

## GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

8.3.15

### **The practical Kingdom - Joss Bray**

There is so much to say about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus was very keen on it - it was a central part of his preaching and teaching:

MT 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

MT 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people

He told many parables about the kingdom - the pearl of great price, the landowner hiring workers, a mustard seed, a small amount of yeast, good seed sown, a treasure hidden in a field, a large net, a king with an unforgiving servant, a wedding banquet where the invited guests didn't come, ten virgins and ten lamps.

And Jesus said this as well:

MT 6:33 ....seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

He was very keen for people to know that the Kingdom of Heaven was near - and he told his disciples to tell them everyone:

MT 10:7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'

### **So what is so important about the kingdom?**

First of all, let's try and get the terminology right. The kingdom is referred to in several ways in the bible.

Jesus talked about the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, as well as it being his kingdom and the father's kingdom. He seemed to use the terms interchangeably.

Later on in the bible it is referred to as the kingdom of light, the kingdom of the Son and the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Also - the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the kingdom of the Son he loves, the kingdom of Christ and of God - or just the kingdom.

So we can see from that, that it seems that it is quite difficult to easily describe in earthly terms, but it is still of vital importance. Just because we don't understand something fully - it doesn't mean to say it is not real or really important.

Take gravity for example - no one really knows what it is. Gravity is real and very important but no one understands what it is - they can only describe its effects. Or dark matter and dark energy - most of the universe is made of it but no one knows what it is.

It is the same with the kingdom of God. There is something about it that is indescribable in human terms. But the good news is - it is not restricted to those who understand it or study it or who try very hard to get it. Listen to what Jesus said when people were bringing babies and children to him:

LK 18:15..... When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Wow - that overturns the wisdom of the world doesn't it? It is not about understanding - the kingdom belongs to children - and people who are like children. They will receive the kingdom and also enter it.

Jesus told parables precisely because it was hard to describe - and all the parables spoke of different aspects of the kingdom. So don't worry if we can't get to grips with it now. Remember, Paul recognised this problem as well:

1CO 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

In future talks we can look at the parables about the kingdom, and what this teaches us. But let's make a start by trying to get a broad sense of what the Kingdom is, because it is clearly very important.

## Where is it?

Remember what Jesus said about the children - we need to receive the kingdom so we can enter into it. There seems to be a contradiction there. How can we receive something into us and then enter into it? Where is it then - inside or outside us?

What else did Jesus say?

LK 17:20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

So the kingdom of God is within us - but we see it only as a poor reflection in a mirror. There is a time when we will see face to face. There is something partial about our experience of the kingdom which will be resolved eventually when we meet God face to face. This does not mean that the kingdom of God is only within us - that is not what Jesus meant. To explore that further we need to ask:

## What is the kingdom of God?

In essence - in simple terms, it is this. A kingdom is somewhere where a king rules - he has the ultimate authority. The good king rules and governs his people for their benefit and for the good of the kingdom. His characteristics are seen in the kingdom. If he is good - there is likely to be a good culture in the kingdom, if bad - then things will not go well.

But God is the ultimate good king. The king of kings actually - the king over all kings. His kingdom is found where he rules and is recognised as king. That is why the kingdom of God is within us - as well as being eternal and more massive than we can ever imagine. If God is the king of our lives, then the kingdom of God is by definition within us. But there is also an expression of the kingdom of God in the whole universe which we have very little insight into - at the moment. These are described as the heavenly realms in the bible where it says in Ephesians 1 that God raised Christ from the dead and:

EPH 1:19 ..... seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

In fact, we too are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ - we see that in Ephesians 2 v 6. There will be a time we die or Jesus comes back when we shall see face to face - we will suddenly realise how poor the reflection of the kingdom is that we have seen. That is when we will see the glory and might and power of God and the splendour of King Jesus.

### **It is not fully here yet**

Even though the kingdom is near and within us - as Jesus said - it has not fully come yet. Otherwise why would Jesus tell us to pray:

MT 6:9 .... `Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Our prayer and our concern should be like Jesus's - that God's kingdom should come - which means his will be done - on earth as it is in heaven. The heavenly realms are only poorly reflected to us - but there, God is glorious. Jesus reigns on the throne, the Holy Spirit roams around with unimaginable power. There are angels and indescribable creatures praising God, there is worship and laughter and feasting - it's a big party going on right there, right now. It gets even louder when someone becomes a Christian and gives their lives to God.

### **So what should the kingdom look like here?**

For a start, it is not about rules and regulations or religious traditions, or about clever sermons and worldly plans:

RO 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

1CO 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

It is about what goes on in us - inside where the kingdom is. It makes itself known from the inside out - not imposed by rules from the outside in.

It produces righteousness - we are made right with God - not separated any more from him. We have the right to be called children of God.

It produces peace and joy - and the rest of the fruit of the Holy Spirit we read about in Galatians 5:

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

These are the hallmarks of the kingdom of God - which is inside us. We should see these grow in us and each other as the kingdom comes more in our lives.

And the kingdom of God is about power - not talk. When we pray or do something in the name of Jesus, we are stating that we have the delegated power of King Jesus. We are demonstrating that the kingdom is near.

This is what Jesus told his disciples to do - and why should it be any different for us?

MT 10:7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.

And he equips us with gifts to powerfully demonstrate the kingdom:

1CO 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

That is the challenge for us. We heard it in an exhortation from our friends from Durham on their last visit - "Go and pray for people and the good news will spread. Expect the miraculous. Reach out to all the villages and towns in North Northumberland."

This was a word for us. Whatever else we do -

**We need to focus on the kingdom of God - just as Jesus did.**

The key is this - seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Let's know we are right with God - recognise that

Jesus has done this for us and let's walk in obedience to that truth. Let's honour God as king in our lives - and let's look for the overruling of God in our lives and in every circumstance we find ourselves in.

Let's look for the kingdom of God to come in other people's lives - let's be so kingdom focussed that we are confident in praying for healings and miracles. Let's encourage people to repent and receive the loving forgiveness of a suffering saviour.

But let's not be disappointed if we don't see instant results - remember the Kingdom is near and what we see is a poor reflection. But the call from our king is the same - preach the good news of the kingdom - heal the sick, do miracles, set people free in the name of Jesus.

This sets the foundation for our work as a church - when we love God, love each other and serve the community, we are demonstrating the kingdom of God on earth. Everything we do should be a reflection of the kingdom and should bear the hallmarks of the kingdom. That is the starting point.

Does the work we do or plan to do reflect the kingdom of God? Is God overruling in it? Do we have faith for the kingdom of God coming through what we are doing? Does it come from the work of the Holy Spirit in us and does it honour King Jesus?

These are the questions to ask - and to keep asking.

And we keep praying - let your kingdom come Lord!