

TOO GOOD AND IT'S TRUE

Series: Stories of the Kingdom
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Kingdom of God, Repentance
Mark 1:14-15

Okay, so let us wrap our minds around what is happening here. Jesus has entered the scene and he is preaching about the Kingdom of God. Last week we looked at Kingdom expectation and just how sometimes people are expecting very little or have given up on the idea that God moves.

So just to recap some of that. The idea of the Kingdom is the rule and reign of God. This idea had been developing within the community of Israel for quite a while. They had seen the glory days when one of the Nation's most important Kings was reigning. They had also fallen way out of that glory. They had lost the Kingdom so many times and at this particular point in History, they were under the rule of the Roman Empire.

So there grew an expectation that one day a saviour King would arise, a saviour King who was a descendant of David. And this King would come and set them free and set things right. Restore the Kingdom.

Alongside this hope was also a hope that the King would be divine, that it would be as if God himself had come because it would be the end of human history as we know it. The Kingdom he was going to set up was going to be more than just a human Kingdom, it would be the Kingdom of God himself and it would take over all the earth.

So, where is the problem when Jesus comes to the scene? I can understand when political leaders and people in power get together to crucify Jesus. Especially with all the talk about being a King. But why was it hard for religious leaders too? I mean I would be excited about someone saying, hey the hope that you have been waiting for us here.

Generally they were in need of hope and that is all Jesus was bringing. They were in need of Good News. Could it be that the Good News of the Kingdom was just too good they had a bit of trouble believing it? And maybe that is exactly what we are invited to. News that is too good and it's true.

So here goes another excerpt from the story of Jesus

Mark 1:14-15

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

There we go again, Here is what we have been trying to say. Jesus main message was the Kingdom of God. Some of the translations of Marks story read Jesus went int Galilee proclaiming the Gospel, a word that has increasingly become a church word. At that time, the word gospel was mostly used in political terms. To mean the good news of a King. So they are kinda using street language or at least non-religious language so that everyone could get the idea.

And this is why I keep saying if the church has good news we must continually find a way to communicate it in ways that the whole world will understand. Not just church people. And that has a lot to do with the language we use.

The things God is doing are already so incredible that the church does not need to add weird on to it. It is okay if some of it comes off as weird to the world, but where we can help it, we do not have to get weird.

It's already crazy that people are getting healed, you do not have to change your voice when you pray. It is already crazy telling the story of God come as man and dying and rising again, we do not have to add weird. When you get what we call words of knowledge when you just know something someone has not shared with you often for the purpose of encouragement, that is crazy enough. Don't add a voice change to it.

If this is good news, it has to be good news to the world. We must speak it in a language the world will get.

Anyway, back to the story. Mark says Jesus was preaching the good news and the goodness he was preaching is the Kingdom of God is at hand. So if the church has any message to preach, it has to be the same message.

“The KOG is near, repent and believe the good news”

So most of us have heard the word repent. Unfortunately, it is almost always in the context of you have been a very terrible person and all that is coming to you is the fire of hell unless you say sorry, feel sorry and stop.

Yet, that is not the context in which Jesus uses the word repent here. The word Jesus uses better translates to “change the frame of mind or feeling or to change principle and practice”.

Essentially, change your worldview, change the basic narrative that you buy into that then informs how you act and respond to the world. Change your mind.

So I want to replace that word with that phrase and see how that verse now reads

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Change your frame of mind and believe the good news!”

But why would Jesus be inviting us to change our minds set? You see, often the breaking in of the Kingdom of God is so close, even in front of us but what is keeping us from experiencing it or being aware of it is our mindset. The narratives we have bought into.

So for example,

Jesus is at the meeting place of the Jews in Galilee and he declares that the time that God had promised for the Kingdom to be unveiled is here and he is the one ushering it in. How do people listening to him respond?

Luke 4:22

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?”

“We know your mother and father. We know your brothers and sisters...” Essentially you are too insignificant to be the King we have been waiting for.

So even though the Kingdom of God was the right in front of them. Even though the Kingdom of God was everything they had hoped for and what they were yearning for and praying for it was still out of reach for them because of the mindset, they needed to repent. They needed to change their mind.

Another place, Jesus has risen from the dead and he is just about to ascend to the father. This is brilliant. All his claims have come true. He has defeated death. You would think that those who had been walking with him for close to 3 years will have gotten the plot.

Jesus had done ministry beyond the boundaries of the Jews, talked about bringing other sheep not part of the flock yet. Jesus had shown them what God was inviting every tribe, every tongue every nation too.

But as Jesus is giving them the final instructions, what do they ask him?

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?”

This is a nation that strongly believed that it was about them. About restoration to its former glory. Jesus tells them that timing is none of their business but the Father’s. For them, they are to go into the world.

And this group of 12 is the seed that becomes the invitation to the whole world into the Kingdom of God. That reaches us today.

But they would have missed out on what God was doing in the world if they did not change their mind about it being an Israel-centric affair. Repent. Change how you think about these things. Because the Kingdom of God is at hand, yet your mindset is keeping you from it.

One last one. Why specifically use the words, the Kingdom of God has come near, change your mind and believe?

This nation believed that the Kingdom of God would come in the way Jesus was talking about it, at the end of history as we know it. In some ways, Jesus was bringing the idea of God’s Kingdom that they believed was not yet to come.

Let’s look at this story

Matthew 12:22-24

Next, a poor demon-afflicted wretch, both blind and deaf, was set down before him. Jesus healed him, gave him his sight and hearing. The people who saw it were impressed— “This has to be the Son of David!”

Right there you see that a bit of the expectation of the was that the son of David, the Messiah, the Christ would not just be an ordinary person. He would usher in the Kingdom

of God and there would be signs to show that which included such things as healing the sick, raising the dead, easing those afflicted by evil spirits.

And just a bit of that story. I am convinced that sometimes we are unwell because our biology is acting up. Sometimes it is some sort of spiritual attack. Either way, the expected messiah could heal.

So some people begin to genuinely consider the possibility that this is the promised King, that maybe there is an in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. But see how the story unfolds

Matt 12:24

But the Pharisees, when they heard the report, were cynical. "Black magic," they said. "Some devil trick he's pulled from his sleeve."

They can see with their own eyes what is happening, They have heard story after story about the things Jesus has done but they are convinced that it couldn't be him, it couldn't be now. So what is happening must be some sort of sorcery. It must be black magic. Other translations say he is doing it under demonic influence himself.

They did not doubt that these are the things that would come when the Kingdom of God comes it just wasn't the time in their mind. A lot of times Jesus had to say, now is the time, the kingdom is here. There was a time aspect of this.

The reign of God expected at the end of time has broken into our current time in Jesus. And that is Good News. Too Good and it's True.

We all kind of grew up with the idea that when we die we will go to this place called heaven. And in heaven all things are made right, At funerals we use the words, he has gone to be with the Lord. Almost implying that it is only at that end that one can be with the Lord. Which is partly true. When we lose our loved ones to cancer or dangerous accidents or the actions of wicked men we all say, that finally, they are not in pain. That finally they are resting in peace. Which is partly true. That they are healed. That in death, they enter into a new life. Which is partly true.

Everything you have believed about the life of the age to come, the life after death, the life in the Kingdom of God, the power of the age to come. Strong enough to bring us back to life in a way that we cannot die again. Imagine that power breaking into our current reality. Incredible, right?

So incredible you are fighting with it right now because it is just a different mindset. It is something for that day. The Good news of the Kingdom of God is actually, too good and it's true.

Essentially when Jesus would say the Kingdom of God is near. He was saying all that they and we have reserved for that day when we breathe our last when the world is not anymore as we know it. All that we have reserved for heaven is at hand. Now. It is within reach. It takes a change of mindset to participate. And that is great news. This is the great news of the Kingdom of God. It is near, it is accessible if you repent. That is great news. And it is too Good and it's true.

"The Kingdom of God is within reach, it is breaking out right in front of you. Change your mind, change how you look at things and believe this incredible news"

What parts of your narratives are setting themselves up against the Good News of the KOG? What parts of your narrative are making you say, “Well that is a great story but surely not him, not me, not today,”

The Good news of the Kingdom of God is too good but it cannot be him. How could Jesus be the only way?

The Good news of the Kingdom is too good, but maybe not for me. How can I be forgiven of all I have done free of charge.

The Good news of the Kingdom is too good but surely those people are not part of it? They behave like this and that.

The Good news of the Kingdom is too good but it surely cannot be now. Those things only happened when Jesus walked on the earth and his disciples, the rest of us have to wait until the end of time.

Jesus is inviting you to change your mind and dare believe.

Investigate your narrative, in what ways is the culture that informs your narrative keeping you away from the hope and expectation of the Kingdom?

National culture. You know how we see ourselves as Kenyan or British or South African or American or Luo or Kikuyu can sometimes be in very opposition to what it means to be in opposition to the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

What about your national or tribal identity is saying, it cannot be now, or it cannot be this way, or surely not him.

For example, I think globally there is an idea of scarcity and it plays it in different ways in different nations and one of the ways it shows itself in Kenya is in corruption.

So the good news of the Kingdom is that God will provide but we cannot believe this good news or even see the provision because we have not yet abandoned that mindset, that worldview.

Political ideologies. No matter what political party we belong to that is shaping our mindset, if anything in it keeps us from believing the message of hope and the good news that God will and is setting things right, we abandon that worldview and believe. Because the Message of the Kingdom is too good and it's true.

Religious narratives. You see, even atheist are living out a certain theological and religious narrative. So that even when the hope of the Kingdom of God is right in front of us, our world view keeps us from seeing it and believing.

Sometimes it is just the culture we live in. Or even church culture. That says surely God could not move anymore. Surely God could not speak to us. Surely God could not heal. So even when it is all around us like the Pharisees we explain it away. And listen you will not lack an explanation.

Sometimes even believers buy into the idea of disappointment. Even for the church, we are being invited to change our minds, to repent

When you see passionate worship and people overcome by the presence of God, Is there part of you that says “Oh, its just mass hysteria” I dare you to change your mind and believe

When you hear of people getting healed, “Oh if any of them got better maybe they were not sick, to begin with.”

When you hear that everyone gets to play and it is not just for religious superstars, “Oh surely I do not pray well enough to pray for the sick.”

When you hear of words of knowledge, “Oh surely those must be a coincidence”

But here is the thing, the Good news of the Kingdom of God, is too good and it’s true. Change your mindset and believe in this message.

The boy oppressed by Demons

And it’s okay. One day a boy who was oppressed by evil spirits from birth was brought to Jesus. He had been getting convulsions from birth. And Jesus assures the father that everything is possible. Jesus assures the boy’s father that the Kingdom of God will break through, that the Kingdom is at hand, that the powers of the age to come are about to invade his reality. He gives him such great news that is too incredible. Too good and it’s true.

And the father has a hard time believing and he says these words

““I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

And maybe that is the prayer I am inviting you to make today. If you find this news too good yet your heart is struggling with it, start with the confession that you believe it and then ask God to help your unbelief.

“I believe, help me overcome my unbelief”

Let’s Pray