



## The Upside-Down Kingdom

*Donald B. Kraybill*

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## **The Upside-Down Kingdom** Donald B. Kraybill

An intriguing study of the kingdom of God in the Gospels. Donald B. Kraybill says social, religious, and economic practices of the dominant culture usually favor the rich, powerful, prestigious. Jesus, on the other hand, favors those who suffer at society's margins and fall between the cracks. Winner of the National Religious Book Award: Best Religious Book of the Year. Revised and updated.

## **The Upside-Down Kingdom Details**

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Author : Donald B. Kraybill

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## From Reader Review The Upside-Down Kingdom for online ebook

### Esther says

Challenging to read.

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### Douglas Wilson says

Let me say a few nice things about this book first.

The first thing is that Kraybill is obviously a very nice man. Second, he has a very helpful grasp of a number of historical details about first century Palestine that I found very constructive. I learned a number of good things from him on this count. Third, he has a good gift of phrasing a commonplace -- and comes up with the kind of thing that every biblically literate Christian would agree with, and learn from at the same time. That was good.

On the down side . . .

He is pretty clearly an Abelardian on the atonement, which obliterates any possibility of a true "up-side down" kingdom.

And this is why the book over all was pathetic. Kraybill is stuck in a profound paradigmatic blindness, one which does not enable him to see how radically he truncates his calls for radical discipleship. This is scratch n' sniff radical discipleship. This is radical discipleship lite. This is shadow boxing, pull-the-punch radical discipleship.

He gets all the rhetorical steam he can get out of passages like Luke 14:33. But then, when he discusses what this might look like in actual financial practice, this "let it all hang out" Jubilee lifestyle, the best he can come up with is a graduated tithe (p. 128). Someone who follows his advice still gets to keep a salary of 34K (even though on his reading Jesus said to give it all away), and despite the fact that he acknowledges a few pages later that this is wildly more than what the poor in other nations have to live on (p. 132). "The Jubilee message strikes home." Yeah, with a nerf bat. The point is not to do what you are actually maintaining that Jesus said to do. The point is to maintain rhetorical superiority over those of us who say that Jesus taught nothing of the kind.

He says that Jesus said that we are to live in a "up-side down" way. This can be accomplished, he goes on to reassure us, if we lean slightly to the left.

On p. 135, he equates babies with plastic litter and gas-guzzlers. Gkkk. In sum, this is a really poor book.

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### Shoshanna says

This is a book from the evangelical tradition. It is a must read for any organizer working with a pentacostal church!

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### **Greg Williams says**

In this book, the author confronts us with the fact that we often don't take Jesus and His message seriously. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day, we are good at finding ways to soften the radicalness of Jesus' teaching to fit better with our culture and make us more comfortable with it. Kraybill looks in detail at Jesus' teaching about God's Kingdom. In particular, he focuses on what Jesus's words and actions say with respect to power, religion, and wealth. In all these areas and more, he shows how "upside-down" His Kingdom is compared to the kingdoms of this world.

I found this book to be well-researched and well-reasoned. It was also a challenging read because it called my own faithfulness to Jesus' Kingdom into question. This is a book I will read again. I highly recommend this book to any Christian who is interested in learning more about Jesus' Kingdom and its implications for how we live here and now.

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### **heidi says**

makes me step outside my lifelong evangelical bubble enough to approach my newfound anabaptism.

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### **James Townsend says**

#### **Powerful reminder for all Christ followers**

We need this book again today in the messed up world in which we live. Our only devotion is to Christ the King.

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### **CK says**

The basic premise of the book is that the Kingdom Jesus announced in his day was revolutionary and totally at odds with the political, economic and religious expectations of the day; nothing is new under the sun, and the author argues it is just as upside-down today, and calls for us to embrace and live out these Kingdom values in our day-to-day.

The author starts by framing Jesus' temptation in the desert as real temptations to avoid the way of the Cross, but instead to use brute-force power to achieve political, economic and religious goals. The author shows that these temptations were very real and very tempting, and believers alike today: one can see how politicians have used the name of God to achieve political power; pastors who promote wealth and prosperity instead of the way of the cross; and churches which so want to preserve their status quo that they run the risk of missing God's heart entirely.

Instead, the author argues that the "Jubilee" spirit is precisely the spirit of the Kingdom that Jesus announces, challenging our views of power, wealth, piety: Kingdom values should open our pocket books, bring our

religious structures back to the heart of God, and shatter walls and hierarchies that divide us from each other through Jesus' agape love. The author urges us to identify and take up our "barn ministry" whereby we serve each other and be a witnessing community through our service to one another.

The author's scholarship is outstanding, and I learned so much about the political, economic and religious climates in Jesus' day, which helped bring out just how outrageous Jesus' teachings and parables sounded to that ancient audience. And today. Just that in itself was worth the read. Definitely challenged me to think intentionally how we ought to live.

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### **Hank says**

The Upside-Down Kingdom is an incredibly challenging book, highlighting a lifestyle of service that leads to costly-discipleship. A must read for all who claim to follow Jesus, especially those in paid ministry.

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### **Doug says**

On my second reading of this, I conclude that this recent classic is perhaps the best, single, lay introduction to the way of the cross. Because it wonderfully avoids denominational particulars, political trendiness, and academese, I could put this book in the hands of many folks without worrying about distracting side issues. It sticks to scriptural arguments and anticipates objections and knows the issues. It's already setup for group study, too. If I could give only one book to a person wanting to get a basic grasp of the way of the Cross, this would be it.

Quotes:

"Our overriding temptation is to save our lives in both systems. We want to save our life in this world and in the community of God's people. We want to succeed by secular standards and by kingdom values. Making it in the kingdoms of this world often requires accommodation and compromise." (266)

"Instead of mimicking a typical king, Jesus worked from the bottom up. Rather than demanding service, he served. Rather than dominating, he invited. As servant, waiter, and janitor, he ministered to those strewn on the human dump. The powerful weren't amused. They responded with their kind of power – a violent cross." (251)

"The power of the upside-down kingdom lies in the corporate life of its citizens. Kingdom life means doing God's things together. Jesus would have been less of a threat if he hadn't gathered a community of followers around him. A wandering vagabond dropping wise sayings doesn't threaten the established order. Jesus' words on riches, power, love and compassion assume his people share a corporate life together. He calls us to repent and join a disciple group characterized by spiritual, emotional, and economic interdependence." (267)

On the-poor-will-always-be-with-you: "Jesus quotes directly from Deuteronomy 15, the chapter with Jubilee and sabbatical instructions. Earlier in the passage God tells the Hebrews that if they're obedient there will be no poor in the land. God then says that if they harden their hearts, there will be poor. As long as greed and selfishness continue, the poor will be among them." (135)

"Many of the rich in Jerusalem derived their wealth from vast country estates farmed by slaves and hired men or rented to tenants....An elite aristocracy made up the chief priests, wealthy landowners, merchants, tax collectors, and the Sadducean Party called Jerusalem home....On the Day of Atonement, everyone was required to go barefoot. To protect her feet, the wife of a high priest carpeted the path from her house to the temple." (77)

"It's easier for the poor to enter the kingdom because they aren't entangled in property and prestigious reputations....The poor understand dependence, simplicity, and cooperation. They know the difference between needs and luxuries." (120)

"Any gospel which isn't social isn't gospel. God's love for the world produced social action. God didn't just sit in a great theological rocking chair and muse about loving the world. God acted. God entered social affairs -- in human form. Through Jesus, God lived and interacted in a real social environment. Jesus, in essence, disclosed God's social habits. In the Incarnation, the spiritual became social." (29)

"Things in the gospels are upside down. Good Guys turn out to be Bad Guys. Those we expect to receive the reward get a spanking instead. Those who think they are headed for heaven land in hell. Things are reversed. Paradox, irony, and surprise permeate the teachings of Jesus. They flip our expectations upside down. The least are the greatest. The immoral receive forgiveness and blessing. Adults become like children. The religious miss the heavenly banquet. The pious receive curses....Again and again, turning our world upside down, the kingdom surprises us." (24)

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### **Cameron Macormic says**

Chapters 2 through 4 are an awesome insight into Luke Chapter 4 (the three tests of Jesus in the wilderness) from a Jewish sociocultural/historical perspective.

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### **Jason Evans says**

The kingdom of God can be elusive of simple definition. It is often something very hard to explain. It is understood, evidenced in practice, quite differently across the Christian community. In his book, *The Upside Down Kingdom*, Donald Kraybill takes up the challenge of explaining the kingdom. Apparent by his title, Kraybill offers that the kingdom is a realization that stands in stark contrast to the common ways of this world. It is most often the exact opposite of how we assume a rulership to function. Here, Kraybill provides a biblical framework for understanding the kingdom. He does so not by using common kingdom texts. His core text is Jesus' temptation before his ministry. But in using this he is able to compartmentalize the topic and provide a simple definition, if not of what the kingdom is, certainly of what it is not.

A predominant portion of the book analyzes the sociology of first century Palestine while reflecting on Jesus' temptation by the evil one prior to commencement of his ministry. Kraybill spends three chapters looking at the three areas of focus within their interaction. First, he speaks of the temptation from the mountain top. The author provides deeper insight as to what the political climate was during the time. He also gives significant effort in explaining the history of politics and power within the Jewish community. A broader understanding of the context allows the reader the opportunity to "read between the lines" of the tempter's offer to Jesus. And Kraybill is convinced that Jesus was also able to assume certain things within the temptation in front of

him. What Jesus did not do though, was accept the offer to political authority.

In the same fashion, Kraybill goes into the next chapter explaining the religious climate of first century Palestine. He offers detailed explanation of the intricacies of Jewish life during this era. In doing so, he exposes the kind of power that existed within the Jewish religious structure. He contends that Jesus was cognisant of what he was being offered. He was conscious of what the enemy was alluding to. Again Jesus did not accept.

Kraybill ties in the last temptation to economics. He explains that the political and religious power plays of Jesus' day had drastic effects on the economic life of the majority poor. The author insists that Jesus was aware of what kind of power he was being offered by addressing hunger, and economics in the manner being suggested to him by the evil one. Once again, Jesus rejects this offer to him.

What does this have to do with the kingdom of God, you might ask? Everything, in Kraybill's mind. The chapter explores Jesus' announcement, quoting Isaiah in the temple. Here Jesus announces that the wonderful dreams read within the text he reads are being realized now. Jesus implies that these things are beginning within himself. Jesus ties the message of the kingdom of God to himself.

But what the original listeners within that room, hearing Jesus' statements may not have known was that Jesus was setting out to establish a kingdom without using the kind of powers mentioned above: political, religious or economic. Instead, Jesus was implementing a kingdom of radically different principles and values. A kingdom pulled from the imaginations of first century Jewish people, implying concepts they were familiar with, even if they had been exploited. Jewish principles such as Jubilees, Sabbath and Shalom were insinuated in Jesus' words and message. And he was announcing and demonstrating to those that heard and saw that he intended not to treat these principles as good ideas but truly embody them in everything.

Kraybill's book is a great help in putting together an understanding of the context in which Jesus announced the kingdom. Reading this book makes very clear how easily we can misunderstand much of what Jesus said and did if we do not appreciate his situation. It is here that Kraybill soars. His ability to communicate clearly the research he has collected to paint a picture of what was being "heard" by those listening to Jesus is imperative. What he is able to do, and well, is provide the reader the information to sort for themselves whether or not their previous understanding of the kingdom of God is cohesive with Jesus actions and teaching. As well, the clarification he provides in relation to Jesus' parables is deeply helpful, once again, in providing a cohesive understanding of Jesus kingdom pronouncement.

After compiling such an insightful and informative presentation of context and biblical interpretation it is somewhat shocking how few practical applications Kraybill provides for the modern reader. At first glance, this seems a disappointment. Now that the reader has had the opportunity to reconsider her understanding of the kingdom of God, how does it effect one's life? But further reflection on Kraybill's style and approach may make one consider that this may be on purpose. Kraybill acknowledges that when providing an explanation of the biblical text that it can not be taken in its exact form and applied to contemporary culture. Just as he provides context for the reader, he allows for contextual interpretation for those that wish to apply what they have learned from the text. And this might be the genius of this book. It never imposes context but rather exposes it.

For the purposes of those trying to uncover the reality of the kingdom in the twenty first century this book needs to be at the top of the list of reading. It is helpful in providing a framework for our own interpretation without being prescriptive. It makes clear what we can not assume about Jesus' message of the kingdom and provides insights as to where he was going with his message. The subject matter within this book is far from

safe. What Kraybill makes clear is that the kingdom is not compromising to culture, powers or convenience. My only criticism of this book is that Kraybill seems to be accommodating from time to time for those who may yearn for personalized version of the Gospel of the kingdom and find this kind of interpretation repelling. Here, I believe his argument is strong enough to not need these accommodations. Otherwise, this book was incredibly educational and helpful.

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### **Jonny says**

The Upside-Down Kingdom was one of those books that influenced me before I even read it. It was released in 1978 and has been updated numerous times (recently a line-by-line edit, in fact). Today, it is still just an important—as the chasm of income inequality grows, the stratification of society, and perpetual war looms. It is an old favorite of many in the Brethren in Christ. And it has helped form much of our “Anabaptist” understanding of the world. It is a call to counter-cultural living. It is a gentle, but convicting commentary on who Jesus is and why he is truly turning everything about the world upside-down.

It is a Biblical book, highly based in the Scripture. It is an apology of Christianity, surprisingly, a defense of the way of Jesus. It is a radical call to revolution too.

Kraybill outlines religious, social, and political life in Ancient Palestine and articulates why Jesus would invert all of them. He surrounds much of the text in the temptation story and makes a great argument for why the bread Jesus was tempted with was referring to economics, the temple religious power, and the high mountain political power. Jesus is bringing another way beside the world.

Kraybill introduces the idea of radical redistribution through Sabbath Economics and Jubilee forgiveness. How Jesus loved the poor, rebuked the wealthy, how he lived simply. How stratification of social groups, war and violence, and even the Jewish law were subverted by Christ.

I think my favorite part of the book were the detours the author went on. So often when we are preaching a radical Gospel, detractors want to deconstruct our arguments. The identity of Jesus is where he starts—was Jesus really who he said he was? He then proceeds to articulate why the Bible points toward simply living and addresses one-by-one common “biblical” arguments for why the endless pursuit of wealth is justified. Finally, he does the same with peace and why the Bible points toward it.

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### **Lynley says**

This book is absolutely fabulous. I may not agree with the author about everything he said, but he brought up many good points and it was very convicting. So the question is, am I living in the upside-down Kingdom--or am I just a pharisee?

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### **Julia says**

A must-read for anyone who takes their existence seriously.

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### **Stephanie says**

Thanks to NetGalley and the publishers for a free, digital ARC of this book.

I have always been a little confused as to what Jesus was referring to when He spoke of the "kingdom". Kraybill makes the kingdom seem clearer in this book. He delves into what Jesus was referring to when He spoke of the kingdom both spiritually, socially, and economically. One thing that really stood out to me was how Kraybill makes the connection between God's Jubilee economic system in the Old Testament to Kingdom living. Also, He connects the beatitudes in Matthew 5 to what God expects from His kingdom citizens. Overall, this was a very informative book, and I walked away a little less confused about what living the Kingdom in this world is all about.

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