

THE KINGDOM CHANGES EVERYTHING

Series: Stories of the Kingdom

July 28, 2019

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Kingdom of God,

Acts 9

And Jesus often told stories. He told metaphorical stories called parables. A lot of times when people would gather around him, he would start to tell these stories to teach or encourage them. The stories were very simple that everyone could see themselves in. Now often some people did not understand them and he would explain but certainly, none of his stories was out of reach to even the simplest of people.

And most of the parables he told were about the Kingdom of God or of God, the King of the Kingdom; or God the father. The Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus. This was his central focus.

Actually even in times when he does not make direct references to the Kingdom of God or God as King, for him, this was all about the Kingdom.

Now maybe to see that we need to understand what Kingdom meant for Jewish dwellers of Palestine at that time. Unfortunately for us in this century Kingdoms only bring in mind monarchies that are limited to a geographical place. Like the British Monarchy only reigns within the UK.

The Kingdom of God was not a reference to a physical place but rather a to God being in charge. The Kingdom of God is about God's reign and power.

So when Jesus said he only says what God saying or only does what God is doing, he is in that moment saying that God is in control, He is King and He is reigning.

And what things did Jesus do and say? He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he comforted the mourning, he taught the truth with boldness, he spoke life and forgiveness to those who were fainthearted and rejected. His teaching completely revolutionized the world.

Some important things to note, one day Jesus sent his disciples out and tells them to do the same things he did. His instructions were Go and into the cities and declare that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Meaning that they should declare that the Rule of God is within reach. To declare that living a life in which we are under the reign of God is within reach.

This is because his invitation has always been, to God's Kingdom. One day teaching his disciples he said "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all the rest will be added to you" You know, seek first to enter the life in which you are submitted to the Kingship of God and everything else is added.

Of all the things we search for in life, to be living the life of the Kingdom is the key to it all. You know sometimes we are preoccupied with the desire to find everything else. What shall we eat, what shall we wear? What will become of our nation when so and so becomes president or prime minister? Should we allow these people in? What will become of our careers and this and that?

And as I go through that list, all of us might have felt something in their chest at the mention of one or 2. Because these issues are important. Yet here is Jesus saying, the most important thing to be focused on is living a life of God's Kingdom. Living a life in which we are submitted to the reign of God.

One of the stories he tells to illustrate this is very short. He told his disciples that the Kingdom of God is like a very rich Jewel merchant who set out (Matthew 13:33-36) and then he found a pearl of great value. He found the most valuable treasure. When he found it, he sold everything he had to acquire this one pearl.

So pearls were so valuable in their time. Maybe not as much today. But then they were so valuable. People searched really hard for them. If you have ever been in the business of buying things or resell, sometimes you come across something so good that you decide that it will not go on the shelf for resale.

Now be careful, some of the second-hand clothes resellers of our city when they come across such they take 'em off the shelf and use them for a while and then put them back. Or some just might use their stock as their personal wardrobes and just wear as they put back until the stock is over.

But I am not talking about that. Imagine finding something that is so valuable that you are not willing to put it up for sale. It must be valuable? But now imagine finding something very valuable, too valuable that you sell your stock, and everything else you have to acquire it. This is the value of the Kingdom of God.

Think of the most valuable thing for you. Reputation, possession, citizenship, your dreams. Experiencing and seeking the Kingdom of God is so valuable, completes us enough, satisfies us enough that we will lay that valuable thing down and then go back and get everything else and lay them back down.

You see, sometimes we read such passages and we are discouraged, we think God is cosmic kill-joy and a sadist who just demands everything. Quite the contrary, I think the picture is of God offering everything. The value of the pearl was so immeasurable that nothing he had could keep him from having it. The satisfaction he was going to get was going to be much more than everything he had combined.

Living a life of the Kingdom of God will be so life-giving that nothing that gives us a bit of life or all of them combined could keep us from surrender.

And it is the core message of Jesus Christ. That the Kingdom of God is at hand. It is so of value that it is worth standing on the rooftop and shouting aloud to the world around us that the Kingdom of God is reachable. You see everything they have, singly or cumulatively, will not satisfy them. Sometimes people have no idea that they could trade in all the less satisfying things for true life in the Kingdom of God.

As depression rates soar, as upward mobility becomes harder and harder, as corruption becomes our country's staple and even for countries that are seemingly doing better to be caught in a state of brokenness. It is easy to get disillusioned and think, well this is it. This is the reality of human experience. The world desperately needs to know that the Kingdom of God is within reach. The power of God is within reach.

To say, God, your Kingdom come is essentially to say not my Kingdom. Your Kingdom come is to say my Kingdom go. It is the prayer Jesus makes right before he is arrested. To say, father, your will be done, is to say not my own. We can't have it both ways. To have God's Kingdom and still sit on the throne.

When God moves in, he rearranges everything.

I want us to read a story. This guy we have talked about a lot around here. His name is Paul. He was a Roman citizen and he was also a Jew and a strict follower of Judaism. So as a firm believer in Judaism he was so passionate for God he decides to persecute all followers of a new sect later called Christians. Everyone who was following Jesus and claiming that he was the son of God was on his radar. Until he meets Jesus.

Acts 9: 1- 9

All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest and got arrest warrants to take to the meeting places in Damascus so that if he found anyone there belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.

He set off. When he got to the outskirts of Damascus, he was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you out to get me?"

He said, "Who are you, Master?"

"I am Jesus, the One you're hunting down. I want you to get up and enter the city. In the city, you'll be told what to do next."

His companions stood there dumbstruck—they could hear the sound, but couldn't see anyone—while Saul, picking himself up off the ground, found himself stone-blind. They had to take him by the hand and lead him into Damascus. He continued blind for three days. He ate nothing, drank nothing.

So after this encounter, we get a totally different person. This becomes the Paul who plants so many churches throughout the Roman world. He writes so many letters to the churches and disciples for Jesus that end up forming a huge part of the New Testament. It is a total turnaround. A whole 180.

Look at this part

Acts 9: 21-22

Saul spent a few days getting acquainted with the Damascus disciples but then went right to work, wasting no time, preaching in the meeting places that this Jesus was the Son of God. They were caught off guard by this and, not at all sure they could trust him, they kept saying, "Isn't this the man who wreaked havoc in Jerusalem among the believers? And didn't he come here to do the same thing—arrest us and drag us off to jail in Jerusalem for sentencing by the high priests?"

But their suspicions didn't slow Saul down for even a minute. His momentum was up now and he ploughed straight into the opposition, disarming the Damascus Jews and trying to show them that this Jesus was the Messiah.

The guy who had come to Damascus to kill the disciples ends up opening time with disciples and getting to know them and love them and in no time, he is preaching the same message. It is very shocking for everyone around him.

The disciples could tell his conviction, his passion and his commitment. They knew he wasn't faking it. But is kinda hard to reconcile the change.

Soon, he is arguing with the same people he was for before. He is now arguing with Jews who held the same beliefs he held before his trip down to Damascus. He is now declaring that Jesus is the Messiah.

That word Messiah which is also translated Christ is not Jesus' second name. It is a very special title. It means that the anointed King. Paul is now declaring the same message, that the Kingdom of God had come in Jesus, the anointed King.

Such a turnaround that he was on the Hitlist of the ones who hated this message. Talk about the hunter becoming the hunted.

Every time we encounter the Kingdom of God everything changes. It is a total turnaround. Our conviction, our politics, our philosophy on marriage, race, sexuality, economics change when we meet the King of the Kingdom. Because saying God let your Kingdom come, is literally saying my Kingdom Go.

Saying Let your Kingdom come is literally saying the Kingdom of the enemy go. And when this happens we see the sick getting well. We see people being released from the oppression of evil spirits. We see people being released from the grip of drug addiction.

Saying God Your will be done, is saying not my will, not the will of my government or my political party or the will of my socio-economic or socio-political group but God's will. And the thing is, welcoming the Kingdom of God rearranges everything.

And it is not just once. Every time we are in God's presence we experience his Kingdom. His Kingdom breaks into our current reality and always rearranges things. So it is not just about the initial time when we decide to follow Jesus. But being ready anytime for God to rearrange things and make things different.

Paul had so many of these occasions. One time he was planning to go into a city when the Holy Spirit stepped in and changed plans. There was a friend he had worked with for a Long time and it was time for them to part. Life in the Kingdom of God is a life of expecting that anytime, any moment God will step in and rearrange everything.

And every time we discover the pearl of great price, the Kingdom of God, the response is the same, we see everything we've got. We give up everything that we have gained to that point. The reputation we have built to that point. The wealth we have created to that point. The stability and safety we have gained to that point. We sell it all to pursue the Kingdom of God.

When I first came to Nakuru. I was just about to graduate from college. I had a job with a Vineyard church in Nairobi, I had paid internship and another job promised pretty much. I was in a flourishing relationship. I was not gonna come back to my hometown and no longer go to the movies whenever I want to and no ice cream places. Especially not when I did not have a place to stay or a job.

But I came down to meet Adam and Melody the couple that was planting this church to ask them how the community of worship leaders of Vineyard churches could support the new church plant.

On my way here, I kinda fell asleep. I wasn't sleepy and I know Kenyans, you put us in anything that is moving we are ready to sleep but this was different. I had a dream after which I must have woken up immediately again with no sleep in my eyes. In the kinda dream I had come to Nakuru and never went back to Nairobi.

And you know sometimes you dream and it is simply what you ate or your fears showing up or your desires. It could mean nothing and it could mean everything. Have you had some of those? I kinda knew that this had the potential to be one of those significant ones. But I was not sure.

So I met Adam and his wife, Melody for dinner. And this part he and I tell differently but it's okay. How I remember it is Adam shared passionately about the vision of this church and I heard him say, "You would be a great fit for this church" Now he says he did not say that. Now, I know all of us who know Adam like him but what do you make of a man who cannot remember things he says?

Anyway, it is possible he did not say it. The point is that at that moment I heard an invitation to be part of what God was doing here and immediately it took me back to the dream I had on the road. I had great plans for where my life was going or so I thought. But God...

At that moment the Kingdom of God was breaking into my story and I had a choice. Either my Kingdom come or God's Kingdom come. And to say God's Kingdom come, was to sell everything I had to that moment and acquire this pearl of great price.

A few months after that I had given up my Nairobi dreams, given up 2 jobs, the safety of what I knew. Adam and Melody offered me a room in their compound to start from.

Living the life of the Kingdom is living a life of expecting that God will break-in at any moment and change everything.

And the church is charged with the message of the Kingdom of God is to literally go around telling people that the Kingdom of God is at hand. That they do not have to live in a state of depression or sickness or under the oppression of evil. That they do not have to live in despair with no hope. That they do not have to live in the darkness of loneliness. That the life of the Kingdom of God is within reach. You can smell it, you can touch it.

It is not for the religious professionals called pastors,

it is not for those who have been walking the journey for decades,

it is not for those who have not done the kind of things you have done.

It is not for those who have never smoked this and never drank that. It is not for those who have never slept there or woke up there.

The Kingdom of God is within reach.

It is not even for those who after beginning to follow Jesus no longer struggle with any of the above.

The Kingdom of God is within reach of every one of us. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

Let's stand. I want to invite our ministry teams to take their place. I invite you to read these words with me

***When you walk into the room, everything changes
Darkness starts to tremble at the light that You bring
When you walk into the room, every heart starts burning
And nothing matters more than just
To sit here at Your feet and worship You***

***When you walk into the room, sickness starts to vanish
Every hopeless situation ceases to exist
When you walk into the room the dead begin to rise
'Cause there is resurrection life in all You do***

***We love you, and we'll never stop
Can't live without You, Jesus
We love you, we can't get enough
All this is for You, Jesus***

***Come and consume God all we are
We give You permission our hearts are Yours
We want you, we want You***

Lord, we declare Your Kingdom come.

Let's Pray