for people who didn’t have much to start with.

-What if, in our world, everything was as **God** wanted it to be? That’s what Jesus taught His followers to pray for, remember?

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10 TNIV)

-See, the deal is that Heaven is the realm where God dwells—it's the sphere of God's will—which is what makes it a place of pure love, and grace and peace and stunning beauty and joy. Jesus says, "Pray that the range of God's will and reign will come **here!**"

- b. When Jesus taught, "The Kingdom of God is near"—what He was saying was that ***the process of God's reign over-taking the kingdoms of the earth has already begun!*** Right in the middle of everything—Roman oppression, bullies, wars—and all the crud that goes on. If you wanted to draw it—it would look like this—Heaven intersecting earth.

-And Heaven's ***conspiracy*** is that God Himself moved into the neighbourhood—in Jesus. He showed up here to ***take it all back; to restore everything—to make all things new—to redeem everyone who's lost.*** And He launched his offensive against the stronghold of Satan. Here's what we need to somehow understand about ***why*** Jesus came: ***We can't solve this problem ourselves!*** We humans are a little cocky. We think that if we just had more money, better governments, more self-restraint—and if everyone got a fair deal, ***we*** could bring Heaven to earth. And we can't—it a ***cosmic*** battle—fought right our homes, offices and temples.

-You see hints of this battle when Jesus directly encounters the forces of darkness. One of Jesus' first encounters takes place in a synagogue—not far from where he was raised. People ***loved*** his teaching. They're thinking, "Hey, Bubba's a preacher, now! But someone in the audience was ***very*** clear about who was talking:

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. (Mark 1:23-26 TNIV)

-This was ***not*** an unusual reaction. The forces of evil were ***terrified*** of Jesus. I'm not sure they fully understood that God had taken on flesh—but they knew He had authority over them. And no one from the outside could see what was going on. One man just seemed crazy and extremely dangerous. Jesus confronts the evil in this guy—and there are ***hundreds*** of demons that have infested his soul—and they ***all*** beg for mercy, realizing that Jesus had the power to do what He wanted with them.

-Jesus confrontation with evil happened ***almost every single day.*** He didn't just deal with demons; Jesus confronted all the sadness caused by the reign of sin and darkness—sickness, blindness, paralysis, broken relationships, betrayal, hunger, thirst—and spiritual exhaustion. Jesus was here to serve notice to the evil forces and the entire kingdom of darkness that they were on their way out! And ***that,*** friends, is at the heart of the Good News of Jesus!

-There was one **very** surprising place where evil was lodged. Know where? **Religion!** All the religious leaders—priests, rabbis, authors, Pharisees, and professors—became increasingly hostile to Jesus and His message. Think about it: God shows up to rescue everything from the incredible mess it's in—and the very ones who are **praying** to be rescued demand the execution of the Only One who can! **Very** strange.

-They saw him heal disease, multiply bread and fish, raise the dead and cast out demons. Know how they interpreted it? They said that **Jesus** was filled with Satan—and that's why He had that kind of power. Jesus said that the prostitutes and tax collectors—people who seemed the furthest away from God were **entering the kingdom ahead of the religious professionals**. That is, **they** would come under God's leadership; the religious people wouldn't.

- c. Let's be clear. Know what it means to enter the Kingdom of God/the Kingdom of Heaven (the sphere where God's will is done all the time)? It's to believe in Jesus—put your confidence in Him as the One who has come to defeat evil, once for all, to restore all who have been lost—and all that has been lost. But most of all, it means to **submit your life to His authority**.

-When you trust Him as both the **Forgiver** of your sins, the **Restorer** of your broken relationship with God, and your **Leader**, your **King**, the **One you devote your life to**—you become a part of His Kingdom—a Kingdom that extends through this life—and into eternity. In short, the Good News is that evil has been defeated at the cross—the invasion of good overcoming evil has started—and God will, in fact, finish what He has started and **everything** will be restored.

6. When Jesus taught His Followers to pray, **that's** what He meant when He taught us to pray, "Father... **Your** Kingdom come...down **here**, right here—not mine, not ours. Our kingdoms—our spheres of influence are all tainted with selfishness and pride and spite. We need **Your** leadership here. **Your** will be done on earth—**just like it does in Heaven**. I want **your** will to be done at the core of my life—right here, in my heart, in my home, in how I work, in how I relate to others, in my health, in how I handle my sexuality—**in EVERYTHING**." Why? Because, friends, we **cannot** have life and peace and grace Jesus promised when we refuse to submit to him. **God's will** being done is what makes Heaven the place everyone wants to be!

-I want you to think of what life would be like in a world where all the kingdoms—were submitted to God's leadership. Imagine--Hollywood, cyberspace, corporations, health systems, every government—**everything**—all now under the leadership of the most powerful, loving, kind and gracious Being in the universe!

-Think of what it would be like to have our value system flipped right over; where the **best** known influencers—were **not** actors, athletes, the rich and beautiful and powerful—the people who have the best veneer over their hearts. Instead—the people of influence would be people of humility and pure hearts—people who are peace-makers; people whose passion is justice and righteousness. Imagine?

-Imagine what a world would be like where greed didn't win the day? Where anger, name-calling, hatred, lust, divorce, lawsuits and slander—just **stopped!** Where streets—instead of being ruled by **the survival of the fittest**—were run by a different rule: **Treat others in the way you would want to be treated!**

-And imagine a world of no religious hypocrites; where spiritual authenticity prevailed? Imagine children raised on a solid moral foundation—not trained primarily in the obsession with winning and getting ahead. And imagine evil—wherever it's found—being shoved out of school systems, governments, judicial systems, prisons and religion?

-How many of you think that **might** be what the world is thirsty for...Longing for...Hoping for...Dying for? Well, **that** is what God is up to!

- a. Know where the reality check is for you and me? It's the distance between what we **say** we believe—and what we **really** believe. It's the distance between what we **say** we want most—and what we **actually** pursue.
- See, it's one thing to believe that Jesus is Lord—and that what He gave His life to accomplish—is good and powerful and real. It's quite another to stop rooting and cheering from the stands—and step onto the playing field, where it's muddy and dirty and sweaty. It's one thing to talk about the tragedy of the lostness of this world; it's quite another to **fully invest your life in its ONLY hope of redemption: Jesus.**

-I'm just going to be quite blunt here, if you don't mind, because **so** much is at stake. The world system has had enough of Christ-followers jabbering about the fact that Jesus is Lord; it's time to **live** it. It's time to **show** the world what it's like when Jesus is actually Lord of the way we handle our money and time. It's time to **show** the **kingdoms of this world** what it looks like when Jesus **actually is** first; more important than getting ahead and winning; when Christ-followers actually are more devoted to their children's eternities—than them being superior to other kids.

-What would life around us look like if Jesus were Lord of our sexuality, Lord of our attitudes toward others—and our jobs; if we really did put His leadership ahead of our own opinions and convenience and comfort. See, we have no right to pray, "Lord, I want your kingdom—your leadership to prevail everywhere in this world—except, over me of course." No, it's more like, "I will bow first—and give you the keys to **all** the places in my life before I expect that anyone else will."

-**That** is where Jesus calls me—and **that** is where He calls you. Will you go there?

- b. One more thing. You know this Kingdom that Jesus came to establish? Where **all** the kingdoms of this world will be infiltrated, influenced, touched—and ultimately transformed? How many of you would say this is **all** very obvious to you—you can see it in the news every night? It's not that obvious, is it? In fact, if you do a quick survey of the continents and the governments and the alleys

and the boardrooms—it would appear that God’s Kingdom/leadership is quite feeble—or even non-existent. It’s very easy to think, “Man, it looks to me like evil is winning!”

-What God has done/is doing through Jesus reminds me of the Normandy invasion. When TV networks celebrated the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy back in 1994, news broadcasters interviewed a lot of aging veterans about their memories. In that time, there were two contrasting interviews that were put back to back.

-The first man was a former marine who had landed on Omaha beach. It was a vicious bloody battle. This one guy who survived said that when he saw how powerful the defences were—and how many friends were cut down, he thought, “We’re going to lose.”

-In the very next interview, a reconnaissance pilot spoke. His mission was to fly over the entire Normandy area for those first few days, observe what he saw, the report to the generals. After the third day of observation, he said, “I came to the conclusion--***we’re going to WIN.***”

-Now, these were two first-hand reports of the very same battle. Know what made the difference? It was ***perspective***. The ***final outcome*** of what we’re facing, friends, is ***not*** up for grabs. What God is accomplishing here is inevitable. God will reclaim everything, because Love Wins—not evil. We are in a messy, tough war. Have you truly chosen—like ***really*** chosen--which side you’ll ***fight*** for?