

Saved as: The kingdom of God

Mark 1:15 Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news."

Acts 28:30 (Paul) lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

I started school the first year of the Second World War. Parnell school. Concrete air raid shelters appeared in the playing field. Teachers went off in uniform. One of them came back on final leave and sang to our class. I wonder what his name was. I wonder how it went for him. It was hard, even in isolated NZ.

I listened to the radio with my parents, "the wireless" –BBC news - and **Vera Lynne** singing the white cliffs of Dover -

"There'll be love and laughter, and peace ever after, **tomorrow**, when the world is free."

People have always dreamed of better times to come.

Sir Paul Reeves in an interview one summer, asked to nominate a song, chose "Somewhere over the rainbow -

Somewhere over the rainbow

Way up high

And the dreams that you dreamed of..."

At Grammar we had massed school singing. –

"Somewhere over the top of the hill **there's a new wold** waiting to be born."

In all of these lyrics there's the yearning, that no matter what it's like now, one day it will be better - one day dreams will come true.

The People of Israel had a dream – nurtured by the prophets -

"Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing into Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head." Isaiah 51:11

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name." Is.12

John the Baptist knew it was about to happen

The voice crying in the wilderness –

“Prepare the way of the Lord.” “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Then Jesus came, the hope of Israel, the dawning of the new world. The new Kingdom of God.

How often the **“kingdom of God”** appears in the scriptures. Mark reports that Jesus began his ministry with the words, “the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near”.

For Paul and the other apostles, the kingdom was the main theme of their preaching. *“From morning until evening he explained the matter to them”*.

When we are explaining what Christian faith is about we may begin by saying how Jesus came into the world – that God was in him – incarnation it is called. Then we move on to the cross. How Jesus on the cross died for the sins of the world, for our sins – that by repentance, faith and trust in him, our sins are forgiven and we can move into a new and right relationship with God.

Correct. But there is something else. The kingdom of God! The four gospel writers begin by telling how God became man, and they end with the crucifixion and the resurrection. In between they spend chapter after chapter covering Jesus’ ministry of action and teaching, declaring - THE KINGDOM OF GOD. –

“The kingdom of God has come near.”

“The kingdom is like” – treasure hidden in a field that a man goes and sells all he has, then buys it.

The kingdom is like – a woman who has ten silver coins, when she loses one she turns over the house until she finds it. Then she calls the neighbours in to rejoice because the coin that was lost has been found.

The kingdom is like - yeast that transforms the whole of the dough.

The kingdom is like - a mustard seed, tiny but grows into a sizeable tree.

With the coming of Jesus, the kingdom **has** come near. One day it will be manifest in all its glory. God’s reign will be seen by all. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now, his reign is seen in faith by those who have come to know Jesus as the introducer of the new kingdom. **And their lives have been changed, forever.**

Let’s review how the scriptures present this reality of The Kingdom of God.

(1) We go back to when God chose the People of Israel to be his special people bringing his light to the whole world. God leading his people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. The Tabernacle in the wilderness, the Temple in Jerusalem. The sin and failures, the struggles. Prophet after prophet as God's mouthpiece inviting his people back to their inheritance and call.

Again and again they miss the way, following other gods that are no gods. Finally going into exile. Babylon.

Yet even in exile there is still a message of hope. Daniel paints a picture of God's triumph. Isaiah – the people will return...

One day God is going to return to his people and establish his kingdom.

(2) We learn of the Kingdom through Jesus' teaching: we see it arriving.

In the gospels you can see how important it was for the writers to show that **Jesus was part of all that had gone before in Israel. Jesus was not replacing Israel, he was fulfilling Israel's mission.** In Jesus the Kingdom was breaking into this world. The temple used to be the place where the people met with God. Now in John's gospel we find Jesus being referred to as the temple – in him everything that would normally happen in the temple is fulfilled.

The story of Jesus is the story of Israel's God coming back to his people to establish his rule over Israel and the whole world.

That explains why Matthew begins his account with that long genealogy – all those "begats", "Abraham was the father of Isaac ...

Matthew was making it clear that the time had come when God's rule, promised by the prophets, yearned for by the faithful, would be known.

eg Road to Emmaus "explained to them the things concerning himself"

The story of Jesus is the story of how Israel's God became king.

A new kingdom.

(3) The Kingdom witnessed to in the church. The church is not the kingdom. The church announces the Kingdom.

The gospels tell the story of **the launching of God's renewed people.** Luke especially makes this point. Take the resurrection appearances of Jesus – to the two on the road to Emmaus - to the disciples gathered behind locked doors. Again and again he will come to surprise, to comfort, to send out on mission. To bring reassurance to his puzzled and anxious followers - through the opening of scripture and the breaking of bread.

Hear again the message of the "kingdom of God"! – It is exciting!

1 It was promised to the People of Israel

2 It was seen and declared in the person and ministry of Jesus

“The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near.” Mark 1:15

3 Our life and mission as the fellowship of believers, the church, the renewed people of God is **to witness to the kingdom.**

It is our mission and privilege to live now in the kingdom that is already here - and to pray “your kingdom come” in all its glory and completeness.

The kingdom was not received by all. People were slow to see it. Jesus gave parables to explain. Something to keep in mind, to ponder over – as we are doing now.

I love the song, “This Kingdom” –

“This Kingdom’s King has come” –

“For the majesty and power of this Kingdom’s King has come

And this Kingdom’s reign, and this Kingdom’s rule”

(That song helps to put my focus on His Kingdom. Maybe that one, or another, does the same for you?)

The old hymn book had, - *“Your Kingdom come O Lord, Your rule O Christ begin, break with your iron shard, the tyranny of sin.”*

And again, - *“God tell everyone, the news that the kingdom of God has come”*

Paul says to the Colossians, and to us, you have been brought into a new place

“He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.” Col.1:13

Something has already happened.

This Kingdom we are yearning for, is co-existing with the other earthly kingdom, the one we’re thoroughly involved in day to day? In a sense, as Jesus’ People, we are stepping between the two kingdoms every day of our lives. And what we know is–

One is passing away, the other will last forever!

There is a war on between these two kingdoms, make no mistake.

We don't major on this, neither do we ignore it. The gospel writers are very clear.

Look for example at the interaction that takes place at Jesus trial before Pilate.

Pilate: Are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus: My kingdom is not from this world.

Pilate: So you are a king?

Jesus: You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Pilate: (To his accusers) Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?

The Crowd: Not this man, but Barabbas!

The Crowd: We have no king but the emperor. –

The Kingdom of Caesar or the Kingdom of Jesus, Jesus or Barabbas?

The Kingdom of God:

A different kingdom brought in by humility, not force –

Jesus, emptying himself, though he was God, by becoming a servant –

“Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” Phil. 2:6ff

Who is interested in the news about the Kingdom? Often not the well-to-do, the healthy, youth. Yet life has a habit of bringing us all up short. Personal and family problems crop up that are too much for us alone.

We are moved by the plight of children dying in camps - sectarian wars. tsunamis, earthquakes.

What can we do? Is there anything to hope for?

Long ago came the word, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Turn about, change direction, see, the kingdom is here!

In Jesus the Kingdom arrived.

The apostles, the church, preached the message of God's new kingdom where a new way of life is possible, mandatory.

Where -

peace and righteousness reigns

the meek inherit the earth

there is justice for the oppressed

no more death

no infant mortality

no famine – the desert will blossom

evil is finally ousted.

PRAYER: Dear God keep alive in us the vision of your Kingdom. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the bringer of your Kingdom. May the seed of your kingdom grow in the world and in us. Amen, come Lord Jesus.

Future? Yes. But also present. Jesus said,
 “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” Mark 9:1 They saw it!
 Jesus has not disappeared with his ascension -
 “All authority in heaven **and on earth** has been given to me.” Mt28:18

Because God really is King on earth, as well as in heaven.

How will the kingdom come in completeness? Not be territorial expansion, any human pressure. In his kingdom there is a different sort of power at work. For this king is “The Lamb who was slain”, “The suffering servant”.
 Heroes of this kingdom are – Wilberforce, Bishop Tutu, Bonhoeffer. –
 Men and women who suffered for righteousness sake like their master.

At communion we come close to the coming Kingdom.

“I tell you I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.” Mt.26:29
 Can we allow our imagination to take hold of that. There is a day to come, a day that the whole world has been waiting for-
 “somewhere over the top of the hill”
 “somewhere over the rainbow”
 “tomorrow, when the world is free”.

-The day when heaven and earth will have become one – Your Kingdom has come.

Those yearnings were God-inspired. What we are called to declare to the world now is that in Jesus Christ they are fulfilled.
 He is the bringer of the new Kingdom. The kingdom is in him and through him. In the midst of all that surrounds us, we declare in faith that Jesus is king –
 And that one day he will reign on earth as he does in heaven.
 Now our prayer is that of Revelation 22
 “Come, Lord Jesus.”