

The Kingdom of God Among Us

Luke 17:20-21

February 28, 2021

As I begin this message, I realize that the term “Kingdom” is not something that we use every day, at least in the United States. However, in the biblical times, it was the term that everyone could associate with. In fact, “The kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” was the central message of Jesus Christ. By the way, these terms were interchangeably used in the New Testament. Many of his parables were about this kingdom. However, the Bible itself does not define what the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is. We know that it has to do with the reign of God in human hearts and lives.

The term “kingdom” is used 162 times in the New Testament. Most of the time, it referred to the Kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. Some people think of the Kingdom of God as heaven itself. Psalm 103:19a states, “The Lord has established his throne in heaven.” This certainly suggests that the Kingdom of God may refer to heaven.

However, the Kingdom of God is not a physical place. In both the Old and New Testament, the term “kingdom” is primarily understood as the rule or reign of a king. It is seldom used to refer to a geographical or physical territory. So, the expression “Kingdom of God” is best understood as the “Rule of God.”

One day, Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the Kingdom of God is among you.”

The last sentence, “The Kingdom of God is among you” can also be translated as “The Kingdom of God is within you” or “The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

No matter how it is translated, the basic message of Jesus is that “The Kingdom of God is already happening, all around you, because I have come.” In other words, Kingdom of God is something that exists here and now.

If it is here and now, how do we experience it? There are two ingredients that are necessary to experience the Kingdom. Jesus said, “Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

The first ingredient is repentance. In his book, *I Surrender*, Patrick Morley states that many of us have the misconception that we can add Christ to our lives without subtracting sin. They think all we need to do is to change our beliefs without changing our behaviors. “It is revival without reformation, without repentance.” Can this happen? No, it cannot. Because we experience God’s love, presence and intervention as much as we repent of our sins. God rules in our lives as much as we surrender to him. As much as we repent of our sins, that much we will experience God’s reign in our lives.

The second ingredient is to believe God’s good news and to trust him. The Bible gives us this promise. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”¹

The everlasting life begins the moment we surrender ourselves to the Lord. When we surrender ourselves to the Lord, our guilt, fear, anger, and all the negative thoughts and emotions can be washed away, and you can begin a new life. It is the beginning of a total transformation of our lives. It begins with a change of heart, but it translates into the modification of behavior.

There is a young woman named Eleanor Sass. When she was a child she was hospitalized for appendicitis. Her roommate was a young girl named Mollie. Mollie had an accident. She was hit by a car while she was riding a bicycle. Her legs were badly broken and she had several surgeries. However, doctors were not sure if she would ever walk again. Naturally, Mollie was devastated. As young as she was, she just gave up all hopes and refused to listen to any possibility. She spent almost all day every day crying. She was bitter and would not co-operate with anyone to start the therapy.

However, she seemed to perk up when the morning mail arrived. She often received gifts from relatives and friends. Most of her gifts were books, games and stuffed animals.

Then one day a gift came from her aunt. When Mollie opened it, it was a pair of beautiful black leather shoes. Nurses who saw them mumbled saying, “Ah, people don’t use their heads!” They said that because they were convinced that Mollie would never walk again but Mollie didn’t seem to hear them. She put her hands in the shoes and “walked” them up and down her blanket.

¹ John 3:16.

From that day, her attitude changed. She began to co-operate with the therapy. One day, Eleanor heard that her friend Mollie had left the hospital. The best news was that Mollie had walked out of the hospital wearing those black shoes.²

What happened to Mollie is that the new shoes gave her hope. They became a source of strength and a change of attitude that affected her emotionally and even physically. When she imagined herself walking again and wearing those beautiful shoes, she wanted to start the therapy. She was determined to walk again. In a way that is what repentance does. It changes our hearts and behaviors.

Repentance can have the same therapeutic effects on our lives. It not only changes our heart and attitude, but it also changes our behaviors and the way we live.

A retired pastor Martin Singley once shared a story of a young man, named Dan, who had an unfortunate accident that totally changed his life. Dan was a brilliant athlete who went off to college on an athletic scholarship. He was smart and had a bright future. One day, Dan came home for vacation and got together with some old high school friends. They met at the town park in the evening, drank a few cans of beer, told jokes, had a wonderful time. About midnight they decided to go swimming in the town pool. Dan was the first to dive in. Unfortunately, there was no water in the pool. No one knew about that. In the darkness, he could not see that there was no water. He was parallelized neckdown.

His life was forever changed. When pastor Martin met him, Dan was bitter, distraught, wheelchair bound, struggling to make it through each day. Dan was angry and frustrated with his life, his circumstances, perhaps with God. Who wouldn't be? When the pastor met him, Dan was tired of living but was also afraid of dying.³

If Dan accepts Jesus as his Lord and Savior, would he be healed? Probably not. We may say that when Dan dies, he can experience the freedom from his wheelchair and his brokenness and have new life in heaven. He will suffer no more. Well, that will be wonderful. And I believe he will.

² *God's Devotional Book for Mothers* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005), p.231.

³ <http://www.tellicochurch.org/Year%20B%20Sermons/030706.html>.

But what about now? Dan needs heaven not only tomorrow, but he also needs it today. Can he experience the kingdom of God, the rule of God in his life today?

Dan needs to know that God cares for him in an intimate and personal way. The accident was terrible and disastrous, no doubt. I wish it had never happened to him but now that it had happened to him, what will change his life? His bitterness? His hopeless and despair? His anger toward God?

If he accepts the fact that it had happened and surrenders his life to the Lord, then he will begin his healing, if not physical restoration, then at least emotional and spiritual healing.

Many of you remember Joni Ereckson Tada. She had a similar accident and became quadriplegic, just like Dan. She had a similar bitterness, frustration, and anger toward God but she surrendered herself to the Lord, she began to experience healing, not a physical restoration, but spiritual and emotional healing. Now she is an amazing servant of the Lord. She experiences the Kingdom of God, the Rule of God, each and every day.

Christian faith is NOT primarily concerned with life after death. It certainly includes that but its main concern is about the life here and now. Our faith is not about dying; it is about living.

When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, he was talking about God's rule, his Lordship, in our lives here and now. No matter what we face in life, we need to learn to constantly surrender ourselves to the Lord. Surrendering our lives to the Lord is not just a one-time thing. It is an ongoing process and ongoing practice because it is in our constant surrender, we experience the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is among you." May the good Lord rule in your hearts and lives today and every day!