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Transcriber's Note: This transcription is somewhat edited. Sermons are prepared to be heard, not read silently. Underlined topic headings were added for improved readability on a computer screen (website), but they disrupt the flow a bit. I recommend printing out the sermon and reading it aloud, and ignoring the topic headings while reading.

UNDERSTANDING NEW COVENANT KINGDOM ORDER

Section 1

Believers need to be a people of conviction. (Mt 7:24-27)

A mass media "sand" culture

One of the problems that we have in our culture, predicted by Marshall McLuhan, was that, being a people of mass media, we would become a people who lose our ability to think in terms of truth and falsity.

McLuhan said that we would lose our ability to reason. We would lose our ability to have real *convictions*. Our convictions would be fleeting, and we would be a *changeable* culture where whatever was on the *media* would, in effect, be *reality* for us. Therefore, truth would no longer be defined in terms of what was really there. Truth would be the experience of what we see in a film or on television.

McLuhan called this *cold communication*. (His best-known work *The Medium is the Massage*, does not mention "cold communication".) Thirty-five years ago, he predicted that this was where our culture was moving. He said that in a cold-communication culture, people would mostly act on the basis of *conditioning* and on the basis of *emotions*.

McLuhan believed that the shift from a reading culture to a picture culture and a media culture was very dangerous.

We have entered into that post-modernist, cold-communication culture.

A Bible-based "rock" culture

Believers need to produce a totally alternative culture, a culture of thinking, a culture of reasoning, a culture where we have convictions that last, no matter what hardships we face in our society and in events around us.

However, in an emotional-response culture, in an emotive culture, all decisions are made on the basis of how you *feel*.

Discerning the Spirit

It is important not to confuse the *leading of the Holy Spirit* with how you *feel*.

The Holy Spirit's voice comes to you in ideas, in prophecy, in words that can be totally apart from any feeling. It may *lead* to feeling, but it is something far transcendent of feeling. The leading of the Holy Spirit is an *objective* thing that can be confirmed, that is in accordance with the word of God.

However, many people have understood the leading of the Holy Spirit to be the orientation of their *feelings*, and that is a big mistake.

The importance of covenant community

This is why today we have tremendous moral problems in the American body of believers. People attend where they have *good feelings*. They attend where they are *entertained*. They do not expect to build lasting *covenant community*, where they will build their lives together, perhaps for a lifetime of relationship.

Covenant community is the whole foundation of our ministry, Tikkun Ministries International. We minister out of lifetime relationships.

However, most American believers attend where they *feel good*, where the *entertainment* is good. And if they tire of it after a while, or if they reach a point where they think they have consumed all a particular congregation has to offer, they go *shopping* for another one.

Lack of covenant discipline

This is why there is a lack of discipline in congregational life. It is why the divorce rate among believers is only slightly less than the non-believing world and, according to some studies, *higher* than among non-believers.

You see, if you are not building covenant community, then there is no enforcement of biblical standards of discipline. Unbiblical marriage and divorce without biblical grounds are allowed. The leadership of what we *call* "congregations", but are not really congregations in a biblical sense, looks the other way.

Modern congregations are not covenant communities

This happens because, today, congregations are not primarily *covenant communities*. They are *consumer organizations*, where a leadership produces a *product* that is *paid for* through the people who attend. The members are buying into a product, but they are not forming community. The leadership has no intention of building them into a covenant community. The members have no intention of being part of a covenant community because to them "congregation" is *only* the place you attend if you like what the leadership is producing for you in a stated meeting.

This really fits the whole cold-communication, emotional foundation of our culture. However, it produces an emptiness, a shallowness of relationships and ultimately leads to great disappointment.

Detrimental to growth

This orientation of the body of believers does not produce growth. Over the last fifteen years there has been no net gain in membership. In fact, there has been a slight decline in the number of people that are parts of institutional congregations.

Lasting convictions

My whole life from the time I entered into ministry has been oriented to seek to produce a people who live out of deep and lasting convictions of what is true.

I want to share with you today, from a Jewish context, a few of those convictions.

Proper understanding of "the Law"

We read that the rabbis reduced the 613 commandments of the Mosaic law to ten commandments -- the Ten Commandments. Then we read that Rabbi Hillel reduced the Ten Commandments to two commandments: (1) To love God with all your heart, soul, strength and resources,^[1] and (2) to love your neighbor as yourself.

In Mark 12:28 when Yeshua was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?", he essentially quoted Hillel. Here we see that, truth be told, Yeshua was *not* bringing a *new* message; rather, he was confirming that the message of the Torah had already been properly understood by those who truly had a heart for God.

Our duty to God and man

Many people want a one-sentence summary of our duty to God and to man.

One of the great summary statements of the totality of who we are to be and what we are to do is in the Great Commission in Matthew Chapter 28. Yeshua tells his disciples, "Go into all of the world and disciple all of the nations and teach them to observe *all* that I have *commanded* you."

If you really are open and honest with the pages of the New Covenant scriptures, you will find that the word "commandment" is a happy word. It is a good word, contrary to what many people in mainstream Christianity teach today.

Christians who teach "Christ freed us from the Law", do not understand the *dual nature* of God's Torah. God wants his people (1) to be saved *and* (2) to *live holy*. And remember, the word "Torah" means "instruction" or "teaching", not "Law". Deuteronomy 28 *instructs* us about "*life* and death; *blessings* and curses", blessings *conditioned* on obeying God's *commandments*.

"Teach them to *observe*"--to *obey*--"all that I *commanded* you", and *if* you are oriented that way--this is a qualified promise--"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The totality of the Law

Thus far, we have looked at the Great Commission as a summary of our duty. But I want to focus on a different verse, that also summarizes the totality of our duty as believers: Matthew 6:33. One

commandment. If you do this *one* commandment, you have the whole thing. Can you handle *one* commandment?

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That is the entire summary.

Understanding "seek the kingdom"

To understand this summary, we must determine what "seek first the kingdom" means. Unfortunately, in the body of believers there is no consensus on what this means!

Some people think to "seek first the kingdom of God" means to get in a mystical state where one thinks of heaven and clouds and harps and golden streets. It is not very concrete, and for some people it does not sound very exciting. Personally, I like thinking of harps and golden streets and things like that; I like those images.

Jewish context

But to understand the teachings of the Jewish Rabbi Yeshua correctly, we need to look at them in their First-Century Jewish context.

Defining 'the Kingdom'

So, we need to begin by asking, "What is 'the Kingdom'?" How did they understand it?

First-Century expectations

In First-Century Israel there was a tremendous ferment concerning the different parties wanting to bring about the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of his worldwide Kingdom, or the Millennial Age. The Pharisees thought they would do this through establishing priestly purity laws throughout the land. The Essenes thought they would do it by establishing separate ascetic communities. The Zealots thought they would see the Messiah come if they would just have the faith to rebel against Rome.

They all were looking for the Kingdom. But they only could conceive of it in a *physical* sense--in its Millennial Age form.

Expectations versus reality

But the message of Yeshua was that the Kingdom of God *has come* or is *at hand*, Mark 1:15. "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Good News." "At hand" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "is available to you".

Yeshua did not bring the Kingdom in its Millennial Age form, but he brought the Kingdom in a *real* form and *something happened because Yeshua came*, that was not the case of life before he came. He brought the Kingdom of God in a whole new stage, in a whole new form.

Effects of the New Covenant

To understand this new form of "the Kingdom", we have to understand the right contrast between the New Covenant and the Mosaic Order. It is not like many gentile Christian thinkers have interpreted it. It is not a matter of "law" over against "grace". Rather, the whole issue of what is available in the New Covenant is *more*. It is a *more* issue.

This is why Yeshua can say of Yochanan haMachbil, John the Immerser, "He that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than Yochanan." Even he who is least has such greater opportunities, so much greater blessing, so much increased benefit.

Why?

To you, in God's Kingdom Order, are given many *things* that our ancestors did not have during the Mosaic era.

Atonement and identification

First, you are given the reality of the death of Yeshua for your sins. You can identify with his crucifixion and experience the putting to death of the deeds of your flesh. That was not available before.

What else do you get in the New Covenant Order that was not available? You get identification with his resurrection.

You also have identification with his ascension. It now can be said that you are raised with him and seated with him in heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:5)

Indwelling Holy Spirit

You also have the benefit of the immersion in the Holy Spirit, where you enter a whole new realm of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Now you can hear the voice of God.

Spiritual gifts

You can operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You are not subject to mere human ability.

Intimate fellowship with God

You can have fellowship with God at an intimate level beyond what was available to the ordinary Israelite before.

Exodus 34:29 tells us that when Moses returned from speaking with the Lord, his face was actually *glowing* from the glory of God.

Yet 2 Corinthians 3:10 says that this New Covenant fellowship is a *transcendent* glory that is *so wonderful* that the glory that Moses had when he came down from Mount Sinai was as if he had no glory at all in comparison to the awesome brightness of the glory that is in Yeshua.

Character transformation

What else do we have in the New Covenant? We have the power of *character transformation*.

Yeshua now gives us the teaching of the Law, of the Torah, brought to the epitome of its intended meaning in the Sermon on the Mount. He shows us that we are not victims anymore. We do not have to be subject to poverty. We do not have to be subject to mourning.

Rather, we are living from and in the Kingdom of God that he brought, which is his own presence. Therefore, we can be people that do not hate, people that love our enemies, people that forgive. We can be people that are delivered from lust and adultery and have marital fidelity, people who keep our word without having to swear, people who are not into religiosity for pride. We can be people who are not storing up treasures on earth. We can be people who are not worried, but in seeking the Kingdom first have all these things added unto them.

So, the New Covenant is greater.

Continuing applicability of the Law

But it is a *Jewish* New Covenant that preserves the Torah and reapplies the Torah and reaffirms the feasts described in Leviticus 23 and all of the promises to Israel--when you study the New Covenant rightly. So, although we are not in the Mosaic era, the New Covenant takes everything that is lasting in Moses and makes it part of itself.

Greater ability to manifest God's order

Now that Yeshua has come, we have the ability to manifest the very order of God's heart, the very presence and order of God, in every dimension of our lives, at a level that was not available before.

I want to emphasize that we need to see "seeking the Kingdom of God" as our convictional stance in life. "Seeking the Kingdom of God" is seeking a *concrete* thing, not just a mystical, ethereal thing.

Seeking first

What does it mean to "seek the Kingdom *first*"?

A relationship with the King

The first and most important thing about seeking *first* the Kingdom of God is to *seek* a *deep ... relationship* with the King.

Consider John 15:15; Yeshua says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit." You cannot help but bear fruit if you abide in him. "For apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away as a branch and dries up. And they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned. But if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you."

Yeshua as our devotional focus

The New Covenant gives us a devotional focus on Yeshua, the incarnated Son of God, a devotional focus which was not clearly revealed before the time of his ministry and self-revelation. Yes, Yeshua was there with Moses in the burning bush. He was there wrestling with Ya'akov, Jacob, at Peniel.

However, the revelation of Yeshua gives a superceding wonderful devotional focus because he is the revelation of God to us. We now have an ability to develop a devotional life in him. We have the ability to read his words, and to hear them with depth. We have the ability to know his presence in our life through the Holy Spirit. This means that the foundation of "seeking the Kingdom of God" is seeking deep fellowship with him on a constancy of devotional life.

Quality time with Yeshua

No one ever can be said to "seek the Kingdom first" who is not daily and regularly spending quality time with Yeshua. This means reading the Word not so much for study and information but to understand it rightly. It also means reading it *at the same time* with an eye of fellowship, of how the Spirit is putting you into contact with Yeshua, how, as you are reading the Word, the Holy Spirit is speaking to *you*, personally and individually, so that you are reading the Word of God *every* day, devotionally. It means that you are also spending time apart from normal activities. You occasionally spend a day of fasting and prayer and seeking God, a day of listening to his voice, a day of solitude.

There are individual disciplines that are absolutely essential if you are to be transformed into his likeness. Therefore, the devotional life of the individual is the most foundational thing that all of us *must* incorporate into our lives.

Only then will we be not subject to every wind of doctrine. Only then will we come into a place where there is a stability and a peace and a security in navigating through this particular world, which is going to be full of storms and very high waves.

Seeking the Kingdom corporately

We must understand that seeking the Kingdom of God, devotionally, is not just an individual thing. This is because God has created us to be a *corporate* people. He seeks to join us into a body. The scripture says that we are not to see ourselves as members of a congregation on the basis of attendance. Rather, we are to see ourselves as members of a congregation because it is where we are submitted to be equipped to do the work of ministry. And in that submission, we are to meet in small groups. We are to pray for one another. We are to be accountable to one another. And we are to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit to *mutual upbuilding*.

We have to understand that "seeking the Kingdom of God first" means both seeking the King in individual devotion, but it also means seeking the King in *corporate community relationship* and devotion. None of us will be transformed into the likeness of his image without a quality of community, a quality of shared life, a quality of accountability. How many other ways can it be said? A quality of the mutual exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. A quality of mutual prayer for one another. Therefore, we have to get to know one another in some sub-group of the community where we are really *helping* one another to grow into that likeness.

We have to see that conformity to Yeshua is not just an individualistic accomplishment, although the individual part is important. It is a *communal* accomplishment.

Section 2

That leads us to the second point. It is almost transitional when you think of the importance of the *body* of believers as a *corporate community*, not just a meeting that I attend.

Our relationship to the King is something we experience individually, but it is experienced corporately when we worship together, when we meet in small groups together, when we pray for one another, when we exercise the gifts.

This ability to experience the King in this way is part of the New Covenant Order. It is part of the benefit that was not available before.

So, the first thing in seeking God's Kingdom is to *seek the King*.

Kingdom Order in the believer's life

The second thing, is to seek to establish God's Kingdom Order in every dimension of your life. This immediately takes us out of the *subjective*, into conviction. It immediately takes us into a place where we begin to think in terms of Torah. We begin to think in terms of commands. We begin to understand that the grace of God is not just God becoming kind of like an old grandfather and no longer requiring much anymore.

There are some people who think of God that way. "God was very *hard* in the times of the Hebrew Scripture period. But since Yeshua came, God is *so* much *nicer* than he used to be! He *matured* over the years! He mellowed!"

I would say "I want you to read the *last* book of the Bible and see how much God has mellowed"

When we read "seek God's Kingdom first" part of our witness to the world is that we show God's Kingdom Order because the Kingdom is found wherever his will is done. Yeshua says that we are to seek to *disciple*, to teach people to observe all that he commanded.

Yeshua's commandments include all of the commandments from Moses that are relevant, as you know from Matthew 5:17-18. You have studied this; you are in a Messianic congregation. I am sure that Matthew 5:17-18 is something now that is just clearly part of your conviction: teaching the greatest of these commands *and* the least of these commands, which Yeshua said we are to do.

The commandments establish order

It is in the *commandments* that we find God's order for every dimension of human life.

Kingdom Order in the family

We are called to bring *marriage* into God's Order. "Seeking the Kingdom first" means that I seek that my wife and I have the kind of relationship that is in God's Order. That is an Order of love. The Order of God is not an external, empty kind of rigid thing. We read in the commandments that the Order of God for a husband and a wife is that the husband loves his wife as the Messiah loved his congregation and lays down his life for her. The wife is submitted to her husband and obedient in all things that do not contradict, that are not contrary to, the Word of God.

But they come into a place, really, honestly, in God's Kingdom Order, it is attainable, there is this thing, honest, called "marital bliss"! Now, I am not saying you are going to experience it all the time. But you *can* experience it *most* of the time. And Kingdom Order has to do with seeking God for marital bliss in your marriage and that is the way you treat one another in love through the power of Yeshua in *you*. You become different through his power.

I do not treat my wife the same as I did when we first got married. Thank God! I am just being real honest with you. *I* did not do it. But I have a tenderness to this woman, a compassion. When I am short with her I am *so* repentant I am beside myself. That is *God's* work. That is Kingdom Order.

And she has a whole different orientation, of willingness to serve. A compassion grows up in a couple over the years, that they will do the right thing. It produces something beyond anything that Hollywood has ever dreamed of.

It is Kingdom Order for the family, and the children, and how we raise them, how we discipline them, the quality of time we spend with them. If we do not know how to do it, we are going to seek God, because we are committed to his Kingdom Order.

Kingdom Order in congregational life

I already spoke about congregational life under point one. We are to seek God's Order for congregational life, where we are a covenant community, an extended family, under an eldership, willing to be committed and pay the price to gather much more frequently. If you are going to create community, it is not going to happen Saturday [or Sunday] morning in a couple of hours. It is going to be meeting *outside* of the context of *stated* meetings. It is going to mean *other* stated meetings where you gather in small groups and you get to know one another and you get to care for one another. It means that you are all seeking to be equipped by five-fold ministry -- apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers -- who equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Every one of these giftings has an equipping dimension that you need, to become what you are called to be in God.

The evangelist is what motivates you and equips you to be a good witness.

The prophet teaches you how to hear the voice of God and be a prophetic people.

The pastor equips you to love one another and to serve one another, so that your relationships last instead of being pulled apart. We have got to show the world lasting relationships through the body of believers.

This is the Kingdom Order.

Lord of our life

However, Yeshua did not stay within the limitations of family and congregation. Yeshua demands to be Lord of *every* dimension of our life. He wants to be Lord over the art pieces you hang in your house, or the paintings that *you* paint if you are an artist, or the sculpture that you chisel, because *everything* is done to the glory of God. No, a believer cannot do art for art's sake, as you hear in the artistic world. Art must be for *his* glory.

Now, that does not mean you can only paint religious subjects. No, that is a terrible misunderstanding! "Well, I guess I'm a believer now. I'm going to have to just paint crucifixions."

Maybe you will paint family life. Maybe you will paint nature. Maybe you will paint abstractions, to show the beauties of color and form.

But whatever you do, there has to be a motive and intent to the glory of God. In the way you arrange your house. In the way you furnish it. There is a glory of God that you are seeking to bring in.

Kingdom Order in political life

Yeshua claims the education world, and he claims, indeed, the political world. Do you know ... I am going to tell you something shocking ... that **you** are voting *citizens* of this country? As believers, God *expects* you to show God's Kingdom Order for civil political life!

Do you know that **God** wants you to read a book on *economics*, so that you *understand* what the Democrats and Republicans are debating? "Horrors! I'm going to read something about basic economics, so that I know who I'm voting for and what their policies are!"

God may expect you to read a little bit about the origins of our country and the Constitution and to begin to understand how biblical principles are to influence our government, without destroying the separation of church and state, but recognizing that the state is accountable to God for its sphere.

If we are citizens and we vote, don't you think we should educate ourselves so that we are not just subject to sound bites and McLuhan's cold communication? All political campaigns now are cold communication campaigns. They do not deal with truth seriously. To be a good citizen, you have to educate yourself. That is part of seeking God's Kingdom first!

"Well, I'm just not interested in politics."

Well, then don't vote!

It would only take a couple of books to understand the basic differences of economic theory and then to take them and to go to the scriptures and to study the Year of Jubilee and what God says about economics and to kind of figure out where you stand.

Do you believe in powerful central government or decentralized government?

Do you believe, as Lord Acton said, that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."?

Will you seek the Kingdom first in the political and civil realm?

Kingdom Order in education

Will you seek the Kingdom first in the way you educate your children? Parents, you cannot give your children up to the public school for umpteen hours every week, thirty-five hours a week and say "They're being educated fine there" and not do anything about it. If you have children and they are in public school, you have a massive education task. You must *uneducate* what was wrong, reaffirm what was right and then to *add* education to it.

Educating your children is a realm that Yeshua claims. You see, to "seek his Kingdom first" means to seek to establish his Order of Torah in every area of life.

Section 3

Extending the Kingdom

And number three, "seeking God's Kingdom first" means to seek to *extend* the Kingdom to those that have not had opportunity to be invited into it. We are to call everybody, like the Prodigal Son, to return

to the Father's house and submit under his rule. That is the only salvation there is. The idea that "I pray a prayer and go to Heaven, and that is salvation" is *totally* unbiblical.

God's hope for the hopeless

The invitation is the invitation to enter the Kingdom of God *through* the death and resurrection of Yeshua and to submit under the Father's rule. The Good News is that no matter how messed up you are, God will put everything in your life in right order if you return to the Father's house and submit under his rule.

There is hope for the hopeless.

In my years of being involved in pastoring, I have watched how many people who I thought would not amount to *anything*, who were *really* messed up, become *something* because they really submitted to God and to leadership.

I have also watched other people, who looked pretty good, become rebellious and go off the deep end. *I* had thought they were really God's hope for the world. So, in God's Kingdom Order, there is hope for everyone.

Getting involved with unbelievers

We cannot be "seeking God's Kingdom first" if we live within a ghetto of just believers. We have to be involved in serving other people *outside* of the believing community. Our light is not to be hidden under a bushel basket, our light is to be put on a lampstand.

By being involved with others, we are not trying to parade our good works in a proud kind of way. When we are involved in serving and loving, people begin to ask *us* for the reason for the hope that is within us. This is because they see us walking around with light and hope.

If you are really a Kingdom person, this thing is contagious. There are people who will come up to you--wanting to avoid it--but they will say "I can't stand it anymore! How come you have such hope and joy all the time??? How come you walk with such peace??? How come you are always giving yourself to others instead of being selfish? *What is it about you, anyway???*"

I want to encourage you--especially if you are a Messianic Jewish congregation--to become involved in serving the Jewish community. You are not going there to preach *at* people, but to develop friendships, and *care*. Because this is a congregation whose primary heart is to win Jewish people. You cannot do that if you are not serving and developing friendships with Jewish people!

Conclusion

You give money to extend the Kingdom of God. You give your life to extend the Kingdom of God. Because the Kingdom *has come*. There is healing of the body. There is healing for the soul. There is restoration for every person, in every situation.

When you begin to understand the Kingdom, you begin to understand how much more is available to us because Yeshua came. He calls it "the pearl of great price for which you sell everything else", the treasure in the field--you spend your last penny to buy that field to gain that treasure.

After a pretty long number of years walking with the Messiah, forty-two years now, I have come to believe that the life and teaching of Yeshua is the center of my devotion. It is the height of revelation. It is that out of which I live and go on when things are tough.

So what is the sum of the Law?

To love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself?

Yes.

To teach them to observe all of his commandments?

Yes.

But that is all simply part of *one* commandment: Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,--that is, his Torah Order for every dimension of human life,--and all the things you need will be abundantly supplied, if you will do this, if we can make that our focus, if we can make that our orientation: "God, I am going to be the kind of person that has deep conviction about truth, and I am going to be the kind of person that seeks to bring your Kingdom Order into everything for which I am responsible."

That does not come by your own human effort, but by depending upon Yeshua's power working through you. It is not us that accomplish it. On the contrary, it is his power through us that establishes his kingdom.

-- Endnote --

Regarding the Translation of Mark 12:28 as "Resources" instead of "Mind"

In everyday conversation, Yeshua and Hillel spoke Aramaic, not Greek.

For various reasons beyond the scope of this sermon, it is obvious to linguists and translators that the original conversation of Mark 12:28 was either in Aramaic or its sister language Hebrew, which was no longer spoken in everyday use. The actual conversation was definitely not in Greek.

The Aramaic and Hebrew word translated "resources" can properly be translated either "might", "mind", "strength" or "resources", i.e., wealth.

Contrary to common belief, very few biblical Greek translators have a thorough knowledge of First-Century Aramaic. Hence, although a translation may properly translate the text from Greek to English, it may not capture the exact meaning of the actual original words.

Christian Bibles usually translate the word as "mind". This gives rise to debates about "What is the difference between 'heart' and 'mind', since the Jewish understanding of 'heart' in biblical terms is 'mind'?"

Various Jewish sources translate Hillel's statement as "heart, soul, strength and resources", which makes more sense. Most likely, this is the sense in which Yeshua used the word.