June 28, 2015

“The Kingdom of Heaven”

Matthew 4:12-17

**FCF**: Our longing and need for a king

**PROPOSITION**: (magnet) Because the kingdom of heaven is at hand,

(anchor) we must repent.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

We all have deep memories – sometimes suppressed memories, that will still surface and find a way to express themselves – of a king and a kingdom. Let me explain that. Think of the ancient myths and legends. There once was a great and noble king. His reign was a Golden Age of flourishing and life. Now he’s gone and that life is withering. But one day he will return. Anthropologists, historians, and literary types will tell you this is common to many cultures.

Why? Where does it come from? Especially when you consider the terrible record of most kings – stories of tyranny and tragedy. Why then do these tales keep being told? Because of this deep memory, this longing within. We were made for a king, the king of the legends.

This may surprise you but the legends are true. He has come. And His name is Jesus.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 4:12-17

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

If you’ve been a part of this study, you may recognize Jesus’ message as a repetition of John the Baptist’s. John had been arrested. Jesus took over for him and built on what he started. Look at the text. Matthew tells us that Jesus, in fulfillment of ancient prophecy, moved to the north. He is no longer in the little village of Nazareth but in the bustling region of Galilee, a densely populated area with a varied and mixed demographic. Jesus moves to Galilee to Capernaum, a town on a major trading route, sitting on the NW corner of the Sea of Galilee.

(READ Matthew 4:17) What does it mean to repent? More than most think. The story is told of a shoplifter who writes to a department store and says, “*I’ve just become a Christian, and I can’t sleep at night because I feel guilty. So here’s $100 that I owe you*.” Then he signs his name, and in a little postscript at the bottom he adds, “*If I still can’t sleep, I'll send you the rest*.”

No, repentance looks like this. In May 2001, a preacher spoke in Liverpool, England on the 8th command, “*You shall not steal*.” Conscience-stricken people handed in masses of stolen goods – hotel towels, a bathrobe, cash, hospital crutches, library books, CD’s. Even letters of confession. One man who had become a pastor had taken towels from the Wimbledon tennis championships years ago when he worked there. He sent those back. Why? Repentance is an internal change with external results. It is a U-Turn from self-rule to Christ’s rule.

What would impel this? News that the kingdom of heaven is at hand – the main theme of Jesus’ preaching. We’re going to look at two things here. First, the breadth of the kingdom. How far does it reach? And then, second, its coming. How and when is it to be established?

1. **THE BREADTH OF THE KINGDOM**

So, first, the breadth of the kingdom. How far does it reach? How far does it go?

1. *Expectations*

We need to understand something of the expectations of Jesus’ hearers in those days.

1. General understanding

For the 1st century Jewish person, there was a general understanding of God as King. He is the Creator of all. And so He is the sovereign King, ruling over all (READ Psalm 103:19).

1. Special sense

But there was a special sense in which this left you with tension. Why? In heaven, all the angels honor God with unqualified service. But on earth, everywhere you look there is rebellion, a refusal to acknowledge God as King, evil kingdoms rising in opposition to Him and His people.

So, the Jewish expectation was, according to how they read the prophets, a climactic resolution to this that would come through the Messiah. They saw the kingdom of God as something chiefly shown over the years through Israel and God’s commitment to Israel. Which, to them, meant the Messiah, when He came, would issue in this kingdom and drive the Romans out.

1. *Reality*

Those were the expectations. And those expectations were to collide with reality.

1. Israel’s place

For Israel was never intended to be an end in and of itself. Israel was to be a means towards an end, a stage by which the kingdom would come. Abraham, Moses, David – all served a larger purpose. The establishment of the kingdom and its extension to all peoples in all places.

1. The kingdom

Through Israel, God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, His reign was to come down and take root on earth. His authority would then be fleshed out, lived out, on earth as it is in heaven. All disease, emptiness, broken relationships, poverty, injustice, racism displaced by “shalom”.

Jesus is saying that is the kingdom that is at hand with His coming.

*Illustration:*

Let me put it this way. Jesus has come to begin a revolution – not a rebellion but a reclaiming. He is bringing God’s kingly rule to bear on our sin-infected, sin-scarred world. Think of the Robin Hood tales. Richard the Lion-Hearted has returned to England to take back his throne from the evil Prince John. Or the more modern Narnia stories (READ quote):

*Wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight.*

*At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more.*

*When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death.*

*And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.*

That is a picture of Jesus and the wonder and breadth of the kingdom of heaven.

*Application:*

Which goes far beyond what many of us have heard. This is a bigger, greater, fuller, truer view of the biblical gospel. For it is not just about our being made right with God. It is that but the gospel of the kingdom of heaven goes even beyond that (READ Wakabayashi quote):

*It’s not just about individuals gaining forgiveness so that they can secure their destinies in heaven. It is also about God’s Kingly Reign ‐ His Will ‐ coming to bear in all areas of life here and now. It’s not just about saving the soul, but about caring for the body, about healing brokenness and reconciling divisions and conflicts. It’s not just about evangelism, but also about seeing justice overcome injustice, seeing the poor fed, healing divisions of race and social class and seeing brokenness and pain healed with the love and power of Jesus. Wherever there is need and brokenness in our world, the good news is that Jesus has come to begin the process of making it right. Rather than the gospel being about how we get to heaven, it’s more like seeing heaven break into our world.*

What then does this mean? It changes our view of every topic of study, our labors in every area of life. All of it is broken. All of it. And all of it is being reclaimed by the one rightful King.

Such is the breadth of the kingdom that we can and must consider how this impacts everything under the sun – media, music, humor, hobbies, food, physics, sports, stocks, gender, and geriatrics. Or, put another way, because the kingdom of heaven is at hand, we must repent.

1. **THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM**

But that begs a question. When, how is it coming? Which takes us to the second point.

1. *Expectations*

Here again we need to understand something of the expectations of Jesus’ hearers.

1. Understanding of history

The Jewish view of history was of two grand eras. The Old Age of sin, death, and evil. And the Age to Come when God’s peace, justice, and love would arrive. The division between these two ages was to be by the Christ who would end the Old Age and usher in the Age to Come.

1. Confused by Jesus

The idea was that the two ages would be clear and set apart. But all this was muddled by Jesus. Yes, there was something to His teaching and miracles. But John was prison, the Romans were in power, the people oppressed. And then Jesus would speak of His death. And on a cross.

1. *Reality*

Again, their limited expectations were colliding with a greater and deeper reality.

1. The kingdom has come

On the one hand, the kingdom has come. It is present through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, and then His sending of the Holy Spirit. We have new life in Christ now – full pardon and forgiveness; an enabling to love God and one another; a new identity, community, and purpose.

1. The kingdom has yet to come in full

So, on the one hand, the kingdom has come and it is present. But on the other hand, the kingdom has yet to come in full. For it is future. The King has yet to return. There is still more to come. Satan is bound but like a mad dog on a long chain. We see astonishing answers to prayer one day and then cry out “*How long?*” the next. We are free from sin’s control but still snap at one another (READ Hebrews 10:14). The kingdom has come but has yet to come in its fullness.

So we live in this tension, in between the times of His comings, in the “now” and the “not yet.” And all of this is part of what Jesus means when He says (READ Matthew 4:17).

*Illustration:*

Perhaps the best illustration of this is D-Day, 06/06/44, when Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, France in the struggle against Nazi Germany. Left and right, Allied soldiers were picked off and killed. Yet at great cost, they were able to secure the beachhead. And once that happened, the Allied victory against the Nazis was practically assured. The war would prove to be all but over. All that was left was to mop up and push for complete surrender.

Jesus’ work on the cross was like the D-Day victory in the war against sin, Satan, and death. The beachhead has been secured. The final victory is assured. It was the decisive battle of the war. But it was not the end of the war. The end of the war will come when Jesus returns at the end of history to bring this revolution and reclamation to completion, fully establishing the kingdom of heaven. That will be V-Day, the Victory Day of the Great War. So now we wait.

*Application:*

The reality of our living in this tension, between the times, in the “now” and “not yet,” is so vital for us to understand. Why? To enable us to be optimistic without being triumphalistic. And to protect us from disappointment, disillusionment, and despair. There ought to be optimism. There ought to be hope. But we must know the times. We need this full picture.

That said, we must not nuance our view of the kingdom of heaven so much that we don’t actually then consider just what it means to live now with Jesus as our king. What should that look like? Let me suggest four things. I’m borrowing this from Tim Keller and a sermon he preached on Psalm 2. Those four things are obedience, submission, reliance, and expectation.

First, obedience. Jesus is to be obeyed in every area of life. Always, without conditions. Ours is not to say, “*If you give me this, then I’ll do that*.” That is for a consultant, not a king.

Second, submission. We are to trust Jesus with our circumstances. No matter how things may look or feel. Not that tears are forbidden. But we must be assured of His good purposes.

Third, reliance. We are to look chiefly to Him. We are not to look to anyone or anything else as a requirement for our deepest satisfaction. We are to hold to Him as our chief joy.

Fourth, expectation. We are to live boldly with Jesus as our King. We should be accustomed to asking great things of Him. Not to fall into pessimism as to what may come.

Ours are to be lives typified by obedience, submission, reliance, and expectation. And where we are falling short here, we must repent. Why? The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

**CONCLUSION:**

Understand this is not advice. Advice crushes and weighs you down. Think how you respond when someone tells you how to address your physical health. “*Take these supplements, eat better, exercise on this plan*.” Or spiritual health. “*Pray in this way, read these books, go on that pilgrimage*.” In the end, what does such advice often do? Crush you and weigh you down.

(READ Matthew 4:17) This is not advice. This is news. This is an announcement. And that should encourage and hearten us. For the message is not, “*You need to do this*.” It is, “*You need to know this*.” Which sets Christianity apart from all the other religions in the world.

This news of the kingdom of heaven, embraced into the heart, brings inevitable change. It creates a desire, an impulse, a longing deep within us. It’s a spring erupting, the pressure mounting, creating cracks in the rock, water pouring down the side. How is that flow to be channeled? How is it to be directed? What response is this news meant to bring? Repentance. A change within as to how we see, think, and feel. A change within and then a change without in how we live, work, and play. The positions, opinions, and convictions we carry on even the biggest topics of our day – money, sex, race, and politics. Change within and without.

We did some painting and redecorating in a bedroom of our house last week – really just sprucing it up. It’s nice but it’s not like we knocked any walls down or shifted the foundation. But that’s just what we’re talking about here. (READ Matthew 4:17) This is a demolition and rebuild starting at the core of your life and flowing out from there. Does that sound scary? Maybe it should. It’s that far reaching. And that needed. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

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