

Title: New Kingdom

Text: Matthew 4:12-17, 4:23-25, 5:13-20

Date: 11-03-19

Several years ago I was flying to a conference and a man 15-20 years my senior was sitting next to me. I can't remember who started the conversation first but he was intrigued when he asked about my work and I told him I was in ministry. Generally there's no halfway. Either they lean in and ask more questions or they back away, verbally and physically.

This gentleman leaned in. He asked questions about my faith and my beliefs about the Bible. I asked him about his faith and he said something like, "Well, I'm more of a skeptic, but I would probably consider myself Jewish."

I said, "Why would you say that?"

He went on to tell me about the somewhat complicated, yet also beautiful, rituals, rules and celebrations in the Jewish faith. He talked about the joy of stopping his work, the challenge of removing all the yeast in his house for passover, and he talked about the practicality of living by the 10 commandments.

Then he said, I don't believe everything in the Bible is exactly true, but there is so much I find helpful.

I listened, thanked him, and reflected for a moment. And then I asked, "So what do you think about Jesus?"

He smiled and paused, and then said, "I think there's too much evidence that the person known as Jesus the Christ actually lived to argue otherwise—History, archeology and the even religions all seem to agree on that point." He paused again, much briefer this time, and said, "I admire what I read about Jesus; I think he was a great teacher and moral example, but I don't think he was God, and I simply can't believe he actually rose from the dead.

I said, "What about the places in the Bible where Jesus (or someone else) claims Jesus is God and where it talks about Jesus rising from the dead?"

He said something that has stuck with me all these years later. "I really only believe something in the Bible when and if I can find it at least three times in there."

I can't remember if I asked him to give me an example, but if I knew then what I know now, I may have asked if he wanted to look up the many more than 3 places where Jesus is seen alive after his death.

I didn't know what say, so I just replied, "Huh, that's interesting." And I thought to myself, is that really good news?

Does God still have a plan and goal for world?

There are still millions of people on this planet who don't know who Jesus really is and what he really accomplished...

- Some of them are sincere like the first man I talked about.
- Some are skeptical, possibly because they have been beat up by bullies, difficulties, or even religion.
- And still others who use religion as their rulebook and scorecard. They like to know who's winning, who's losing, and who's out of bounds.

Yet, I would say that all of these people are missing LIFE, and the Jesus Jesus wants for all of us.

What would Jesus say to people like this?

What is the good news?

- How does this good news make a difference to these groups of people, and to you and me, for our actual, everyday lives?

I think the writer of Matthew would say the good news is the message of rescue, of a rescuer, and of the restoration of all things.

First, the good news is a message of rescue.

Much of the world will say that humanity is basically good; there are a few bad eggs out there but otherwise. We are pretty good.

When the Bible uses the word good, it means that something is life or has the potential to bring life that will enable the new life to bring life. So when the Bible says that humanity was created good, actually very good, it's telling us that humans were created in God's image to reflect God's image; with life in them to bring more life into the world. Humans were given abilities to create and responsibilities to cultivate.

But much too quickly in the story, humanity didn't choose goodness, they chose evil. The Bible says that there is this tree of life and this Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the Hebrew language, they are the words *Tov* and *Ra*. *Tov* is life or the potential of life that will bring future life. And the first humans can eat from the tree of life...so I would say these humans already knew GOOD. What they didn't know and hadn't experienced was Evil: *Ra*.

- *Ra* means "to crush and break into pieces." Evil, at its core, is anything that works to shatter anything that was created to be whole.
- *Ra* destroys wholeness and creates distance between anything that should be connected.
- *Ra* influenced the son named Cain to murder his brother, Abel. *Ra* persuaded Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery. It plagued families all throughout the book of Genesis.
- And we can still see *Ra* at work today. *Ra* plotted the destruction of 9/11. *Ra* prompted Stephen Paddock to hole up in a 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel waiting to open fire on a country music festival.
- And *Ra* walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida last year shooting at least 17 unsuspecting students and adults.

Ra causes war, deception, and slavery. *Ra* shatters what was made to be whole.

Jesus is tapping into this word when he says, **Matthew 5:21-22 NIV**

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, e and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Raca is idiot, fool, or someone to beat down, break or shatter.

The world is broken. Humanity is broken. And I am broken. That doesn't sound like good news, but actually there is something validating about telling it like it is. Victims of abuse long for someone to agree with them and say, yes, this was wrong.

The writer of Matthew tells us throughout his story, You need rescue. Religion will not save you.

Matthew tells a story about the religious leaders. Some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

Matthew 15:3-6 Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

That same time tells his followers, don't worry about what goes into your mouth but worry about what comes out of your mouth.

Matthew 15:17-20

"Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you."

He condemns the religious leaders because they have evil in their hearts. They have *Ra* in their hearts, and he warns the crowds, be more concerned about what comes out of your mouth than what goes in.

The good news of rescue is that we don't have work for it, earn it, or follow the rules perfectly enough. Jesus fulfilled every requirement.

Some of staff put a little video together that I wish I could have showed the man I met on the airplane, but I can show it to you.

Fulfilled video

At least this is good news if Jesus is qualified to fulfill those requirements. It's like if you haven't studied for a test in school, but someone offers to take your test for you, don't you want to somehow know that the person who offered is qualified to not just take the test, but ace the test?

That's why the good news is also a message of a rescuer.

Matthew shows us that Jesus is the qualified rescuer because he fulfills both God's promises and God's plan.

And he does it from the very beginning of his story:

Matthew 1:1 NLT

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham:

Because Jesus is a descendant of David, Matthew connects Jesus to God's promises to David: God's promised that one of David's descendants would save their people.

And because Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, Matthew connects Jesus to God's plans to and through Abraham. God's plan was to bless Abraham and through Abraham's descendants, the whole world would be blessed.

He emphasized it in the story of Jesus' birth.

Matthew 1:20b-21 NLT

"Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

He emphasized it at the start of his ministry:

Matthew 4:23 NLT

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.

Jesus is God's promised rescuer. As Messiah, Jesus delivers all kinds of people from their disease, sickness, illness, paralysis and demon-possession.

He includes it in the middle of his story, Matthew 16, Jesus asks *Who do people say I am?* And then, *who do you say I am?*

And one of Jesus' closest students, Peter, answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And at the end of his story, Jesus participates in a meal what we call communion that was actually their Passover celebration where Jesus says I am the new passover; my body and my blood will rescue you from slavery to sin like a lamb's sacrifice rescued you from slavery in Egypt.

His resurrection is the final validation of his qualification as rescuer.

But there is one more part to the good news: it's a message of the restoration of all things.

Jesus called this restoration, *the kingdom of God* or the *Kingdom of Heaven*. Matthew used the terms more than any other writer in the New Testament.

He introduced the idea mysteriously at Jesus' birth:

Matthew 1:22-23 NLT

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

This kingdom and restoration have to do with Emmanuel-God with us.

He emphasized this at the start of his ministry:

When Jesus is baptized, the heavens split open, the Spirit of God descends and remains on Jesus, and God speaks...God is with them: Emmanuel-God with us is here.

Matthew 3:16-17 NLT

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

He includes it in the middle of his story:

After Peter answers who Jesus is,

Matthew 16:17-19 NLT

Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you

that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

Simon Peter, you are not just a simple fisherman. You are not perfect, you have some brokenness, but God, the divine father spoke to you. And you will be part of my kingdom and my work.

Jesus insisted that this kingdom of heaven had already begun. And it was demonstrated not only by the healings but also by who was healed and who was invited to join in.

Jesus started with 4 fisherman and invited them into his kingdom work.

“follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

- What did he mean that he needed them to fish for people, and why did he need them?

Couldn't Jesus just announce the start of the kingdom on a giant loudspeaker and that would be enough? Why would God need humans to bring about this kingdom of heaven anyway? Wouldn't humans just mess it up?

Yet Jesus, repeatedly said and shared stories that illustrated, the Kingdom of Heaven depends on human action and divine power.

And finally at the end of his story, Matthew most clearly explained this:

Matthew 28:18-20 NLT

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The good news is that Jesus is Emmanuel-God with us- and he has God's authority, wisdom and power to restore all things. And as God with us, He gives the people who need to be restored, his authority, wisdom and power to join in that restoration work, and that is good news.

If Jesus is the Promised Messiah-Our rescuer-deliverer, the one who saves people from their sin, brokenness and evil, because we can't save ourselves and religion won't rescue us either.

Then we must confess him as Savior, the one who rescues us from our sins.

If Jesus is the presence of God with us—our Emmanuel—He has the wisdom, power and authority of God. It was God's plan to bless and redeem the whole world, not through the temple system, the religious rules, or the prideful leaders, but through the a new people with God's presence and power to invite all kinds of people into his kingdom and restoration.

Then we must submit to him as LORD, the one who reigns with God, and all authority and gives us his wisdom and power to join in his kingdom work to bless every people and restore all things.

You all join in this work when you bring food for food on the first and when you give financially to restoration. We sponsor 30 students at Westview through the Sherdian

story, which is a weekend meal supplement program that started in a church plant in Minneapolis just a couple years after we started.

Our students joined in Jesus kingdom work in a raking rally to bless people yesterday. And we join in this work when we join with Jesus every day to engage in spiritual conversations with our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends and our teammates.

What does this look like on Tuesday, at work, or school or at home?

We went through a series last year called BLESS and we put it in bookmark form for you to review and remember and reengage with in your actual life to live out the Kingdom.

B.L.E.S.S.

Begin with Prayer: You start acknowledging Jesus as your creator and savior and Lord in each day, seeing what he wants you to see, hearing what he wants you to hear. Praying for people in your life who are far from God. Asking God, “How do you want to use me to bless the people in my life?”

Then you Listen with Care: Listen to the person in front of you. Pay attention to people’s dreams and hurts and heartaches. Listen for evidence of God’s work in their lives.

Then consider who God wants you to spend time with and Eat Together. Share meals and life with people in your life who do not know God.

Serve with Love. Be attentive to opportunities God provides you to care for people and attend to their needs. Christmas is starting earlier and earlier each year, but people also want to be generous during the holidays. Invite someone to serve with you.

Share your Story. Once you build relationship and earn trust, look for ways you can share the story of how Jesus is transforming your life and the world.

This is what Jesus invites people to...all people. Ask the Holy Spirit to put at least 1 person who you talk to about Jesus and help that person take one step closer to Jesus.

Close in prayer.