

God's Kingdom at Hand – Mark 1:14-15

Matthew 4:17/Luke 4:14-15

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Recently, after the busy work of setting up camp with my family on the edge of Fish Lake near Halfway, we were finally able to stop and enjoy the beautiful view of the lake as night closed in. And as we did, we got a bonus. As the last light of the sun faded from the sky a full moon rose over the lake and reflected in the waters. What a sight on a pristine mountain lake! Have you ever looked at the moon and allowed your mind to wonder about it why it's there and why the sun so perfectly lights it up for us to see and how it plays such an important role in the proper functioning of earth? Or about why the moon and the stars and the planets and the sun are so perfectly positioned and organized and moving in such a regular cycle that they've been compared to a giant clock?

Modern science with its emphasis on what's visible and verifiable and can be seen with the eyes, has missed the most important observation of all: *There is an order and design and structure and guiding force that holds everything together, sustains and reproduces life, and keeps anything from getting of sync to the point that life on earth comes to a quick end.* Think about it: If the sun got even slightly too far away from earth or if the earth drifted too close to the sun: disaster. Think of all the billions of stars and the planets and asteroids out in space and how over the past 6,000 years of recorded history nothing large enough to destroy earth has gone off course and brought an end to life on earth. If random chance and accident were in charge, we would have been wiped out long ago.

You see, earth and the entire universe and really everything we see around is, is the visible part of a vast kingdom designed and ruled by God the Creator and Sustainer. All visible creation shouts the reality of God's invisible kingdom which is all around us and underlying and governing everything we see with our eyes. And as we continue on today in our study of the life and ministry of Jesus, the Son of God, , we're going to learn how the opportunity to live in sync with that invisible kingdom – at peace with God, filled with his wisdom, and empowered to

live life the way he designed – was coming like never before through Jesus and the Holy Spirit he would soon send.

We're going to be focusing today primarily on Mark, verses 14 to 15, but will also incorporate Luke 4, verses 14 to 15 and Matthew 4, verse 17, to complete the picture and absorb the full impact of what was happening as Jesus, in the first year of his public ministry, returned to Galilee from Judea after his two day visit with Samaritans. So let's begin by reading all 3 passages, which I've also put up on the screen so you can easily keep up. In your own Bibles I would encourage to park in Mark 1, verse 14 to 15. Let's read our Scriptures for today:

Luke 4:14-15

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Matt 4:17

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Mark 1:14-15

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

II. PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM GOSPEL

Well, the first point I'd like to focus on from these verses is that as Jesus returned to Galilee, he was focused on *Proclaiming the Kingdom Gospel*...the good news, the glad tidings, about the kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus was speaking audibly a message that announced something very good that would benefit people and had the potential to bring great joy to them. He was not keeping this message to himself, or just hoping people would figure it out by watching the way he lived his life. Instead we're told that he was speaking words that communicated the good news of God clearly and publicly.

In the verses we just read he's described as doing this by preaching, proclaiming and teaching. And as we mentioned last week, preaching and proclaiming are the same thing. In fact, the same Greek word is used in both instances. The idea is simply: *openly sharing an important message with spoken words*. Teaching, on the other hand, indicates going a little bit deeper into the message, explaining and expounding on what is meant. So not only was Jesus boldly proclaiming a simple and consistent message, he was also spending time explaining it on a deeper level in the synagogues, the places where Jewish people met to pray and worship and receive religious instruction. We're reminded here again, as we were last week, that God's good news about Jesus and the kingdom – which really is great and joyful life-giving news – is meant to be shared by us with words wherever we go and in a wide variety of ways.

And did you notice that upon first arriving in Galilee Jesus was very well received? Many people from Galilee had been to Jerusalem for the recent Passover, and had witnessed firsthand what Jesus had done and said there. As a result, word about him and his teaching and miracles had already arrived in Galilee and been spread all around. And people in the synagogues there were ready to hear more from this godly man who had made such a stir in Jerusalem. They were so far very receptive to his message. Luke tells us Jesus was being glorified or praised by all who heard him teach in the synagogues.

III. ANNOUNCING THE KINGDOM NEARNESS

So we've seen that Jesus was Proclaiming the Kingdom Gospel as he returned to Galilee. Now let's look at what the actual good news was that he was proclaiming. What we find is that Jesus was *Announcing the Kingdom Nearness*. The good news of God he was sharing wherever he went in Galilee was this: ***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."*** This message had 3 parts: 1) Something special is happening now that has been predicted and prophesied in Scripture; 2) This something special is related to what's called the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven; and 3) the special thing that's happening is that the kingdom of God is *at hand*. Through Jesus the kingdom of God has come near and is available to human beings like never before.

Let's start with the first part of Jesus' good-news message: ***The time is fulfilled.*** So many hundreds of prophecies had spoken of this time that was now finally here. The coming of the "***anointed One, a prince***" spoken of in Daniel 9 as arriving at a very particular point in history, had now taken place. And that prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 was unfolding before their very eyes, calling for great rejoicing:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

And remember that amazing day spoken of in Joel 2, verses 28 to 29, when God's Spirit would be poured out on people from all nations and walks of life, even slaves?

8 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

This time was coming soon. ***The time is fulfilled.*** All history had been moving toward this moment when all these things prophesied were now beginning unfold. This is good news that you don't want to miss!

Secondly, in his good-news message, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. What was he talking about? Well the Greek word used here for "kingdom," is *basileia*. It means "royal power, kingship, dominion, rule...[it refers] to the sovereign activity of God as he rules over his creation and brings his plans to realization" (*Strongs/NET Bible*). So Jesus is speaking here of the rule or reign of God...the realm where God's will is always perfectly done. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray: "***Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***" If you've noticed, a lot of things out of step with God's will and purposes are done on earth by people every day, many times even by Christians. God is always absolutely in control of the universe and accomplishing his will through the midst of the ungodly choices of humankind, but the reality on earth is that horrendous things completely out of step with God's design and purposes are

continuously carried out by rebellious human beings on a daily basis. We long and pray for that day when God's will is fully done on earth as it is currently in heaven...in the kingdom of heaven. But that day is not here yet and will not arrive fully until Jesus returns in glory and power to visibly rule over all the earth.

However, the good news Jesus was sharing in Galilee was that God's rule and reign was coming near to people on earth like never before through Jesus. ***The kingdom of God is AT HAND***, he said. This is the third part of Jesus' good-news message and the heart of it. The kingdom of God is at hand. It's nearer to you than you can imagine. Like you can reach out and touch it with your hands. Jesus later told people, "***...the kingdom of God is in the midst of you***" (see Luke 17:21). It's always been here, but your opportunity to enter it and live in step with it is coming in a way never before possible.

All people living on the earth, a place where so many things contrary to the will of God are continuously being carried out on a daily basis, now have the opportunity to enter God's invisible kingdom where they can live even now under his rule and reign, at peace with him, filled with his presence, and empowered to live in step with his will and actually carry it out now on earth. This is very good news and Jesus in his life on earth was showing the full potential of what this kind of life, connected with the Father and filled with the Spirit, could look like in the middle of a very broken world bent on living outside of God's rule.

Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 12:28:

28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Life in the near kingdom of God is life filled with, directed by and empowered by God's Holy Spirit dwelling inside people. Jesus was already living this way, and this would become a possibility for all people after the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead, when the Spirit would come with power to dwell inside all those who have entered the kingdom of God. What did this look like when it started happening? The book of Acts describes it well as it records true history of what actually happened among the first believers in Christ when the Holy Spirit came to take up residence within them. It looked like God coming with power to fill, guide, direct and empower his people to carry out his will...enabling

them to do and accomplish things they could never have done apart from his power.

Acts 4, verse 31, gives us one description of the Holy Spirit's work:

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

As they sought the Lord through prayer, the Holy Spirit filled them up and gave them everything they needed to speak God's Word with boldness, even in the face of great persecution. This is one snapshot of life in the near kingdom of God!

IV. REVEALING THE KINGDOM WAY

Well, this was the good news Jesus was proclaiming and announcing in Galilee, but you probably noticed that he was also calling people to action in light of this good news. We could say he was *Revealing the Kingdom Way*. Connecting with God in his kingdom wasn't something that would just happen automatically to everyone on earth now that Jesus had come. Though God's invisible kingdom is all around everyone and so near in fact it's like we can touch it with our hands; and though it undergirds and sustains and supports everything we see around us; it's possible to go through human life ignoring it's reality and pretending it's not there. And as Jesus announced the kingdom nearness, he each time revealed there was only way to enter it, and that is through repentance of sin and belief in the message of the gospel. ***Repent and believe in the gospel.***

Why do we need repentance? Well, if you'll remember from what we just talked about, the earth is full of human beings living out of step with the will of God...living as if God's rule and reign over all he has created and is right now holding together is either nonexistent, illegitimate, or subject to our own rule and reign. The Bible call this sin and it's how we all begin living our lives and continue living them until God opens our eyes and brings us to understand the rebellion going on in our hearts and what's really going on in the world around us. And in order for God's Holy Spirit to take up residence with in us – the holy God dwelling inside a human being – we must first acknowledge and own our sin against God and invite him to remove it. He can't move in until that sin has been removed

through the work of Christ on the cross. And that removal begins with repentance. By God's grace, we first need to change our minds about the way we've been living our lives apart from God, and invite him to change us. In the words of Acts 17, verses 30 to 31:

30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Secondly, in order for our sin to be removed forever so the Holy Spirit can take up residence within us, we need to believe in the message of the gospel. The only way our sin can be removed while still satisfying the justice of God is to let Jesus pay the penalty we owe for our sin. He did that by eventually dying on the cross and bearing the wrath of God we deserved. But to receive the benefits Jesus bought for us on the cross and through his resurrection from the dead, we must believe in what he did for us on the cross and receive him for ourselves...as our own Savior and the One taking charge of our life from here. In the familiar words of John chapter 1, verses 12 and 13:

12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

If you think about it, both repentance and belief require one important thing: *humility*...the willingness to stop justifying ourselves and acting as if we know more than our all-knowing Creator...the willingness to set aside our pride and admit we were wrong and surrender ourselves to Someone infinitely more wise. As we do that, we fall with a sigh of relief into the loving arms of our good Father and his Son Jesus Christ, allowing him to take charge as he gives us his Holy Spirit and leads us to start living life in his kingdom the way he designed human beings to live...connected with their Creator, infused with his wisdom, and finally able to live his good and perfect will on earth.

Many people resist repentance and simple faith and the humility it requires, but it is the only way to enter life in the kingdom of God, and any person, no matter their background or past, can enter God's kingdom this way. Stubborn pride,

placing ourselves above God, needs to be torn down by the power of God if we want to enter his kingdom. Listen to Jesus rebuke of the Pharisees in Mathew chapter 21, who by and large refused to submit to repentance and belief as the way into God's kingdom:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

A refusal to humbly repent and believe in the message of the gospel always bars the way into the kingdom of God. So much better to surrender with childlike faith and then be filled up with the power, presence and wisdom of God in the kingdom of God, which is infinitely better than what we will every experience or accomplish in our own strength and human "wisdom."

Dallas Willard, who has a great perspective on the kingdom of God and some very powerful teachings on living fully in that kingdom, provides a couple of illustrations I want to share briefly before we wrap up today. I think this will really help tie it all together for us. He says:

As a child I lived in an area of southern Missouri where electricity was available only in the form of lightning. We had more of that than we could use. But in my senior year of high school the REA (Rural Electrification Administration) extended its lines into the area where we lived, and electrical power became available to households and farms.

When those lines came by our farm, a very different way of living presented itself. Our relationships to fundamental aspects of life – daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it – could then be vastly changed for the better. But we still had to believe in the electricity and its arrangements, understand them, and take the practical steps involved in relying on it.

You may think the comparison rather crude, and in some respects it is. But it will help us to understand Jesus' basic message about the kingdom of the heavens if we pause to reflect on those farmers who, in effect, heard the message: "Repent, for electricity is at hand." Repent, or turn from their

kerosene lamps and lanterns, their iceboxes and cellars, their scrubboards and rug beaters, their woman-powered sewing machines and their radios with dry-cell batteries.

The power that could make their lives far better was right there near them where, by making relatively simple arrangements, they could utilize it. Strangely, a few did not accept it. They did not “enter the kingdom of electricity.” Some just didn’t want to change. Others could not afford it, or so they thought.

Another image may help us understand this “available” aspect of the kingdom, which is so easily overlooked. Think of visiting in a home where you have not been before. It is a fairly large house, and you sit for a while with your host in a living room or on the veranda. Dinner is announced, and he ushers you down a hall, saying at a certain point, “Turn, for the dining room is at hand,” or more likely, “Here’s the dining room.” Similarly Jesus directs us to his kingdom.

*In these images something absolutely crucial to Jesus’ message is emphasized. There is no suggestion that electricity or the dining room hasn’t happened yet but is about to happen or about to be there – possibly if someone welcomes it or lets it come. Rather, they have now become available. And, similarly, the kingdom of God is also right beside us. It is indeed *The Kingdom Among Us*. You can reach it from your heart with your mouth – through even a shaky and stumbling confidence and confession that Jesus is the death-conquering Master of all (Rom. 10:9).*

To be sure, that kingdom has been here as long as we humans have been here, and longer. But it has been available to us through simple confidence in Jesus, the Anointed, only from the time he became a public figure. It is a kingdom that, in the person of Jesus, welcomes us just as we are, just where we are, and makes it possible for us to translate our “ordinary” life into an eternal one. It is so available that everyone who from the center of his or her being calls upon Jesus as Master of the Universe and Prince of Life will be heard and will be delivered into the eternal kind of life.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Do want to live life right now connected with God in his kingdom...that eternal kind of life? Are you tired of trying to run your own life with your own strength and earthly “wisdom?” That’s a very exhausting and pain-filled way to navigate

life. There could be a few of you here today, who have not yet even entered the kingdom of God through repentance and belief in Christ. All it takes is a simple prayer that you mean in your heart...a prayer that expresses repentance (God, I've sinned against you and I want to change) and surrendered belief (Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead and I receive you as my personal Lord and Savior). That's it! I pray that by God's tugging at your heart, you would do that today. I'd love to simply pray that with you as a witness if you'd like to come up now or at the end of our service. Please come at any time. But please don't leave here today without doing it.

But most of us here, I know, have entered the kingdom of God already through repentance and belief in Jesus. And I hope we each have a deep desire to more fully live our lives connected with God in his kingdom and accomplishing his purposes by the power of his Spirit within us. Do you long for that today? What's keeping us from really progressing in kingdom living? It could be a need for repentance. When we allow Christ to fully shine his light into all areas of our lives and our priorities, we may discover some things out of step with God's purposes that are holding us back. When those things are revealed, we need to deal with them the same way we dealt with our sin when we entered the kingdom: with repentance. We'll get nowhere until we do that.

The amazing truth is that Jesus has given us full freedom and security to repent and own up to our sin. The cross is big enough for every bit of our sin and our status as God's child is never in jeopardy. We can only begin to eradicate sin from our lives when we truly repent of it with honesty and a calling out to God for change...and as we're willing to make actual changes in our daily lives that allow us to leave that sin behind and replace it with godliness. This often involves doing different things with our time that will further our growth in the kingdom rather than draw us back into the ways of the world.

Secondly, we may need to truly challenge ourselves and call for God's power in order to truly believe in our hearts what we already know about God and his purposes and his priorities and his design for living life in his kingdom. As you read and meditate on Scripture, which I hope you're doing daily, pray that God would open your eyes to see him and love him as he is and believe that his intentions for you are good and that the way of living life Jesus showed us, is what

we really long for and what will bring us the greatest joy and contentment and soul-rest available in the universe.

And finally, life in the kingdom is a praying life...a life of constant communication with God and seeking of his purposes and wisdom. The Holy Spirit works in us and empowers us *as we pray* and seek what we need in him. Life without prayer is life in the flesh. In contrast, life immersed in prayer and obedience to God's Word is life in the Spirit...kingdom life, where God makes us effective and fruitful in accomplishing his will. *As we pray, may God fill each of us with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [so we can walk] in manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.*

Let's escape the ordinary and the normal flow of a world trying to live outside the will of God, and let's get in step with God's kingdom and be a part of his will being done on earth as it is in heaven! Amen?!