

“Kingdom”

Mark 1:14 – 15:

“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

John 12:12 – 15

“The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

15 “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.”

Acts 1:1 – 3:

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”

Robert’s father was white and mother was black and his father died when he was 10 and so for a long time he lived in parallel worlds.

Although shy he grew up it so noticed that he was musically gifted. He won talent contests and formed a band with his friends. Robert’s songs protested against the poverty and deprivation he experienced in Kingston. He became a Rastafarian and his songs had a natural spirituality to them and Robert and his band the Wailers became immensely popular around the world.

And of course Robert is... Bob Marley.

Bob Marley died from a skin cancer that was found in his toes but then spread to the rest of his body.

His story has been recently told in the movie "One Love".

What the film and many tellings of Bob Marley's story omit, is that before he died he was baptised as a Christian.

According to his mother Bob Marley's final words before dying was "Jesus take me."

In our reading from the Book of Acts this morning we have Jesus' last words to his disciples. Jesus returns to a common theme of his ministry.

In Mark's gospel Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God.

We know it was a key theme in Jesus' teaching ministry.

In Acts as we just heard Jesus spent 40 days speaking about the kingdom of God after giving them many convincing proofs *that it was really him*.

[As an aside, the resurrection often comes under real attack, understandably at this time of year. A resource I've printed off is "Evidence for the Resurrection". A very straight-forward defence of the Jesus' resurrection.]

Jesus spent 40 days, we have 20 – 30 minutes this morning.

Then on what we call this particular Sunday – Palm Sunday – Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem as the blessed King of Israel

Kingship language is all throughout the gospels.

The Gospels contain 76 different kingdom sayings.

What is the Kingdom of God?

When you read around and do the research, you discover there are a number of views on the Kingdom of God:

- 1) Some will say the kingdom of God is *Otherworldly* – It's Heavenly – It's in the future and not yet.

In this view, people say they are realists about sin's destructive consequences and are sceptical that much good can come from God's good creation.

The kingdom of God is not here and it's not yet and Jesus came therefore to provide a way out.

God's kingdom – his good and beautiful rule and reign – is absolute therefore He has created a better place free from all of sin's consequences.

So through Jesus is able to take us away to this better place called the kingdom of God.

The churches role is tell others that Jesus is the way to this better place and to help people become acceptable for the day of judgement.

The church operates as a holding place until that day.

There a partial truth in this.

The issue though is what?

What about now, today and even tomorrow?

What about the here and now?

2) Others will say, it's about us *making the world a better place*.

In Jesus, God showed what's needed to be done and we've been left with the job to do it.

God is not going to intervene. The world will improve only as humans embrace and implement God's vision.

Through human effort the world will slowly and steadily become a better place; the kingdom of God will progressively come into this place here and now.

What we've discovered though ,is that even as there have been technological has advanced and there have been scientific breakthroughs, these same breakthroughs and advances have been twisted in ways that harm and destroy humanity and God's good creation.

Why?

Because fundamentally, in this view, human nature is not changed.

So the kingdom is not currently geographical but one day it will be.

The world, it stumbles from one crisis to another and it desperately needs a new ruler and one day Jesus rule will be complete.

In Zechariah 14:9 we are told:

“The LORD will be king over all the earth.

On that day there will be one LORD — his name alone will be worshiped.”

So the this it is worldly, it's coming one day, but it's not yet.

So if it's not otherworldly, and it's not currently geographical, ***what is the kingdom???***

When Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God as good news what is He talking about?

Where I am up to is this: when Jesus is talking about the kingdom he is talking about himself.

The kingdom has a king and Jesus is saying he is the king in the kingdom.

In other words Jesus was saying the world desperately needs a new ruler and I am it.

He is the world's true King and one day the kingdom will one day established over all the earth.

So if it isn't currently geographical, *where* is it?

As King, Jesus rules and he reigns, and he establishes His rule in lives and hearts of people.

The people of the kingdom are those who have bowed their hearts and bent their knees to King Jesus.

It's a radical change in direction, affection and course correction centred on King Jesus.

God rules through King Jesus, and King Jesus' citizens live under him.

The kingdom project has always been the people of God ordering their life together in accordance with God's ultimate will for creation as an example for the rest of the world.

Among Christians is where the kingdom is to be most visible.

And as I've before, as the one who sovereign, who is supreme, Jesus gives orders. He gives commands.

He gives directions.
He is prescriptive.

Jesus is sovereign.

The message our culture communicates to us is this: it's all about radical self-autonomy.
We talked about this last week.

Radical self-autonomy about excessive self-regard and self-rule, choosing self over God; becoming a law unto ourselves.

It's all about being true to yourself and following your dreams.
My life is my own.

I mean, who are you to tell me what to do???

***“How would you respond to that?
What would you say?”***

Tell the person next to you.

What I would say it this: every one of us is giving authority to someone or something.
In other words, we all give the ultimate say-so to something in our lives.

In some parts of the world, it's the state and political parties.
For some it's the family.
For others – especially in the West – the idea of expressive individualism, where I give public expression to my inner self.

I mean in traditional cultures your life is centred on your family.
You have clear roles and responsibilities to fulfil.
Jesus though on a number of occasions came and said, “Come follow me. I want priority over your family.”
That was incredibly disruptive.
For us in an individualistic cultural, saying goodbye to parents isn't a big deal.
But for Jesus to say, “I want priority over your career” is huge.
And even more so, “I want priority over your identity” is almost unthinkable.

We are called to live self-referencing lives or we can live Jesus-centric lives.

Here's the thing: when Jesus gives orders and commands he doesn't do so as a power hungry megalomaniac, but someone who desires your good and my good and the good of the whole world.

When he gives a command, it's for your good.

When he gives orders, it's for the sake of a lost world.

And as King, Jesus wants to bring His good and loving rule into the whole of your life.

The whole of your life matters to God.

And as King, Jesus wants to bring His good and loving rule into the whole of your life.

The whole of your life matters to God here and now.

So finish – one negative and a positive.

What I've found is there are some Christians today who have forgotten that Jesus is the King in the Kingdom and we are called to come under him.

When that happens we will be given over to our preferences.

There is a true story of a preacher who was speaking during a Sunday service. When he reached the pulpit he read the passage for the day. But then he stopped, tore the page out the Bible, screwed it up and threw it on the floor. Then he began to read another passage. Again he tore this next page out the Bible, screwed it up and threw it on the floor. And then he repeated this action again.

Now by this stage the people in the congregation were absolutely beside themselves. I mean, you can imagine.

This was the holy Bible that we prize so highly. Some people had eyes in their heads the size of saucers. Some didn't know what to do, paralysed! Most just wanted to kill him (in the love of Christ of course).

But then the preacher began to speak.

He said, "Some of you are upset at what I have done. Some of you are outraged. Some of you are saddened. But you know, God, whose Word this

is, He feels the same when we come to parts of the Bible and we overlook or ignore what it says and we're driven by our preferences.

To be sovereign means that King Jesus has the final say-so.

And Jesus as king has final say-so over your pardon.
So people feel so condemned by their sin.

The first is this: who has the final say on the sports field? The referee or the umpire.

In the U.K. who has the final say in going to war? Not parliament, not the Prime Minister but actually the King.

Who has the final say in your home? You may want to consult on this one 😊.

And I think there are many people - people who love Jesus – who's lives have been impacted in such a heart-breaking way. And it's like that time, that event, that season, is having the last say over their lives. Whatever it is, it defines you.

Here's the thing: Jesus, as King can have the final say over your life – he can overrule, and he can speak a new word and give you a new season and have the final say over your life.

King Jesus is so welcoming and approachable.

I mean, when we hear he is the King we might be tempted to think it's God over us and even against us. He is master and we are servants. He commands, we obey. The Lord is King and sovereign who we approach with fear and trembling.

And yet on this day the King comes riding on a donkey and we're told not to be afraid.

Jesus has revealed his heart many years before when he said:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”