

The Kingdom of God Has Come Upon You

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Date: 27 January 2019

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[0 : 00] We are continuing with the gathering storm, as we saw here, and Nora said that sounded like a murder mystery, and it probably is. It is a time when we had last week an eye of the storm.

There was the calm where Jesus withdrew and he healed many people, and we hear about his loving grace and his patience. And now we come again into the storm, because in verse 22, Jesus heals a demon-oppressed man who is blind and mute.

Extraordinary miracle, which is very understated. And because there's a spiritual healing, an emotional, physical healing that takes place here, people are absolutely amazed, and they say, well, maybe this is the long-expected Messiah, the anointed one who would bring God's reign. And when Pharisees hear this, they are threatened and angry. They know he is doing the things that Messiah was going to do and say by the prophets in his healings of everything we can imagine, you know, the spiritual, psychological, physical restoration of people, children, adults, wealthy, poor, all of them receiving the grace of God powerfully through Jesus, and that his teaching was like one that had authority, not as the Pharisees.

So in verse 24, they begin a terrible teaching to the crowds to keep them from believing in Jesus. They say he is doing the things, these awesome things, by the power of Satan in verse 24.

[1 : 40] And if you read church history, you see that that was the teaching of the rabbis for centuries afterwards as well. It was an acknowledgement that Jesus has done these things, but attributing them to Satan.

And Jesus responds with an amazing patience and gentleness and wisdom that the Pharisees do not deserve. He reasons with them.

If you look at verses 25 through 26 there on page 817, he says to them two things. He says, if Satan drives out Satan, how would his kingdom possibly stand?

Notice that Jesus is saying that Satan has a kingdom too, that he rules in this world. How could that be that he would cast out himself?

And then in verse 27, there are exorcists in their own community, that's the sons that cast out demons. And he says, by whose power do those people cast out demons?

[2 : 41] By your argument, they are satanic. So he's showing them that their teaching has no basis in logic, that it is really the hearts that are rebelling against the thought of him as Messiah that makes them say these things.

They are threatened by Jesus. And there's lots of examples of this in our world today, isn't there? My first church was in the little town of Pender Harbor. And after I left, they lost their church through the crisis.

Somebody donated land for a new church. And a new church was floated across from Vancouver Island and they needed to build a foundation for it.

There was a bit of an outcry by some in the community that says, we don't want that bad influence of Christianity right next to our high school.

So we don't want to build it. Now, ironically, a number of people were so upset by them saying that, that they all joined in to help build this foundation. But you see this calling of what is good, evil.

[3 : 43] You know, even though the church had a marvelous reputation in the community. And if, as you know too, those who believe that all life is a good gift from God and work to protect life from abortion and from medically assisted suicide can also experience this kind of irrational personal attacks and be called evil for placing a very high value on life, that it is all God given.

It's an irrational opposition calling good evil. That is what the Pharisees are doing here. And they had no answer to Jesus' logical argument.

So Jesus tells them in verse 28, you are really left with one answer. If it is by the hand of God that the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come among you, the unthinkable.

And that is the central verse of this passage. All Jesus' miracles, all of his teaching together mean that the kingdom of God has come upon you.

And the word means that it overwhelms you. It takes you by surprise, which is the case for the Pharisees. It is the reality of Jesus that brings the kingdom.

[5 : 03] And that's a surprise to many in the world today. It's a surprise to us at times too when we see the kingdom of darkness seeming to prevail lots of times. But Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God in him has invaded this world.

And Jesus gives a vivid picture of that invading kingdom in verse 29. He says that somebody has entered the strong man's house, Satan's kingdom, and has bound him.

And now he is plundering his goods. That is what Jesus is doing. He is plundering the kingdom of Satan. And what this means is that there's really two fundamental categories in this world.

It is either occupied by the evil one, Jesus is saying, or it is being freed by the Lord Jesus who is king.

And that's why all of the New Testament and Jesus' teaching talk about the good news as bringing freedom from slavery. Satan is powerful and active, yet Jesus has bound him by his death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

[6 : 21] And so now by Jesus' resurrection power, he is releasing more and more people into the freedom of Jesus Christ. It's a freedom from the fear of death.

It's a freedom from sin. And it's a freedom to serve Jesus Christ, to know his forgiveness, to know the love of the Father in him. The Collect for Morning Prayer says, in his service is perfect freedom. This is the mission of the church. It is to join Jesus as he plunders the kingdom of Satan. And I want to close our sermon by talking about how Jesus applies this.

He actually shows us how we take our part in Jesus plundering the kingdom of God. There's two things that he says. The first is, we can gather for Jesus.

Look at verse 30. Jesus says, whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters. He uses an agricultural term there.

[7 : 31] And what Jesus is saying here is you cannot be neutral or passive about Jesus. If you are to stand for him and be loyal to him, as Jesus is calling for now, it is an act of loyalty.

And the way that we do it, the way that the family of God does this, is to gather. And that gathering takes lots of forms in your life. The Holy Spirit uses your conversations.

He uses your invitations. He uses the prayers you give to God on the behalf of many people who are experiencing the slavery of sin and death.

He uses our loving service in Jesus' name to other people to gather people to himself. We are about that work, that mission of gathering.

And Jesus' mighty power on the cross is behind that gathering. Verse 31 says, Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people.

[8 : 34] That's glorious news. That is the powerful work of gathering. It means people brings people to himself, or Jesus brings people to himself by the reconciling power of the cross so that people know God as their father.

And Jesus' message, his appeal to the world is through us. And that message is, be gathered by receiving the forgiveness of sins.

Come into the people of God. Very simply, that's the mission of the church. Now there's an urgency about this welcome, this gathering, because there is one sin that cannot be forgiven.

And there's lots of commentaries written about this. Lots of ink spilled. And we really don't understand this verse. And I don't. And no commentator does as far as I can tell.

But it is about being hardened against God's gathering work at the end of verse 31. It's called the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Lots is unclear about that verse.

[9 : 40] What's different between the blasphemy against Jesus and against the Holy Spirit? Well, we don't know for sure, but it's very clear that this blasphemy is not a particular act or an event.

It's an ongoing rejection of Jesus' saving work that he has accomplished on the cross by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the Pharisees were teaching that Jesus' saving work was evil. They rejected it. And of course, if they continue to believe this, then they could never trust Jesus for his forgiveness, for his saving work, for the life that he alone can give.

They choose, in a sense, not to be plundered out of Satan's kingdom. And in fact, they work against Jesus' mission of gathering people to himself.

So this shows that in judgment, people actually judge themselves. God gives them over to their own judgment. And if you are committed, if you are worried at all about committing that sin, then you haven't.

[10:54] Because it means that you do not want to miss out on the goodness of Jesus. There is an openness to the goodness and the grace of Jesus. But you see, this is the case in the world, that many are rejecting the saving work of Jesus.

And Jesus says it's an urgency to be part of the work of the Holy Spirit, gathering and reconciling people with God so that they know the healing, forgiving, the abundant life of Jesus.

And then secondly, and finally, Jesus says we join in his plundering work as we speak about the abundance that is in our hearts. It's a marvelous phrase, speaking out of our abundance.

You know that saying that's attributed to St. Francis, preach the gospel at all times, use words if necessary? Well, St. Francis never said it.

Didn't even come close. In fact, he spent a lot of times using words. He was a fantastic preacher. He preached the gospel. His words very powerfully spoke to people's hearts. It's important that indeed we live a life that's consistent with our message.

[12:05] But we cannot preach the gospel without speaking. Jesus says, speak from your heart. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And then verse 35, the good person out of the good treasure brings forth good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. You see, Jesus is teaching how significant your words are, your speech.

Almost every one of you have come to faith in Jesus because someone spoke to you about him. I am so very grateful to my mother and my father and my brother and sister and my friends from youth group who spoke about Jesus to me because that's why I have faith.

The kingdom of Jesus grows as people speak out of that good treasure that is in their heart. And that is where the words of grace comes from in our lives.

That's where words of peace, words that glorify Jesus, words that move people towards faith in the good news of Jesus. And so a common question that Christians may ask is, how can I speak more confidently about Jesus to other people?

[13:18] Jesus is giving us a huge help here. He doesn't give us an amazing strategy of how we can work things so that we say the right things about Jesus. He simply says, treasure God's goodness in your heart.

Treasure his words. Cherish Jesus himself and his good news so that your words are an overflow of who God is for you. When you are thankful to God for who he is, what he is doing, when you're aware of his glory and his goodness towards you, your words will honor Jesus.

And the Holy Spirit will use those words to free people from Satan's kingdom. St. Francis' biographer, Thomas of Salino, he just wrote three years after Francis' death, quotes him, instructing co-workers.

And he said this, The preacher, Francis' Francis, must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons. He must first grow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold.

And that's true for all of us. The kingdom of God has come upon you. May God, through your prayers, through your thoughts, through your reading, through actively serving Jesus, make your hearts warm towards him.

[14:45] May you have a heart that burns with thankfulness and joy at what you have in him so that you are always ready to speak about the hope that you have within you, the hope of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.