

6 - The Gospel of the Kingdom

Announcing the Presence of the Kingdom

Jesus started his ministry by preaching in the synagogues. Luke provides an example of this early ministry, where Jesus reads a prophecy of the coming Kingdom and announces that this prophecy is now fulfilled:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk 4:16-21)

Repent and Believe the Kingdom has come

Luke continues the narrative telling us how here, in his home synagogue the people rejected his message and drove him away. This helps us to understand better Mark's three-line gospel that we looked at earlier:

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)

The repentance that John the Baptist preached was from injustice (Lk 3:10-14) but Jesus saw that there was a broader problem; the loss of hope and expectation that God was present to heal and deliver; the belief that God's Kingdom would always be a distant future dream.

Jesus announced that the time had come and the kingdom was now here, but they did not repent of their unbelief! They were there at the synagogue, reading and discussing the scriptures about the Kingdom and praying to God, yet they would not believe that God had fulfilled the very promises they were reading! They needed to repent and believe.

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’ Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Lk 4:22-30)

We can see clearly here, that the sin they needed to repent of was not wicked behaviour, but religious unbelief! Jesus says they are just like their forefathers, unwilling to receive the prophetic word and sceptical of God's miraculous works.

This reluctance to believe was stubborn! Even after seeing all of Jesus' miracles his disciples still struggled deeply with unbelief:

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. (Mark 16:14)

The command to repent and believe that the Kingdom has come is a message for us all – especially Christians! We must repent of our unbelief concerning the healing and transforming power of the Kingdom of God here on earth right now!

“**Now** is the time for judgment on this world; **now** the prince of this world will be driven out.” (Jn 12:31)

Victory over Satan

There can be no doubt that Jesus considered healing and deliverance to be central to His mission. He could have talked about forgiveness, about God's love or God's priority for relationship with Him rather than religious observance. But this is how Jesus described His mission:

"I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." (Lk 13:32)

Jesus' Gospel was not primarily about going to heaven when we die, but about bringing Heaven's rule here and now on earth. The Gospel is about setting people free from the oppression of Satan. It is the announcement *and demonstration* of Satan's defeat and God's favour towards His children.

The miracles were not to prove who Jesus was; they were simply the outworking of His Gospel announcement, "The Kingdom of God has come":

"But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Lk 11:20)

The new age Jesus preached consisted of victory over Satan as demonstrated by healing and deliverance, and a new relationship with God as demonstrated through the pronouncement of forgiveness and Jesus' teaching on prayer.

The Risen King

As we have seen in our studies in the Acts and epistles, the proclamation of the Gospel made much of the raising up of Jesus after his death; not just as a defeat of death, but in raising Jesus to reign with God on High. Just before His ascension Jesus said:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples ... and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. (Mark 16:19)

Jesus' ascension was the climax for the disciples seeing the kingdom coming. Jesus was now enthroned at the Father's side to rule the Kingdom He had begun to demonstrate. Jesus exercised that rule on earth, both directly and also through all those who believed in Him.

Conclusion

The Gospel has many wonderful and important aspects, including forgiveness for sins and restoration of our relationship with God.

But the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed was the presence of the Kingdom of God here and now. When we pray the Lord's prayer, saying "Your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" this is what we are praying for; the present reality of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated in healing and deliverance.

If we do not proclaim the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth then we are not proclaiming the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed.

In addition, if we proclaim the Gospel without demonstrating it in healing and deliverance, we are not proclaiming the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed.