

Matthew 3:13-17

The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

Christianity has a foundational truth at its core. A truth that says not only is there a God but this God, out of his love, decided to create. Why did he create, was it out of some necessity that he had? No, the best answer we can do is to say because of who he is and who we are that he created not out of necessity but out of his free choice so that we would be the benefactors of knowing him. But what does it mean to know him? Knowing him is a recognition of who he is, as much as we can, in all of his majestic splendor. When we recognize him we see him as the highest and so we call him his highness.

We have been working our way through Matthew and have made it all the way to chapter 4, but before we go into Matthew 4 I want us to go back to 3 and look again at the first glimpse of the ministry of Jesus - his baptism. But it is the way that he is baptized that gives us the clues as to what is going on. Look at John's message in 3:2. Then Jesus comes, is baptized with certain key events that we will look into, is then tempted in the wilderness, and then comes from the wilderness preaching a message. Look at it in 4:17. There must be something to this kingdom language. When you hear the term "Kingdom" what is it that come to mind? The Kingdom of God refers to the forever reign of God with his people as their King. It is both a present reality and a future hope.

From Matthew 3, and on into Matthew 4 I want us to look at 4 aspects of the Kingdom of God

1. God is King

The Bible opens with a God who chooses to be known, a God who eternally precedes creation and who is all together different from creation. God is not eternally a creator but from his infinity he created. The only thing we know of God from before the beginning is his trinity and his love. God is the one in the beginning making decrees and commands and everything responds at his beckoning call - the stars shone at his call to them, the rays of the sun begin to shine, the waters roar and foam, the first rose (thorn less) budded and blossomed. The Bible tells the story to us in such a way that there is absolutely no doubt of how awesome and great this God is.

If we are reading Scripture then the first point should come to us as a no brainer - of course God us King. He is uncreated, independent, self-existent, self-sufficient, and stands in need of nothing outside of himself. He is all together perfect, and all together worthy of our total response of complete love and undivided devotion. What does this mean? Plainly it means that there is no one like our God, no one like the God of the Scripture. He will not give his glory to another. He is worthy of worship, and is to be trusted and obeyed. He is the King and the whole universe is his kingdom. Even right now he is moving all things towards his intended end, and end that finds itself in Christ alone!

Jesus has come into this world and his coming is a declaration that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Such a statement makes even more sense if we come to the second point concerning the Kingdom of God.

2. Man Rebelled Against the Kingship of God

Jesus coming in the way that he came, born of a virgin and yet from the lineage of such a history, as well as his being baptized when he could have been the one doing the baptism, tells us a great deal about how we fit into the universal reign of God. If we go back to Genesis we see that God created everything beautiful. He tells us so with his own deceleration, he looks at the works his hands made and called them good. One of the works of God was mankind, they were to make things with their hands too but they were to make things as an offering to the God who lovingly made them. Instead, we see man taking the freedom that God gave and rejecting the Creator for things made. What was unthinkable and unimaginable, and utterly futile happened - Man rejected the kingship of God.

We call mankind's rejection of God's reign sin. Sin is when we reject the rule of God, but even though we reject we are not absolved from consequences. Rebellion against the Sovereign King of the Universe is not without its cost and the wages of sin is death.

This story is repeated time and time again in our own experience as well as in the experience of everyone that we know. The Bible gives the reason for all death - rebellion against God. All men everywhere are under the condemnation of the law and therefore die. But there is a death that is worse than death, a death that can be avoided with God's redemption plan.

Before we get into the good part of the story let's remember what we know so far. God is King but man rebelled. Here is the best part of the story. God is a good King, a benevolent, loving, kind, just, and patient King. Man's rebellion has brought death, disease, and disaster to the earth. But (here is the good part) no scheming of man can stop God from being King, and because he is King his Kingdom will be everlasting and ever reaching.

This is why Jesus comes in the way that he comes. Jesus doesn't come shielded from death, disease, or disaster. He comes right in the middle of our chaos. And even in our text this morning he comes standing in the line, numbering himself amongst transgressors, though he came to do more than be numbered amongst us, he came to redeem us, to take us from our lowest to his highest.

Number 3:

3. God Pursued Man to Redeem

This is the awesome part of the story. We see Jesus coming in a particular way - out of choice, not out of necessity. He is King. He is self-sufficient. He stands in need of nothing. But he has chosen you and me to realize his greatness. We were made to know greatness, we were made to know God.

The whole Bible tells the story of God's awesome pursuit of me and you, tells of his awesome patience and love as he lets his creation that is so warped be bent back into shape. The chief way that God has chosen to redeem the world is amazing. God sent his Son, the eternal Son, the one through whom the Father created, to take on his creation so that he could bring his creation back to glory.

Think back in Genesis, look how quickly we go from the Fall to the good news of a promised redemption. God lets us go 15 verses before we get to the promise of a brighter day that will come through this one who is to be born from the seed of the woman. And then he comes and as the baptism shows us he does not come to stand over us and far from us but beside us and near us. Without ceasing to be what he was, he became what he was not, so that he could make us what he is (*theosis*).

Look at what happens. Jesus came out of his free choice (Something that none of us can say, none of us chose to be here - someone chose for us. Not so with Jesus, he chose freely to come) as well as according to the way that God had been preparing the world all along. Look at the phrase in verse 15 - *us to fulfill all righteousness*. How is John AND Jesus fulfilling all righteousness? Jesus came in order to fulfill the Law, he is the fulfillment and longing of the Old Testament. He is the hope and fulfillment for time itself.

Is this the way that you read your Bible? Jesus wants you too. Aren't you glad that there is one "scarlet thread" running all through the Bible? In every story God is telling the same story - hope in, believe in the Son who is to come to taste death for all men. This is why he came to be baptized - he is telling the story of his own death. Think about it, there is nothing but death under water. Why does Jesus come out immediately? He came to undo death.

What happens when he comes out of the water? The Spirit *rests* on him. He is not filled with the Spirit, he receives the Spirit. There is a difference there. Men in the past had been Spirit-filled but none had received the Spirit, none had the Spirit rest on them. Let's go back just for a moment to Genesis. In Genesis 6 something horrible happens. Man's rebellion against the reign of God as King has reached a climax. It is so bad that Genesis tell us the story:

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." (Genesis 6:1-3)

And we see the devastation that the change of the Spirit brought. Now that Jesus has come and gone through the waters, the reversal of Genesis 6 happens. Now the Spirit is poured out. The Spirit is poured out through the ministry of the one who received the Spirit. Now look at the kind of life the Spirit brings. Without the Spirit there is death, but with the Spirit there is life. This is why we see Jesus the way that we see him in the text doing what he is doing. He is healing the sick, making the blind to see, healing lepers, raisin the dead, reversing the curse of sin.

Listen to Isaiah 42:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring
forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly
burning wick he will not quench; he will
faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be discouraged

till he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his law.
(Isaiah 42:1-4 ESV)

He is making all things new! And because he is King, he will not relent until the whole earth recognizes him as king.

4. God's Kingship Will be Known

One final thing for us to make mention of from this passage. Notice what John says about the way the Messiah will come, with fire, and notice the way he came, with the Spirit. What does this mean? It means two things: 1. Salvation is here, and 2. Judgment is coming.

The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, it is here and yet not here, inaugurated, but not consummated. This time we are between the times of his second coming and when he comes he will establish his reign over all the earth by purging the earth of all wickedness and sin. But until now, he command all men to repent. This is what Paul says to the men at Athens:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31 ESV)

This is why we preach good news of God's forgiveness in Christ - today is the day of salvation. The challenge that we have as Christians is to overlook the fact that today is the day of salvation. We can be so consumed with the end that it may seem that we look at our world with eyes of contentment itself of eyes of compassion, but rest assured that Jesus sees you he doesn't see contempt, he sees you with eyes of compassion. Jesus sees you as a sheep without a shepherd, and it doesn't matter how far you have strayed into sin and away from his Lordship, today is the day for you to confess him as Savior and Lord. But you must come, today is the day of salvation, tomorrow might not be, but today is. His coming has given you space to come to him. Won't you come? Come confess him as King and Lord.