

The coming Kingdom is better

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 January 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Okay, this evening if you'd like to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 103. Psalm 103.

Now hear God's word. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases. Who redeems your life from the pit. Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

Who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

[1 : 38] He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame.

He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field. For the wind passes over it, and it's gone.

[2 : 40] And in its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. On those who fear him. And his righteousness to children's children.

To those who keep his covenant. And remember to do his commandments. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens. And his kingdom rules over all.

Bless the Lord. O you his angels. You mighty ones who do his word. Obeying the voice of his word. Bless the Lord. O his hosts. His ministers.

Who do his will. Bless the Lord. O his works. In all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord. O my soul. One verse.

To focus on out of the whole psalm would be number 19. Verse 19. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens.

[3 : 46] And his kingdom rules over all. The kingdom of God is not actually easy to understand. It's perhaps one of the more difficult parts of scripture to actually get to grips with.

It's not immediately easy. Nevertheless with a little bit of effort. You can sure enough get there. Is there a shortcut? If there was.

Would you like to know about it? Yeah. I think we all would. Well. The best way I think. In order to get to know about the kingdom. Is. Firstly.

Is the kingdom something to be desired? You think. Well. That doesn't really help much. Because. If I don't know what the kingdom is. I don't know whether or not to desire it. Okay.

Well. Let me put it in a slightly different way. Why is heaven so desirable? Or actually. To be more biblical.

[4 : 46] Because we have to be. Why is the new heavens and new earth. So desirable? Well. Someone might say. Well.

It's the one place where there's going to be no suffering. That makes it desirable. Yeah. You know. That's a really good answer. Another person said. Well. There's no pain. Yeah. That's another good answer.

There's no sin. Yeah. That's another good one. Any more? Yeah. Well. What about. God's there. Yeah.

God's there. But what is it about God being there. That makes it so desirable? Well. It's this. He rules. And he rules.

Without. Any kind of. Opposition. Whatsoever. I don't know. How you read your Bible. But I'll tell you how I read mine.

[5 : 40] I read. That there's coming a day. When the knowledge of the. Of the Lord. Will cover the earth. Like the waters cover the sea. That's how I read my Bible.

That tells me this. And it ought to tell you the same. That perhaps not in your lifetime. But at least in someone's lifetime. They're going to live in a world. Where the knowledge of the Lord.

Covers. The entire planet. Why can I have been born then? Right? Now here's the thing is.

Is. How does that happen? While your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth. As it is. In heaven. Is it gradual? Yeah. Do you know.

It's really slow. Especially if you're on this end. Waiting for it. Really. Really. Slow. But ultimately. The only reason. Why that world is possible. The only reason.

[6 : 37] Why we can ever get. To a world. A new heavens. And a new earth. Where that is possible. Is if we have a Lord. Who reigns. And if we have a Lord.

Who rules. You know. Is there a distinction. Between. Someone who reigns. And someone who rules. Yeah. I think there is. Probably. A pretty big distinction. Someone who reigns.

Is someone who sat on a throne. They reign. How long is God. Going to reign for? Well. He's going to reign forever. He can never be removed. From his throne.

But he doesn't just reign. He rules. The trouble is. Is many of us struggle. With seeing that now. We struggle with the fact. Of how is God.

Actually ruling. Right. Now. Well. This is what I mean. Of why the kingdom of God. Is actually difficult. To understand. Because in reality.

[7 : 30] It doesn't look like God's ruling. Psalm 110. Clearly teaches. That Jesus Christ. Sits at the right hand. Of the father. Until the enemies of God. Are made his footstool.

What is Jesus doing? Well. He's reigning. And he's ruling. And he. This continues. In that way. Until all the enemies. Are. Are. Dout with. And so. Is trying to understand.

The kingdom difficult. Yes. It is difficult. But is it worth. Making the effort. It's really. Really worth. Making the effort. And here's why. Because you're going to go away.

More patient. You're going to go away. Less frustrated. About why things. Don't happen. As quickly. As you want them to. You're not going to be.

Quite downhearted. When you're not seeing. The amount of people. Converted. That you actually want to see. Why? Because the Lord rules. He's. He's got it all taken care of.

[8 : 27] Don't worry about it. Just. Just relax. But relax. In the truth. Of. The kingdom. So. Trying to understand.

The kingdom. Is. Difficult. So. I want you to try. And imagine it this way. Do you enjoy. Reading your bible. Or some will say yes.

Some will be a little bit. More honest. And say. Yeah sometimes. But it is difficult. You know. You get to these passages. You haven't got a clue. What to do with them. So you skip over them.

You know. Like yeah. What does that say? I have no idea. Let's go on to the next chapter. And hope for something. A little bit better. You know. I can remember. Catching a few Christians out once.

It's a little tongue in cheek. But I had to make my point. You know. Being the pastor of the church. And all. These daily reading books. How they end up being treated like. Sort of Christian horoscopes.

[9 : 23] So you open it up. Monday. And you really think. I don't like that reading. So I'll do Tuesdays. Yeah. Right. Right.

Why do you do that? Why do you do that? You do it for a number of reasons. Well. You know. Because you. Perhaps you're caught up in some kind of Christian horoscope. You think. I need a better message than the one that I'm hearing today.

Yeah. Maybe you do. But there's something inside of you that makes you do that. And that is. You know. You need to hear the right things at the right time. Maybe. But you do need to hear everything.

So. Let's get back to the question. Do you enjoy reading your Bible? The answer should be yes. But it's not always yes. Because reading your Bible is difficult. You know. I had to go to school to learn how to read the Bible.

I had to go and sit under theological professors to learn how to read my Bible. You think it was easy. Trust me. It's not easy. Is the Bible meant for every single person?

[10 : 20] Yeah. But I'm going to give you an absolute easy method to reading your Bible. It is so simple. Okay. You start on page one. And you finish reading when you get to the end.

That's it. Now why is that? Here's why. Because if you don't read the Bible like that. And you read a few verses here. And a few verses there. Do you know what that's equivalent to? It's the equivalent to reading a telephone directory.

You read this number over there. And you read that number over there. And the numbers have nothing to do with each other. And how enjoyable is it to read a telephone directory? It's pretty boring.

Not that I've tried it. But I'm imagining it's going to be pretty boring. And that's what happens when you're trying to read the Bible. That's what happens when you're trying to understand the kingdom of God.

The trouble is it's not found in one passage. It's found throughout the entire Bible. And if you don't read the entire Bible. It's a bit like reading this verse and that verse.

[11 : 23] It's probably the equivalent of, you know, holding on to one jigsaw piece out of 10,000. You're going to read the Bible. You're going to read the Bible. Yeah, that looks pretty. But you are never, ever going to be able to get the whole picture.

You're going to miss the grand scheme of things. Does it take effort to put a 10,000 piece jigsaw together? Yeah, it takes a lot of effort. But do you get to see something you can't see without doing it?

Yeah. Once it's put together, you then get to see the picture. That's the type of effort that needs to be made when you're understanding the kingdom of God. You can't read one verse and get it right or another verse and get it right.

You need a collection of verses put together. And then you begin to understand just how important the kingdom of God is. It takes a lot of effort, but it's worth making.

So where do you start? Well, I'm going to make it easy for you. And the place to start is with the end. It's with the picture at the end. And here's the picture. There's coming a day when there's going to be a new heavens and a new earth.

[12 : 32] No pain, no suffering, no opposition to God's rule whatsoever. Everyone in that place is going to know the Lord intimately. And they're going to know each other well.

That place is the place where the kingdom rule of God is finally perfected. That's the picture. So what does that mean then now?

Well, it means this. Embracing the rule of God. Salvation is about people entering into the kingdom of God. Jesus said, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

In other words, Jesus is not saying repent so that you can get into that place into the future. That's not what he's saying at all. What he's saying is repent now so that you can get into that place now.

Okay, but what is that place? It's the rule of God. The moment a person repents because the kingdom of God is at hand, he's entering into the rule of God.

[13 : 32] No longer is he his own, but now he is ruled over by God completely. Jesus also said, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

What is he saying? What does Jesus mean by that? He actually tells his disciples, don't hold them back unless you enter the kingdom like a child.

You're not going to get in. Well, we've already discovered that the kingdom of God is not a place. Okay, it's not a place, is it?

It's God's rule. The new heavens and the new earth is a place in which God's rule is not opposed. That's the finality of it.

But here and now, the kingdom of God is God's rule. And so what he's saying is this, look, children understand that they're in a position of life where they're dependent on everybody else around them.

[14 : 35] And you adults really need to get to grips with the fact that you also are dependent on someone else above you. And unless you understand that, unless you come under the rule of God, you're not getting in.

Well, that's the point. Salvation is about entering in under the rule of God. What does a saved person look like? Well, a saved person looks like someone who submits to God's will, who does what God wants.

That's how you determined a saved person. But what does that actually look like for us? Well, Psalm 103 is quite clear. That the rule of God, as it rules over a person's life, is a rule of steadfast love.

It's a rule of forgiveness, a place of forgiveness. It is a place of healing. It is a place of salvation. It is a place of compassion.

It is a place where, Psalm 103, verse 10, God does not deal with us according to our sins. That's the rule of God over your life.

[15 : 50] It's not oppressive, but it's incredibly liberating. It frees you. The rule of God actually frees you as an individual.

Forgiven. Righteous. Healed. Your iniquities are gone. Does that sound like oppressive? No, it's not oppressive at all. Salvation is a really great blessing.

So Jesus says, you know, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. What's at hand? Well, the rule of God. Well, what is the rule of God? Well, it's love and forgiveness.

The removing of iniquities. All of those wonderful things that you can enter into by coming under the rule of God. So what is salvation? Salvation is a person who's entered the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom is God's rule over your life. What is God's rule over your life? It's all those things we've just mentioned. That's what it is to live under the rule of God.

[16 : 54] The kingdom of God is to be received like a child would receive it. Dependently. The kingdom of God is also something to seek first.

Jesus said, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You know, don't go running after anything else. Seek that before anything else. In fact, seek that first. You won't need anything else.

It's also something to pray for. Jesus said, you know, pray that God's kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Pray for the kingdom of God to come.

And what does that mean? Well, this is what it means. It's that we live in a world where people are going to rule their own life or they're going to have their life ruled by God.

It's as simple as that. To pray for God's kingdom to come is simply praying for God to rule over everybody with that steadfast love and forgiveness.

[17 : 55] To have complete dominion over their life. We're not praying for a place to come even though the new heavens and the new earth will come. That will come. But it comes out of this old earth.

I've told you before, God doesn't get rid of this world. He renews it. God doesn't even get rid of you.

He makes you new. God brings in the new heavens and the new earth in exactly the same way. Not by throwing stuff away. But by taking that which is defiled and corrupted and making it new once more.

That's how God does it. God doesn't waste a single thing. So here's something to be considered. The kingdom of God is better.

It is not something to be preferred. It's better. And the reason I state it that way is because there's quite a lot of people who use the word better when actually they mean preferred.

[19 : 00] They don't mean better at all. Or they really shouldn't mean better. It's a preference. Imagine it like this. You're explaining to someone the gospel. You explain to them that Jesus lived for them, died for them.

And they're not too interested. Then you start explaining to them that Jesus is the king. He is the judge. He is the ruler of all. And at the end of your conversation with them, you know, they've been gracious enough to listen.

But they really don't want to know anymore. And they reject it. Have they made a better choice? Well, they might think that they have.

Their decision is not a better one. It is a preferred one. They prefer their will rather than God's will over their life. But their preference is not a better preference.

And so even Christians, you know, can get caught up in their Christian life where we choose things that, oh, you know, this is better. It's not necessarily better. It's a preference.

[20 : 06] You know, the moment you're doing your own will, often it's not necessarily better. It's more of a preference. And I think we use this word better when we actually mean preference.

Well, the new heavens and the new earth, the kingdom, the rule of God is actually better. It's not just something to be preferred. It is to be preferred. But it's not just something to be preferred as though there are other things that can be.

No, it's better. It's better than anything. That's what's being explained in Psalm 103. That, you know, that this is a place where he forgives all your iniquities.

He heals all your disease. He redeemed your life from the pit. That's better. That's better than anything that anybody has in the here and now. So do we prefer the kingdom of God rather than the old fallen kingdom of this?

Yeah, of course we do. But the only reason we prefer it is because it's better, hopefully. That it truly is better. A second thing to consider, more so with the language of Jesus, is that there are kingdom costs.

[21 : 22] Now, the kingdom is not something that you can buy, neither is it something that you can earn. The kingdom is, you know, God gradually removing sin from this world to the point where he removes it completely until the point where you end up with a new heavens and a new earth.

That's it. Don't be too eager to leave this world so that you can go to heaven because God's going to bring you right back.

God created you for earth. Do you remember the beginning? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Okay, right at the very beginning, you've got the heavens and the earth.

And then God creates you and where does he put you? He doesn't put you in heaven. He puts you bang on the earth. And that's exactly where you're going to be in the future. But here's the thing.

It's going to be better than this one. It's going to be way better than this. You think this one's good? Yeah, wait till you get to the new one. Okay, so God's kingdom rule is about removing everything that corrupts this world until there is no corruption left, even the sin within your own life.

[22 : 43] So do we get to see any of God's rule now? Yes, right here tonight. You are an example of God's rule on earth. You are living under the rule of God.

But the church, throughout its history, is an expression of God's kingdom rule. Of people who have entered into the kingdom living under the rule of God.

And the church, when it evangelizes and when it goes on mission and when it does works of mercy, you're seeing the rule of God on earth. You're seeing salt be salt and you're seeing light be light in the darkness.

You're seeing God at work through his people. God is ruling. Does it look insignificant in the eyes of the world? Yeah, probably. But look at the future.

The future is that one day the knowledge of the Lord is going to cover the world like the sea covers the, like the waters cover the sea. That's the future. It may look small now.

[23 : 43] But it's not always going to be that way. But even though this kingdom is freely received, it nevertheless comes with a huge amount of cost, at least to some people who are not careful.

And Jesus said this, better, not preferred, better, if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes and be thrown into hell.

In other words, if your eye is causing you a problem to sin, get rid of it. Your eye, in comparison to the worth of the kingdom, is not worth anything.

Your hand, in comparison to the value of the kingdom, is not worth anything. Your leg, Jesus says this if you go read Mark, you know, cut them off.

They're not worth anything compared to entering into the kingdom. Why does he say that? He's saying that you've really got to take sin seriously because it is the one thing that can stop you from entering into the kingdom of God.

[24 : 49] You know, it's not a case of one foot in, one foot out. These are the things that can stop you from entering into the kingdom of God.

So take them out, put them away. As Paul put it, don't let sin reign in your mortal bodies. Why not? Well, he says, you are a slave to the one that you obey.

And the one that you obey is the one that you belong to. That's the point. Is that costly? Yeah, it may mean that I have to go without certain things in this life in order to enter into the kingdom of God.

I read the Lord's Prayer quite carefully. I think the most challenging bit about the Lord's Prayer, when it comes to God's will and it comes to what I want, is that verse, and lead me not into temptation.

Why do I think that has so much power over the Christian life? I think it has a huge amount of power for this reason. Temptation could destroy everything that I have, including my relationship with God.

[26 : 08] And it could destroy it in a moment. But at the same time, I might want certain things that I think would be good for me. But what if those things that I would like to have are the very things that can actually bring about the severest amount of temptation?

And I'm praying in one breath, Lord, will you make that happen in my life? Lord, will you let that happen within this church? Lord, will you cause this to happen to me and my family?

Would you just bring this to us? And at the same breath, I'm praying, Lord, and lead us not into temptation. If I understood the will of God perfectly, this is what would be happening.

What I'm praying for in one breath, I'm praying for it not to happen in the next. Not that I would know that. But sometimes the very things that I pray for to have could actually be the very things that could tempt me the most and cost me my Christian life.

So, you know, take it seriously. The kingdom of God has its costs. And so get rid of those things that could stop you from entering into it.

[27 : 29] Sin is not something to be ignored. And the kingdom rule of God is absolutely demanding. Demands my life, my soul, my all.

As the song puts it, if it's that way around. So the kingdom hasn't come in its fullness. People are still wandering around this world doing what they want.

Not everyone in this world has a knowledge of God. But nevertheless, that's the future that we're heading towards. That's why God has left you in this world to evangelize.

So here's the exhortation before we get to a final thought. All the way throughout Christian history, Christians have struggled with the Christian life and been enjoying the Christian life.

They've had blessings, but they've also had persecutions. And they seem to go hand in hand. It would have been wonderful to live in the time of the Hebridean revival or the Welsh revival or other revivals throughout world history.

[28 : 32] It would have been a wonderful time to live in that period. It would be a wonderful time to live in the world that's filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

And everyone knows God. We will get there eventually. But imagine living in a period or a situation where you're persecuted for your faith. And you've got that.

And so suddenly you're beginning to realize that actually, yeah, do you know what? It's great to live in a time of revival. It's not so great to live in a time of serious persecution. If God is saying in his kingdom, I'm ruling, that's going to have opposition.

That's going to have blessing, but it's going to have a huge amount of opposition. We can be exposed to the blessings, but we're also going to be exposed to the cost.

And here's why. Because the message of the kingdom is telling the world how it's going to end. This is how it's going to end. In other words, to put it in absolute, a short point, God wins.

[29 : 41] God's going to have the final say. God's going to make the final action. And so for people who are ruling their own life and want to do their own thing, yeah, is that a message that comes from them like a blunt force trauma?

Yeah, pretty much. Because it's the last thing that people want to hear. That God wins. So don't mistake this period of grace, where the gospel is preached, and people get to know Jesus.

Don't let your friends mistake that is God, you know, God can be toyed with. You know, how many young Christians think, you know what, I got away with that sin before, I'm pretty sure I can get away with it again.

Don't be so sure. Don't be so sure. So the kingdom is a message of how things will end. It's a message of the future.

Is it hard to understand? Yeah, it's hard to understand. You have to put a lot of points together. But unless you do, I don't know how you can be satisfied with only ever seeing one piece of the jigsaw.

[30 : 55] It may be a beautiful piece. It may have a lot of detail. But it's never going to be the whole picture. The reason for getting to know the whole picture is because not only will it give you a sense of the future, it will give you a sense of the patience that you and I need.

So ponder the issue. Here it is. Here's a final thought. Why is the new heavens and the new earth so desirable? There's only one answer.

It is the place where God rules without any kind of opposition. And where sin is not present. It's desirable because there is no pain.

There is no suffering. But it's also desirable because there is no rejection of God. God rules in complete splendor without any kind of opposition to it.

Imagine that. Secondly, as we close, don't be confused when you pray. The prayer is not, Lord, take me to your kingdom.

[32 : 07] But actually, your kingdom come and you will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But how often do we hear prayers that sound like, get me off this earth as quickly as possible?

Get me out of town. I can understand you all want a bit of escapism. I think that's probably why, you know, fictional books are, especially crime thrillers, are such big sellers.

They're ridden for people who want to escape this world. The Bible's ridden for people who want to live in this world for God. Is the Bible a hard book to read?

Yeah. But is it worth reading? Yeah, it's absolutely worth reading. Why? Because it tells you, though difficult perhaps, it tells you about the future and it gives the patience that we need.

So remember this. The coming kingdom is a better kingdom. Not just something to be preferred, but it is really better in every way possible.

[33 : 17] So remember the verse. The Lord established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. That's the reality we live in.

And that's the world that we will inherit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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