

The Kingdom of God is Among Us!

Part 2:

1. Review and Define

- a. I read this week that most evangelical churches have built their theology and practice upon the writings of Paul more than the Gospels. The conclusion of one of the studies was that the Western church, both Catholic and Protestant, evangelical and liberal, charismatic and social activist, doesn't seem to understand what the Gospels are there for.
- b. The Gospels are the first hand account of the words and deeds of Jesus, upon whom our faith rests. **Understanding HIS message and methods is key to understanding the entire New and Old Testament.**
- c. Even a casual reader will notice something about the Gospels. Jesus had a message that he was delivering. It was the message that the Kingdom of God or Heaven was near (in time). He preached the message of the "good news" of the Kingdom of God.
- d. **Historian Michael Grant says, "every thought and saying of Jesus was directed and subordinated to one single thing ..., the realization of the Kingdom of God upon the earth," and "this one phrase [Kingdom of God] sums up his whole ministry and his whole life's work"**

2. kingdom – what does that mean?

- a. King – dom : Literally means "the King's domain"
 - i. A kingdom is defined as a domain over which the sovereignty and rule of a King extends.
- b. To understand what Jesus meant by this phrase, we ought to understand how Jews understood the kingdom of God.
 - i. The kingship of God is one of the basic factors of Jewish thought. The prophets looked forward to a moment when this kingship would be realized by the liberation of Jerusalem and the restoration of Israel. They looked for a liberating messiah to unite their nation and to drive out their oppressors. The entire Old Testament is filled with conquest metaphors and conquering prophecies concerning the Messiah who would usher in the Kingdom of God.
 - ii. So when Jesus began to preach "the Kingdom of God" he got a lot of people's attention. Put yourself in their shoes...you are living in a country occupied by a foreign army and a foreign power, and a person begins to fulfill a number of prophecies comes along proclaiming the Kingdom of God – he'd get your attention too!
 - iii. Jesus preached that Israel's God, was reclaiming the whole world as his own, in and through Himself. To Jesus and His disciples, the term Kingdom of God meant a government that would be established on earth. They anticipated that its arrival would amount to nothing less than a sweeping, overwhelming change in the world order.
 - iv. In teaching the message of this Kingdom, Jesus was simply extending the central theme of the Old Testament. The Hebrew prophets had earlier stressed the reality of this Kingdom. Referring to the Bible, John Bright wrote: "Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it *The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.*"
 - v. In proclaiming the Kingdom of God, Jesus' asked and answered the question, **The Kingdom of God asks – "What would it look like if God were running this show?"**
- c. **There are two opposing kingdoms in existence. God's and Satan's.**
 - i. (Provide background on how Satan got the earth)
 - ii. Matthew 12:26 says that Satan has a kingdom **"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?"**
 - iii. Col 1:13 – **"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son..."**
 - iv. Jesus primarily used "Kingdom of God" to describe those of his followers among whom God was present in power.

1. In the story of Beelzebul (Lk. 11:14-26), Jesus casts out demons through God's power, and thus demonstrates that the kingdom of God has manifested itself (appeared, become visible) to those who have seen what has happened: "*If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*"
- v. God's rule is demonstrated when a miracle of healing occurs as much as when a demon is cast out.
 1. When the disciples exclaimed, "The kingdom of God has come near," they were interpreting a miracle as the coming of God's presence in power. In effect, the kingdom was not near, but already present. **Their declaration meant, "God has taken charge here."**
- d. I would like you to view the testimonies of God's hand of healing, deliverance, and salvation as EVIDENCE of the Kingdom of God becoming visible, of God taking charge in a situation. In fact, I found myself at Marc's on Tuesday listening to a cashier complain about her ex-husband, and the difficulties in her life – and desiring to declare what the Kingdom of God could do for her (and not being able to get a word in edgewise). As I walked out to my car, I cried out to God to make His Kingdom present for this woman who was hurting so bad she couldn't see any answers to her dilemma.
 - i. Can you see what "DECLARING the Kingdom of God" can do – what could happen to someone's life if "God were to take charge" there?
 - ii. This is what we must do! Bring the Kingdom, the rule, the authority of God into people's lives, for ENCOUNTERS with God, for ENCOUNTERS with His Kingdom...which change their lives!

3. Good News!

- a. Matthew 4:23-24 "*Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.*"
- b. If CNN and CBS News were covering the events of that day, what do you think that they would have said?
 - i. Headlines: "Mystical rabbi leading thousands astray."
 - ii. I can hear Katie Couric now, "A religious rebel is producing mass hysteria and supposed healings in the state of Galilee. The FBI is launching a probe to determine if fraud is involved. They would care less about the lives set free, than whether or not Jesus had a medical degree or a license to practice medicine.
 - iii. They wouldn't be covering it as good news...they would be covering the bad news! Isn't that all that ever gets headlines any more? Our world is full of bad news...it's the only thing that gets people's attention.
- c. **The bible says that Jesus preached the "good news of the Kingdom."**
- d. What was/is this good news?
 - i. We talked about it last week, and we will talk about it every week. **The good news is that God is restoring things to their original state, that Heaven is invading earth!** Ever since the fall of man, when Adam rebelled and handed over his "dominion" over the earth to Satan, creation has been crying out for its redemption.
 - ii. Sickness, death, disease, deformity, hatred, selfishness, war, evil – has had dominion over the world for far too long. Jesus came to "*destroy the works of the devil*" (quote) – which is to say that he was going to dethrone the devil from his place of authority on earth and over mankind, and restore the dominion of God upon the earth.
 1. Last week I said that Jesus was in a "perfect" relationship with God – and that because of what He did on the cross...you are too! If you are in the kingdom, you have the same access to the Father Jesus did.

2. This restored dominion is the good news!
 3. What did Adam and Eve have in the garden? A perfect and whole relationship with God.
 4. What do you have now? The same thing.
 5. You may not *feel* like it...because you fail, you sin, you do selfish stuff. But that doesn't change the truth...Jesus covered every failure and sin you did past, present and future...which means that you are in a perfect relationship with God irrespective of what you have or haven't done. That is the good news of the kingdom!
4. *“and healing every disease and sickness among the people”*
- a. What does this MEAN? It means what it says. Jesus healed all who came to Him. He never turned anyone away.
 - i. **Beware of when your theology tries to change what the bible says.**
 - ii. **We must be careful not to bring what the bible says down to our “level” of experience.**
 - b. Know that the four words of Satan to Eve, “Did God indeed say,” resonates in too much of our theology today leading us to doubt what God said.
 - i. We explain away what we cannot understand or experience with “theology.”
 - ii. *“The form criticism and theological movements of the past 2 centuries has reinforced the determination of the Western world and church to make sure that the four Gospels will not be able to say what they want to say, but rather that they be patronized, muzzled, dismembered and eventually eliminated altogether as a force to be reckoned with.”ⁱ*
 - iii. Just because you haven't experienced something that the bible says is not a reason to discount it.
5. When God began with us, He had in His mind the finished work.
- a. When God sees us now, He does not see us as we see ourselves, but He sees us in our finished state and everything that happens to us is working in that direction, taking us there.
 - b. **God creates by declaring what a thing is to be in its finished form.**
 - i. Things don't begin as they are in their final state. *They begin in weakness.*
 - ii. The word God speaks comes into darkness, into the void, and it births itself inside of faith, working through faith, the word God speaks works in our lives to accomplish the purpose for which God sent it.
 - c. **Our job, our role, our part, is to believe what God says.** And in believing what God says, we cast down the voice that contradicts what God says.
6. The Gospel of the Kingdom necessitates the preaching of “God is in charge here!” Will you come under His authority? He comes in light to push back darkness and to destroy the works of the devil!

7. Another one of the lies the church believes is that the goal of the believer is to “go to heaven when you die.” It is what we teach in evangelism classes, and it is how we seek to find out if a person is saved or not...we ask, “If you died today, would you be certain you would **go** to heaven.”
- a. Now, don't mistake me...that is an excellent question...but it also points to what we have emphasized in our teaching over the years...that the goal of the Christian life is to “get to heaven.” (add in losing your salvation if you aren't good, and you've got a great system for bondage).
 - b. Jesus did, as Paul says, die for our sins, but his whole agenda of dealing with sin and all its effects and consequences wasn't about just rescuing individual souls from the world but about saving humans so that they could become part of his project of bringing others into His Kingdom.”
 - c. **This is what the Kingdom is about. It is about us, partnering with the King to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth, so that lives are transformed and the world is brought back under the authority of God.**
 - d. □

¹ <http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=4862>