

## ONCE BEFORE A TIME...

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Series: Stories of the Kingdom  
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Kingdom of God, Kingdom Expectation

So Jesus' main message was the Kingdom of God is at hand. The Kingdom had come through him. An interesting thing to note, when Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, he did not explain what he meant. Last week when we started the conversation, I had to give some context to what I was going to talk about every time I mentioned the Kingdom of God. But Jesus did not.

You know when you do not have to explain what you mean? It is when everyone around you shares that same meaning or when the meaning that your listeners would attribute to what you're saying is what you want to speak into.

So when Jesus was speaking to the first century Jews about the Kingdom of God, what they hear him say determines their reactions. So for us who are many centuries removed from that time, to get a better view of what Jesus was saying, we should look at what they understood him to mean, and how they reacted to his message and why.

Look at this instance, for example, Jesus was one day at the Synagogue very early on in his ministry and he was given the honour of doing the days reading. The Jews had a schedule for reading the scriptures. So by divine providence, the day Jesus was reading they were reading from Isaiah 61. This portion the Jews believed had a direct reference to the Kingdom of God. It was about the Messiah they expected. The chosen one of God, the anointed King, the Christ. Here is what it says

Isaiah 61:1-7

***The Spirit of God, the Master, is on me  
because God anointed me.  
He sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
heal the heartbroken,  
Announce freedom to all captives,  
pardon all prisoners.  
God sent me to announce the year of his grace—  
a celebration of God's destruction of our enemies—  
and to comfort all who mourn,***

If I read this like I just did and said, “Guys, this truth has just become a reality today” there might not be so much of a reaction from you guys.

But After Jesus read this portion, he went on to say, “Listen, everyone, everything that I have just read is no longer something wait for, it is fulfilled here and now in me.”

Guess how they responded...

V22

***All who were there, watching and listening, were surprised at how well he spoke. But they also said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son, the one we’ve known since he was a youngster?”***

Essentially saying is, wow such brilliant talk and all, but there is no way you can be the one. We have seen you grow up, we know your family. We know your mom and dad, your sisters and brothers, their dramas and all. Come on!

And maybe they would not have gone any further if he, Jesus, had not persisted

V23- 27

***He answered, “I suppose you’re going to quote the proverb, ‘Doctor, go heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we heard you did in Capernaum.’ Well, let me tell you something: No prophet is ever welcomed in his hometown. Isn’t it a fact that there were many widows in Israel at the time of Elijah during that three and a half years of drought when famine devastated the land, but the only widow to whom Elijah was sent was in Sarepta in Sidon? And there were many lepers in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha but the only one cleansed was Naaman the Syrian.”***

In a nutshell, Jesus says Yeah I know you will reject me and make fun of me and mock me. Now, Israel had a history of rejecting messengers of God. Jesus doubles down by reminding them stories of their community where God did more for people outside their community and they only got to hear the stories. So yeah, you reject me, like you have done to prophets before and soon you will be hearing from the neighbourhood what things are happening.

See their reaction

V 28-30

***That set everyone in the meeting place seething with anger. They threw him out, banishing him from the village, then took him to a mountain cliff at the edge of the village to throw him to his doom, but he gave them the slip and was on his way.***

They got so angry hearing this that they wanted to kill him. One, they excommunicate him by putting him outside of the village. When they get there they think, oh, we might as well kill him. Whatever Jesus was saying and insisting on was so serious that they were ready to kill him for it. And the church and followers of Jesus today need to understand that.

Whatever Jesus' central message is, was and is so crucial they wanted to kill him for it from the first day and it is the reason they killed him when they finally did. But praise God it is the same Kingdom of God that He was raised from the dead.

So if we are going to talk about the Kingdom of God as was being taught by Jesus, we must try and be aware of what he meant because that is what it must mean to us too. We must go back to once before a time and see a few things that shaped the view of the Kingdom in their mind.

The nation of Israel had had a great King called David. He was the second King of the Nation and no one could deny that the Spirit of God was upon him. The Nation expanded and they were at their peak.

Then they had another King who was his son, called Solomon. Solomon was so full of wisdom and he reigned over Israel in a time of economic prosperity, wealth and so much peace.

So these 2 Davidic monarchies were considered the best times of Israel as Nation.

Unfortunately, what followed under other kings was also a time of spiritual decline that soon led to the splitting the Kingdom into 2 after he died. And everything was downhill from there. They got into a cycle bad kings and righteous Kings, losing their Kingdom and going into exile. But every time they regained the Kingdom it was not like it was before.

There began to grow this burning desire, hope and expectation to see their nation return to the times of King David. But it was not just out of nothing. Prophet after prophet would come and tell them how God would restore the Kingdom under the reign of a special King anointed by God who would come from the house of David.

So there was this growing expectation all across Israel for a militaristic leader, who was from the lineage of David who would be anointed by God to come and restore the Kingdom back to Israel. Especially now that they were under Roman occupation. They really looked forward to the Messiah, that foretold anointed King, who would set them free.

It was so ingrained in them that even the disciples who had spent around 3 years with Jesus still asked about it after his resurrection

Acts 1:6

***When they were together for the last time they asked, “Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?”***

So, everyone who arose as a freedom fighter, they wondered if He was the Messiah and after a few brutal defeats by the Romans they were too careful about people calling themselves their freedom.

So what they were hearing when Jesus is talking about the Kingdom was what Kenyans were hearing in the 1960s when a state of emergency was declared as Kenya fought for freedom.

There was an expectation everywhere in this country. People wanted to be free, coupled with fear from the brutality that was meted out to freedom fighters. Now you understand why they wanted to kill Jesus? This was their life he was talking about.

Alongside this view and longing for a return to an Israel centric Davidic military Kingdom also grew another concept of the Kingdom of God. Where God would come himself. That, that would be the day of the Lord. That it would be the end of human history as we know it. The end of the world.

This view was apocalyptic, they longed for the Kingdom to come which would be God bringing the day of reckoning. It was both the most joyous day and the most dreadful day. Because Judgement was coming. Woe unto those who have been unjust to the poor and the weak, the widow and the orphan.

While there also is a celebration as God is putting things right and finally he will have the government on his shoulders because no one else can be as just as him. This encapsulated in poems such as these

Isaiah 35 :1-7

*Wilderness and desert will sing joyously,  
the badlands will celebrate and flower—  
Like the crocus in spring, bursting into blossom,  
a symphony of song and colour.  
Mountain glories of Lebanon—a gift.  
Awesome Carmel, stunning Sharon—gifts.  
God's resplendent glory, fully on display.  
God awesome, God majestic.*

*Energize the limp hands,  
strengthen the rubbery knees.  
Tell fearful souls,  
“Courage! Take heart!  
God is here, right here,  
on his way to put things right  
And redress all wrongs.  
He's on his way! He'll save you!”*

*Blind eyes will be opened,  
deaf ears unstopped,  
Lame men and women will leap like deer,  
the voiceless break into song.  
Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness,  
streams flow in the desert.  
Hot sands will become a cool oasis,  
thirsty ground a splashing fountain.  
Even lowly jackals will have water to drink,  
and barren grasslands flourish richly.*

God himself was coming. What was coming was a defeat to the Kingdom of the enemy himself. Justice to the oppressed by the powers of this world working alongside the enemy, justice to those oppressed by evil spirits, justice to those oppressed by the wickedness of men, justice to those oppressed by the fallen nature of the world.

Our God is coming. And now Jesus was saying Our God is here. Now you see, why they wanted to kill him. This was their lives he was talking about. And you know, I think the problem is that Israel was asking for way too little of the messiah.

They wanted a King for Israel when Jesus came to invite the whole of creation into the unending Kingdom of God.

They wanted their glory restored to what it was once upon a time, but Jesus came to restore nature and all of humanity and all of creation to what it was always meant to be.

Actually, the promise is not just restoration, the promise is of a new heaven and a new earth.

This earth is choked by pollution. If the major consensus in science is correct then we are not doing well with global warming and waste disposal. We have grown too wealthy we are choking in the waste we produce. The Kingdom of God is about a new heaven and a new earth.

They wanted freedom from the Romans just for Israel, but what Jesus was inviting the world to was freedom from the real enemy, the power behind the Romans and not just for Israel but for the whole world. For you and me today.

They were settling for very little. Just a kingdom, when Jesus invitation was to the Kingdom of heaven.

Unfortunately, the church sometimes lives there to this day. We are still in our little world expectations. We do not expect God to actually move. For the sick to be made well, we do not expect God to speak.

We are resigned to thinking that following Jesus is just about an ancient book and weekly rituals. It is bigger than that. What we are being invited too is God's Kingdom breaking through right here, right now.

John Wimber was very key in the founding of the Vineyard churches which we are part of. When he received Jesus his life was in a mess. His family was falling apart and all. He was a music arranger for a rock band that was becoming quite famous at that time. When he got to his end and just said something to the effect of, "God if you are out there, meet me."

Paraphrased, "God let your Kingdom come."

This is how bad it was, he went to a store to get a bible and one of his friends told him that was not a real bible. Why? The real Bible should have the words "The Holy Bible" written on

it. Not just the Bible. So he went back to the store fuming that he was not given the real thing.

As he read the stories of Jesus, he noticed all the things Jesus was doing. Healing the sick, raising the dead, preaching in boldness, walking on water, loving the lepers. And he got very excited. But noticed that they had not done any of this stuff at the church.

So he goes to the pastor and asks, “when do we get to the stuff?”

The pastor says, “what stuff”

John says, “You know, the stuff that Jesus did?”

Now I want to be honourable as I tell the story because it involves real people, the pastor's response was the equivalent of saying, “We don't get to do those things, we read them as great stories and learn from them”

Is that a familiar attitude in the church today? We do not get to that stuff, those are great stories, we sing about them but that's it. Let's just listen to self-help sermon from the pastor and go home.

John was so upset. He said, “Listen when I belonged to the devil, he let me do all of his stuff. Now that I belong to Jesus I wanna do all of his stuff”

Could we be expressly living a life that says we are expecting very little of God?

In some way, we all are holding on to hope that following Jesus can offer us freedom. Freedom from this oppressing state of affairs. The political, economic, spiritual atmosphere of this age. And we will get into that a bit more next week.

What if Our God is Here Now?

But could we be expecting so little of Jesus, and the life in God's Kingdom? Our God is coming and our God is here. What could that mean for life now?

I invite the worship team back on stage and communion servers to take the bread and the cup and prayer team to take their place.

I would want us to reflect on what we think would be life in the Kingdom of God?

And for some of you, the question is, If God is real, and God is here with us, with you, what would it be like to live under his reign? What would your life be like and what would the world around you be like?

Then I want to ask you, are you expecting very little? Could you be looking for just a community when God wants to give you a place for healing both physical, emotions and spiritual and mental?

Could you be expecting just a place to take a break when God wants to give you hope and joy?

Could you be looking for just a hangout when God wants to invite you to a purpose that is bigger than yourself? To take part in the renewal and remaking of the world?

Let us read this together as we stand

***Wilderness and desert will sing joyously,  
the badlands will celebrate and flower—  
Like the crocus in spring, bursting into blossom,  
a symphony of song and colour.  
Mountain glories of Lebanon—a gift.  
Awesome Carmel, stunning Sharon—gifts.  
God's resplendent glory, fully on display.  
God awesome, God majestic.***

***Energize the limp hands,  
strengthen the rubbery knees.  
Tell fearful souls,  
“Courage! Take heart!  
God is here, right here,  
on his way to put things right  
And redress all wrongs.  
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***Blind eyes will be opened,  
deaf ears unstopped,  
Lame men and women will leap like deer,  
the voiceless break into song.  
Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness,***



*streams flow in the desert.*

*Hot sands will become a cool oasis,  
thirsty ground a splashing fountain.*

*Even lowly jackals will have water to drink,  
and barren grasslands flourish richly.*

*Let's Pray*