

Seize the Kingdom

Introduction

- Today and next Sunday, I want to tell you about the most significant change that has ever taken place in my life: my understanding of the central message of the Scriptures
- This message has revolutionized my thinking and my actions, and has radically transformed my life
- This message can radically transform you/church

The Kingdom of God

- Read Matthew 11:1-15
- Jesus completed giving instructions to 12 Apostles
- Jesus departs to teach and preach in their cities
- What is the message He will be proclaiming?
- The same message He has been proclaiming since He began His public ministry: the Kingdom of God
- Kingdom would have been very familiar to His listeners, the Jews, but unfamiliar to us, as Gentiles
- The Hebrew prophets foretold of a Messiah who would be a descendant of Abraham, who as the obedient Son of David, would come and establish and rule over an earthly Kingdom
- We hear one of these prophecies every Christmas
- Read Isaiah 9:6-7
- And what would be the nature of this Kingdom?
- Read Daniel 2:44-45; background: vision; statue; successive Gentile nations dominating history;
- Prophets foretold of a glorious day when God will establish His reign on the earth in fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, David, and unknown HP, the Expected One, the Messiah
- God's kingdom will displace all other reigns, kingdoms, and authorities
- God alone will be King in that day
- Compare current world vs coming Apoc Kingdom
- Jews longing for this K, as should we
- Mighty manifestation of God's power & might
- Righteousness, justice, and peace established by the Christ, the Son of God, the "Expected One"
- His kingdom sustained into the ages of the ages

Prepare for the Coming Kingdom

- The prophets also foretold of a coming forerunner of the expected Messiah and His Kingdom
- Jews expect Elijah to be the coming herald
- Yet, Jesus equates John with promised forerunner
- Read Matthew 11:7-10
- As John begins his ministry, what is His message?
- Read Matthew 3:1-3
- John calls people to prepare for Messiah
- How are they to prepare? Make His paths straight?

- Through repentance; define & illustrate repentance
- Why? The Kingdom of God has come near!
- Read Matthew 3:4-6
- Who was John calling to repent? People of God!
- John was calling God's people away from the status quo, from ungodliness and indifference
- To repentance toward God/faith coming Messiah
- Those believing John's message: baptized as they confessed their sins; "I am changing my life"
- Read Matthew 3:7-10
- No one is exempt from John's message
- All of God's people, including the religious leaders: preachers, teachers, of that day
- Everyone is to prepare for K and M by repenting
- Evidence of repentance & faith: a changed life
- Being Jew, Baptist, churchgoer won't rescue you
- They/we confused: don't think we need to repent
- "I prayed a prayer"; "I walked down a aisle"
- God's prophet says to God's people:
- Prepare for the Messiah and His kingdom: Repent
- If you don't prepare, expect judgment

The Messiah's Ministry

- When Jesus begins His public ministry, proclaimed same message as John; Read Matthew 4:17
- And as Jesus began to proclaim the K of God, His ministry was accompanied by great miracles
- Prophets foretold Messiah's ministry would be accompanied by great miracles: Read Isaiah 35:5-6
- That is what we see: the blind receive sight; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear

Where is the Kingdom?

- Jesus appears to be the "Expected One" who will usher in the expected Kingdom
- He is proclaiming the K of the Hebrew Scriptures and performing the signs associated with it
- Yet, where is the coming of His Kingdom in great power and righteousness?
- Where is the removal of the wicked kingdoms?
- Why do Herod & Rome still rule?
- This is the thinking behind John the Baptist's question to Jesus: Are you the Expected One, or shall we wait for someone else? (Matthew 11:3)

The Mystery of the Kingdom

- In response to John's question, Jesus responds:
- Read Matthew 11:4-6
- Jesus: I am performing prophesied signs; I am the Expected One; You will be blessed if you do not take offense at me! Why?

- Because something John/we don't understand
- New truth Jesus was to reveal re: Kingdom of God
- Truth about Kingdom that had never been revealed by prior prophets including John the Baptist
- Jesus reveals in a series of parables this new truth which he calls the "Mysteries of the Kingdom"
- The parables that are found in Matthew 13:
- Read: Matthew 13:1-9; 31-33; 44-46; 47-50
- These parables illustrate this central truth:
- The Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is the SAME Kingdom that the prophets foretold
- K has been inaugurated, but not in manner people expecting
- God's Kngd has come, but quietly, unobtrusively
- One day it will transition to one of power, glory, might at return of Jesus
- Evil nations replaced by sovereignty of God
- Wickedness will be judged
- Righteousness will be established
- However, at this time, the Kingdom is not:
- Crushing unjust rulers
- Abolishing sin on the earth
- Establishing righteousness, justice, & peace
- Now it has come as:
- As a farmer unobtrusively sowing seed
- Or as an insignificant mustard seed
- Or as a trivial amount of leaven in a loaf of bread
- However, though this kingdom has come quietly, unobtrusively, it is not to be despised!
- Make no mistake!
- It is the SAME kingdom that will one day be fully revealed in great splendor & power
- Currently present, but tiny, seemingly insignificant
- Yet, one day tiny seed will become a great shrub, the Kingdom of glory, power, might
- Therefore, to be highly prized as hidden treasure or pearl great value
- Though Kingdom has come, it is not "in your heart"; not "heaven when you die;" not "spiritual"
- It is here now!
- Those that have eyes to see can perceive it
- Those that have ears to hear can understand it
- If it has been granted to you to perceive it and understand this mystery, Jesus: repent!
- Amazingly, when Messiah proclaims message of K
- Only a few receive and bear fruit; 1 out of 4
- Satan works to snatch is away from some
- Others fall away due persecution/things of world

- Although Satan's kingdom still stands, K of G has invaded & delivers from power of sin those who believe/persevere in Gospel of Kingdom Read Matt 11:14-15; If you understand that K has come, John is your Elijah
 - If you have ears to hear, you must hear (obey)!
- Truth Will Set Your Free**
- For years, I had missed the main message of the Scriptures, the Kingdom of God and its Gospel
 - I knew Christian jargon, sang the songs; went through the motions of "Christianity"
 - I was a pastor; I went to seminary
 - Because of "heaven when I die" I didn't think sin was a big deal; OK if I sinned; I was "forgiven;" God's grace overlooked my sin
 - I lived with sin instead of dying to it; a slave to sin
 - In reality, Jesus was just an "add-on"
 - I was living a charade; not gospel that Jesus proclaimed; or Abraham, or Moses or prophets
 - But when I began to see that the focus of the Scriptures was not "heaven when you die" but entering the Kingdom now
 - And that sin was not OK, but had to be dealt with ruthlessly through repentance, in order to enter K
 - I realized Jesus was not an "add-on"
 - He was the Holy One that demanded that I be holy
 - I mourned over my sin, but rejoiced in the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God
 - John 8:31-36; Give background; Read
 - If we continue in the message of Jesus: G of K
 - We are truly His disciples; will be set from sin
 - And if we don't, we aren't His disciples; slaves sin
 - Today, that is the choice before us
 - Will we believe in the central message of the Scriptures and Jesus Christ, G of K; repent of sin
 - If you were honest, many have to admit
 - Focus has not the Kingdom; Jesus is an "add-on"
 - You are a slave to sin
 - Unloving toward wife; lying at work; disrespectful to parents; pornography, etc
 - The effects of you sin are evident in your life, your marriage, your family, your relationship
 - But today, you have the opportunity to begin to truly be a disciple of JC; to be set free from sin
 - Challenge: John 3:19-21