

The Kingdom of God Is at Hand

Mark 1:14-15 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁴ Now after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching 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.”

Introduction

Happy New Year! I hope your Christmas has been restful, joyous, and healthy! May the Lord grant us all a year of peace, joy, and love! Amen.

It’s always a good idea to reflect on the past year before we start a new one. The last year’s theme for the church was to ‘*know your God.*’ How did we do it on that score? How much did you get to know God personally? I hope all of us made a progress in knowing our Heavenly Father. As far as I am concerned, I would give myself a ‘B’ meaning I could’ve done better in terms of studying His Word and prayer. Anyway, let us continue pressing on knowing the Lord our Heavenly Father. He loves to reveal Himself to those who diligently seek Him.

For 2023, *Thy Kingdom Come*, is our theme. The Lord taught us to pray *Thy Kingdom Come* and *Thy Will Be Done* on earth as it is in Heaven. We want to see His Kingdom come here and now, but I also know that until Christ comes again, we will not see God’s Kingdom fully established on earth. However, even now we as a Kingdom citizen can foretaste the reign of God in our lives by obeying His commandments. It is God’s will for us to live daily under God’s reign. I urge everyone this morning that throughout the year to stay focused on God’s Kingdom by praying, worshiping, getting into God’s Word, pursuing God, and acting on God’s Kingdom principles in our words and actions, in our families, in our church, and in our communities.

Content

If Jesus were here today with us, and if He launched His public ministry here in Manahawkin as He did in Galilee two thousand years ago, how differently would His ministry look? He might have dressed up differently: wearing jeans and sneakers. Perhaps, He might have spoken English instead of Aramaic. However, one thing will

remain the same as back then: His message. His catch phrase for ministry will be the same: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”** It only takes 10 seconds to say these three sentences, but it packs all the things that we need for God’s Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God. “What is the Kingdom of God?” a child asked of a missionary. It is a kingdom where God is king, the missionary answered. Can we answer any better than that?! Father in Heaven, the King of heaven and earth, is most interested in establishing His kingdom on earth; first in our hearts, in our homes, in our church, in our communities, in our nation, and in the world. The Lord sent His Son Jesus to realize such full reign of God here on earth. Did you know that Christ’s main mission was, is, and always will be His Father’s Kingdom? He said, *I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me* (John 5:30). He also said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, I can do nothing on My own, unless it is something I see My Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things I also do in the same way* (John 5:19). At God’s appointed time Christ came to fulfill God’s Kingdom here on earth in heart, one believer at a time. So He declares,

The Kingdom of God **Is at Hand**. It is here. Right here. Right at the door. Right at the door of your heart. Christ urges you to do something about it. Do it now. Don’t put it off. You may say, how? Repent and believe in the gospel, He commands. *Repent and believe*. These are the prerequisites for God’s Kingdom. Without repentance, you will not be in God’s Kingdom, no matter how morally good you are. Without believing in the gospel, no matter how hard you may try, the Gate of Heaven will remain closed to you.

Some folks in the church are misled by a false teaching that God loves everyone that He will have everyone in Heaven no matter what they believe or no matter what kind of life they conduct. Really? You must test everything you hear against the Scripture and against what Jesus is saying or not saying. When it comes down to the Kingdom of God, Jesus is very specific about sins. He said, **repent**. That means, our sins must be forgiven through repentance. Jesus never said you are welcome to Heaven whatever you believe, either. Instead, He said, **believe in the gospel. Repent and believe, then** you will enter God’s Kingdom. Let’s dig a little deeper.

Repent: I love the word, *repent*. I need the word, repentance. Repentance is my lifeline. Our lifeline. It is one of the most beautiful words in God’s Kingdom. It is

a must word for God's people. Do not shun the word "repent." Embrace it, because we need it for our salvation. Although most of us already know the meaning of repentance and practice it in our walk with God, let's review it one more time.

We cannot separate repentance from God's Kingdom. Where God's Kingdom is, there's repentance. Where repentance is, there's the Kingdom of God. Ask yourself: why did Christ come? "*To call sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32). He has called you and me to repentance. Repentance is a foundation of God's Kingdom. Without repentance, our sins will not be forgiven. With our sins remain unforgiven, we will not be allowed in the presence of holy God. Without repentance, God's Kingdom will not stand. Without repentance, Heaven will be empty.

This is what I mean by that: when we get to Heaven, we will join in worship with countless people of God from all over the world. *A great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all the tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb* (Revelation 7:9). All these saints in Heaven have one thing in common: they are *redeemed sinners*. They were once sinners, meaning, they all have past records, not so great, not so shiny, either. In God's eyes, all of them were murderers, haters, racists, adulterers, swindlers, liars ... , simply put, they all have sinned against God with no exception. None of them would pass divine background checks with flying colors. Yet, they are all in God's Kingdom! How is it possible? Not because of their personal goodness, but because their sins are forgiven. Because they were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God. Their sins were thoroughly dealt and cleansed by Christ's blood before they entered Heaven. The wages of their sin were paid off fully and completely by Christ's death on the cross on their behalf--the only merit that allows them to be in the presence of the Holy God. No human works or merits will do it. Each saint in Heaven was granted the forgiveness of sins through repentance. Each of them accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. That's why Jesus still proclaims to repent of our sins.

Repentance is also a means of God's grace among us. It gives us the second chance in our relationships with each other as we forgive each other. We need repentance because none of us are perfect. Since I constantly make mistakes, and sometimes, I hurt others, I need their forgiveness through my repentance and vice versa. Repentance restores our broken relationships. Jesus points out again: If you want to be in God's Kingdom, learn to repent/forgive.

Two Steps of Repentance: First, you genuinely feel sorry for what you have done wrong before God and ask for God's forgiveness. Although sometimes our own conscience convicts us of our sins, the Lord mostly uses His written Word (we call the Bible) and His Spirit (we call the Holy Spirit) to bring us to repentance. Sometimes,

the Lord sends out His messengers (we call prophets) to call for repentance. E.g., King David and Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12). The key is that whenever we are convicted of our sins, make a habit of repenting right away.

Next step for repentance is to bear the fruit of repentance. That means, turn around 180 degrees, and go on the right direction. It means to stop what we have been doing wrong and start doing what is right. Let's say that I have a gambling habit. I promise to God and to my family that I will no longer do it. Yet, if I keep gambling away my money and time, it is not a true repentance, is it? We must *produce fruit consistent with repentance* (Matthew 3:8). Imagine you have been committing adultery by watching pornography. True repentance means to stop watching porn stuff on internet. You want to repent of lazy habits? Then, start working hard with hands. Someone with a lying tongue must start telling the truth. The list goes on.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of God is at hand, Jesus proclaims. He invites us to be in God's Kingdom. He calls us to repent and believe in the gospel. I am sure all of us have things to repent and ask for forgiveness both from God and from each other. We as a church or as a nation also have things to repent, don't we? Yes, we do. May God help us to repent all our sins and believe in the gospel. Then, only then, we will be in God's Kingdom, and it will be well with us.

Let us pray.