

SLOW KINGDOM COMING

Series: Stories of the Kingdom
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Hope, expectation, tension

We have been looking at the subject of the Kingdom of God. I have invited us to see this as not to think of it as a place but as the power of God. The realm where the reality of God's reign is being felt. The reality where God is King and he is among us and with us.

I have invited us to a place of repentance, where we lay down all worldview and narratives that consistently are at war with the invitation God is giving.

Narratives that say, "Well, God cannot be here with us. Well, God cannot move in the same way today or at all."

To start to see the world completely differently. Something that can only truly happen through the help of the Holy Spirit.

So I taught us one of my favourite prayers lifted from the cry of a desperate father in a story in the Bible. He had met Jesus and wanted desperately for his son to be healed. A prayer that I have learnt to make and keep on making,

"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief"

And as we finish this series of talks I just wanna double down on that once more like some sort of parting shot. Some sort of encouragement. An invitation to all of us to hang in there through the tensions of the life of the Kingdom God.

A few weeks ago a friend of mine, part of this church walked up to me and reminded me that last time we talked about the Kingdom of God as a subject we mentioned about the tension of the Now and Not Yet of the Kingdom of God.

The reality of the fact that we experience the Kingdom of God Now and still there is so much to hope and long for when the Kingdom of God comes.

It is the reality in Jesus' words when he would say, The Kingdom of God was here and then turn around and say what the Kingdom would look like when it comes. Which was it? It was both.

The reality represented by the statement of one of my heroes when he would say that sometimes he felt like a man filled with the Holy Spirit and going to heaven while other times he felt just like an angry fat man trying to get to heaven.

The reality of the Christian life. That, if someone walked up to you and said, "I met your pastor, the guy with dreadlocks. He is a cool guy with no hypocrisy." They would be right. Because empowered by the Holy Spirit who is the power of the Kingdom of God, I am not who I used to be.

But if at that moment someone else walked in and said, “I met that crazy guy who calls himself your pastor and boy isn’t he such a hypocrite. How could he call himself a Christian and be this and that” You know, they may be right too. Because there is still a lot in me that God is still changing and I cannot wait for the Kingdom of God to reign in those places of darkness.

It is the reality of praying for people and every week inviting people for prayer and some immediately or not long after telling you that they got better. And we have seen some incredible things happen as the Kingdom of God breakthrough as we pray and watch and wait.

Yet, we have also experienced the shattering situations that seemed to not change despite our prayers. When death seemed to have won, or pain to have persisted. And so all we could do is wait for when the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness and all things made right.

There is a pastor who led the Vineyard Churches in Canada and he tells a story of a lady who had just given birth to a child who did not have more than a few hours to live. The complication of her birth and health were just too grave. This lady was not a believer. Her paradigm, her worldview had no room for the Kingdom of God, or for God.

In desperation, she cried out and said a prayer equivalent to, “God if you are out there, do not let my child die.”

She then saw what she described as light in her room and her daughter started to improve. She did not die. Now, her little girl grew up with significant challenges and needed a lot of help getting along. She had been healed. The Kingdom had broken through, but she had only been partially healed, the Kingdom was yet to come.

A final story, to illustrate this is the story of our friend here from church. One morning we changed our program as we interrupted to pray for her dad who had had a stroke and gotten into a terrible accident. All over the world her friends and family were praying. The doctors were so sure, he was not going to make it. Science and medicine were done with him but we kept praying. Because in that worldview, in that paradigm there was no room for healing. There was no way out but for inexplicable.

As weeks went on by instead of going under he made improvements and started to respond. The improvement was so incredible that it prompted the Hospital to make changes in some of its protocols. He was healing up.

Here is another part of that story, the Sunday we all gathered and prayed, another person from the crowd walks up to our friend and say that she had just felt prompted to cover her air ticket so that she could go see her dad. Something she really needed then.

What was happening? The KOG was breaking through. We were experiencing a different paradigm, where death and evil does not reign. Where hope is real and restoration is radicle.

It was one of the most heartbreaking things when a few months later they had to lay their dad to rest. Oh, how we long for the Kingdom of God when death loses its sting.

And it's easy to have our entire focus on the two extremes that keep us in this tension. We experience the Kingdom of God now every time we pray or are full of expectation or enter into obedience and repentance because the Kingdom of God is near. And so some people expect that everything will be set right now. That victory will be ours now. That all healing will happen now.

The 'name it and claim it' view and when you cannot claim it they blame it on your faith. That you did not have enough. Even though Jesus says, all we need is a little faith to move mountains. Which can lead to such cynicism on the realization that there is still a lot of waiting to be done.

Or a sharp focus on the Not Yet of the King, the idea that nothing will change until the day we shall see him face to face. We shall hold in our arms the ones taken from us, when we shall be made whole and our bodies join fully in worship. That God does and will not intervene.

Or you have on the other hand a focus on the not yet, which I think is often fueled by our fear and disobedience. This often gives birth to cynicism and defeatism. We become people who claim to love God but really do not expect him to ever do anything. We think the world will never get better, we think God would never heal or speak to us and we can only live by sheer luck if not, wait until heaven come

What is in-between? What is in the meantime? How do we live our in the reality of the Now and the Not Yet of the Kingdom of God? Tension. Hope, longing and faith. It is a slow Kingdom coming, but it's coming. So don't stop praying, don't give up hope, don't stop waiting.

Let's pray

I want us to hear 2 stories Jesus told talking about the Kingdom of God

Matthew 13:31-33

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

This is the reality I want to invite each one of us to as we live out the life of the Kingdom of God. Jesus often taught in parables so many times. And in Mathew 13 you have a collection of a few that he taught. And here are 2 short ones that are put side by side.

And some of them were about the KOG. A friend of mine asked me if I thought people were getting the whole idea of the KOG as reality as opposed to a place. I feel I am in good company to realize that Jesus has to keep explaining it to us too.

One is of mustard seed, smaller than most grains and seeds yet it grows into a very massive tree. But there is a difference between the time the seed is planted and the times the tree is matured. It is called the meantime. And this time is just as important in the time of the tree's growth as any.

A few months back we talked said that in a world that insists that you should go big or go home, that you should remember that if you do go big before you go small, you will go home. This seems to be common with the things God does. That every beautiful thing in some way has a gestation period.

Even those whom God has called and have become names we know too well like Moses and David and Paul had these times when they were seemingly nothing. If you think about someone like David, he was anointed to be King but it took years before he ever sat on the throne. The seed of the Kingdom of God was planted when the boy was anointed, and we saw the fruit when the man became King.

Jesus, prophesied King, for 30 years is not in public ministry. God seems to have a lot of patience.

Here is the thing, maybe the biggest thing now is not necessarily the most important thing. Look at Rome which was once upon a time the biggest power in the world, now it is just a small city. Think of Kings like Herod who were everything in their time, now we only know of them because they are footnoted in the story of Jesus.

And maybe that should be a reminder to those of us who put our hope in the systems of this world. Kingdoms have risen and fallen. Once upon a time, Babylon was great now present-day Iraq is trying to be stable.

Once upon a time, the great King of Persia was ruler overall. Today, his people are having travel bans put against them. The one thing that remains unchanged is the name of the Lord.

Once upon a time the sun never set in the British empire, today the conversation of Brexit is threatening the very union we call the United Kingdom.

America too shall pass

In the last election cycle of Kenya with how emotional it was, I remember we said that this Kingdom too shall pass. And it is not yet even elation year but succession politics is at its peak. And even those who voted this government in are disillusioned by the corruption it has presided over.

The one thing that remains unshaken is the Kingdom of God. this be a reminder that we should not focus on what seems big now. The invitation is to set our eyes on the Kingdom of God which everlasting, even though now it seems foolish, it seems like a long wait.

Because as the Kingdom of God is established, soon it will become a home for all people because the government is on the shoulders of our God. The mustard seed, though the smallest of seeds, grows into a massive tree.

The other parable is the that of yeast used in the making of dough to bake bread. Something so small makes the dough rise. And here is the thing, as a friend to mine would point out, once the yeast is in the dough, you cannot find it. You can spread the dough as thin as you want but you will not be able to say, oh there is the yeast. But you can see its impacts as the dough rises. A very small amount of yeast will make a lot of dough rise.

It's exactly how the Kingdom of God works in us too. When one makes the prayer of repentance, "God I believe, help my unbelief". When we make a commitment to a life of obedience in just small ways.

What could that look like? When you feel an impression in your heart, for example, to simply pray for someone or walk over to them, or give to them and you in obedience to the Holy Spirit do it, it is like a little yeast in dough. Who knows what is working in you and the person you just prayed for.

When this community decides to be obedient and live out a life of generosity, whether we give to 10 people or 2 or a thousand, it is just a little yeast in a large dough. But who knows what it will work in our city and community

When in the middle of worship, the spirit of God comes upon us in the prophetic and we go, "Okay, it sounds crazy, no one will understand this but I am going to obey," When in the middle of worship for the first time you decide to lift your hands in surrender. It is just a little yeast, who knows what it is doing in you and this community.

When we teach ourselves to wait in the presence of God, to hear him. In the beginning, it might feel awkward or it might just feel like all it was silence, it is just a little yeast.

When you are shifting your focus from atheism and agnosticism and saying, "God, I have no idea what this even is but I will learn to trust." It is just a little yeast.

What will happen over time, is that we will start to see the dough rise. We will start to see our lives change as we become more like Jesus.

And this is what people do not get some time. When someone says, "but I saw this person from your church do this and that," I tell them, "Yea, I am still rooting for them, I am never going to disown them."

Why? I have seen where they have come from. I have seen the dough rise. And I am excited for where they could be going.

When in this church more and more people become responsive to the Holy Spirit, more aware of God. What is happening? It started with a little yeast and now the dough is rising.

When in this city generosity becomes the way of life for the government, for businesses, for communities of faith and individuals, the dough is rising, it started with a little yeast.

When finally you can confess that, "I have tasted and seen that God is good" from a place of no faith at all or just casual faith, the dough is rising.

When people are getting healed and the Kingdom of God is breaking through because we have learnt to wait and step in and obey, the dough is rising.

And listen, there is no difference between the dough and the yeast no more. What it means is that doing the works of the Kingdom of God is just who we are.

We do not get into this special zone to hear God. We do not need slow songs to activate our hearing. We do not have to be in church. We do not need a new title or to change our voices into the Holy voices or our English into “Thus Sayeth The Lord” English.

Have you met people and when they are in their God zone you cannot even identify them? As we let God work in us what you end up having is naturally supernatural people. It is God and man dwelling together. It is the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It is treasure of great value in jars of clay. It is simply God doing things through us that are beyond us.

But either way, whether it is the mustard seed or the yeast, time. It is a slow Kingdom coming. What is happening in the meantime is that we are being prepared, we are being transformed, we are being made new. We are learning to trust and have faith.

And think about it, the mustard seed has to die to become this tree and bear fruit. The risen dough has to be baked which involves being put in the oven which is often quite hot.

Whether it is the mustard seed or the yeast on the dough, the truth is that there is suffering. The truth is uniquely tied to the reality of the Story of the Kingdom we are being invited to is suffering and death.

Jesus makes an invitation and says, take up your cross and follow me and he goes and takes up a cross. It is not just metaphorical but some people will carry crosses on their shoulders.

Jesus said that for a kernel of wheat to grow and give life it must fall to the ground and die. And he gives up his life.

As I said, the call we are given is of a different paradigm. It works very differently to the way the world works. When the world is saying make yourself great, the way of Jesus says, decrease and let God increase.

When the world says to make a name for yourself, God calls us to lift his name. When the world calls you to hold on to life because you are all that matters in the world, Jesus invites you to lose your life for the sake of the Kingdom for you to find it.

The thing is we are invited to embrace death and suffering for the sake of the Kingdom. Living out the story of the Kingdom of God will cost you. Your money, your reputation, your comfort and some, just like Jesus, your very life.

Partly the truth is that we all die or go through suffering, whether we are believers or not but the difference is that resurrection is the other side of death for those living out the story of the Kingdom of God. Death, suffering and loss do not have the final say.

The other side of the baked bread is us being bread and life for our city and our families.

Other side is shelter for birds, shade for weak,
The other side of us as seeds dying for the sake of the Kingdom is growing into tress that
people from all nations, the weak and those in need of homes and comfort and a place to lay
their heads, like birds making nests will find a home in us.

Other side is bread for children
Yes, whatever the oven is that takes away my pride, my false sense of self-dependence, my
false sense of self-importance, the other side of death is the resurrection. And only those
who go through the fire filled with the whole spirit find resurrection on the other side

Let's Pray