

BELPRES CHURCH

Kingdom of God

Mark 1:14-34

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Great to see you guys here. Those of you in the room, I love worship is so good. I love worship, especially when we're together in the room and you can feel the spirit moving. It's just awesome. So thanks for being here. Those of you online, thank you so much for joining us online. The scripture comes from Mark chapter one. 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. As Jesus walked beside the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. "Come follow me." Jesus said, "And I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. People brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.

So Holy Spirit, use your word to help us be more like you in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when I was a college pastor in my former church in California, one Sunday, a man came up to me and said, "Can I give you some advice?" Okay, you know, it's going to go bad if That's how it starts, right? I said, "Sure, let me have it." And he said, "The problem with you pastors is." Ooh, getting better. "Tell me what is the problem with us pastors?" "The problem with you, pastors is you think your job is to build the church. It's not. Your job is to equip the church to bring God's kingdom into the world." And I was like, "Oh yeah, well you are so wow. Incredibly right about that. That is what we pastors do." We talk a lot about how Jesus forgives me from my sin so that I can go to Heaven and Jesus changes me, all of which is true.

It's just incomplete we're missing a robust understanding of what Jesus called the kingdom of God. It's like the tomatoes in my garden. Okay? I promise this will connect it's, not just random. Every summer I grow tomatoes, but the last few summers, there've been deer in our neighborhood. And they eat the tomatoes and they eat the tomatoes in the most infuriating way possible. I'll be watching the tomatoes and I'll see four or five of them I'm like, "Oh, tomorrow They're going to be ready tomorrow. It's going to be the perfect day."

I'll pick them tomorrow and I can just taste the caprese salad and the pico de gallo. And then I get up and that morning the deer have eaten not one whole tomato, no, no, no, no, no. They've

taken one bite out of 10 tomatoes. So I can't use any of them and it fills me with sinful rage at the deer. I'm like, "I'm hungry for venison." If we limit the good news of Jesus, if we limit the gospel to Jesus forgives me so I can go to Heaven, we're just taking one bite of the tomato gospel. It's, just one bite of it. It's so much bigger because see, the Bible says the gospel doesn't just change me. The gospel changes everything.

Now, if you go to this church, you've heard us talk about the kingdom of God. It's in our mission statement, our mission is to partner with Jesus to further God's kingdom on the east side and the places in the world he sends us. Jesus talked about the kingdom of God more than he talked about faith, more than he talked about prayer, more than he talked about repentance. Jesus uses the phrase the kingdom of God 90 times and he only uses the word church twice. The problem with you pastors is you think your job is to build the church. No, Jesus talked about the kingdom of God. We're in a sermon series looking at four meta narratives that run throughout the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We all have narratives in our head and the narratives in our head influence our decisions, our relationships, even our happiness.

So it's important to have good narratives which the Bible gives us. And one of those major narratives that runs all throughout the Bible is the kingdom of God. And basically the kingdom of God is whenever and wherever God is king. Where things are happening the way God always intended them to happen. And this is what Jesus was about. This was his project. Jesus did not come to get us into Heaven. He came to get Heaven into us and Heaven into this world on earth as it is in Heaven. He meant that literally. And what that means is of course people matter, but it also means institutions matter. Policies matter, systems matter, workplaces, schools, homes, all matter. God wants to bring all of that into his kingdom under his rule and reign. So when people make Jesus their leader and forgiver and are freed from guilt and shame that's the kingdom of God, but so is when students in school break down social cliques and include everyone that also is the kingdom of God.

When a broken marriage is healed, when people who are angry at each other reconcile. When people in poverty are given the tools they need to get out of it. When businesses are run in ways that contribute to human flourishing, all of that and more is the kingdom of God and that's what Jesus is about. The text I read says Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news, what's the good news, right? You can save money on your insurance or something like that. Geico commercial. No. That's not the good news. I mean it is, but that's not the one Jesus cared about. The kingdom of God has come near. The kingdom of God has come near That's. The good news, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. And in the original Greek, another way to translate the phrase good news is, gospel.

And it was often a political word. So for instance, we have an inscription from back then that says the beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus, and it was announcing that he had become emperor of Rome. So when the people heard Jesus say good news and kingdom. They were thinking nationalism that Jesus was going to make Israel a powerful nation able to kick out the Roman Empire. But the way Jesus described the kingdom was really different. In fact, it infuriated people because his view of the kingdom wasn't what they wanted to hear. He said things like, forgive your enemies. Whoever wants to be great among you will be a servant. Well that's, no way to talk Jesus because our internal polling shows that this is not going to win people to your cause. So could you just talk a little bit more about kicking out the Romans?

People love that stuff. And the kingdom Won't fully come until Jesus returns and sets everything right, but Jesus says nonetheless, we can have moments of it, pockets of it here and now on earth as it is in Heaven. And he calls all of us his followers to bring those pockets of the kingdom wherever we go. In the text, after Jesus announced that the kingdom is near the very next thing he does, very next thing. He saw Simon and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. "Come follow me." Jesus said, "And I will send you out to fish for people." So he calls his followers first, his disciples, then us to go out and bring people into relationship with Jesus and also through his power, bring pockets of the kingdom wherever we go. And this doesn't have to be in big, huge giant ways.

Either it can be in very small ordinary ways. I have a friend Who'd been praying, Lord, use me for your kingdom for several weeks. And one day he was out golfing with a friend of his and was just having a great day, just like best day on the course ever. And at the 18th tee he was thinking, "Okay, just one more good hole and I will have the best golf score I've ever had." Well, the guy that he was golfing with, the guy my friend was golfing with was up first and just before he hit the ball, this guy started talking to my friend. And it turned out this guy was having marriage problems, career problems, financial problems, and he was just talking and talking and talking about his problems. And my friend was thinking, come on man, hit the ball, I'm losing my rhythm. Come on, hurry up. And then this question popped into his head, what's more important, listening to a man whose world is falling apart or hitting a good drive. And he thought, well now That's a hard question.

But then he remembered that He'd been asking for God to use him. So he ended up having a great conversation where he was able to really comfort his friend. And then my friend went up to the tee and shanked the ball so far to the right, he couldn't find it. Screwed up his golf score. That moment is the kingdom of God, the conversation, not the bad shot. That's a little pocket of Heaven on earth. And my friend Didn't care about his score because comforting, his friend felt way better than golf because everything feels way better than golf if you're me. So maybe that's not a great comparison, but it was more fulfilling. And this theme of the kingdom is everywhere in the Bible. It starts on the very first page, Genesis one. God makes humanity and he tells them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.

Rule over the fish in the sea and over every living creature. And the words there in the original Hebrew for rule and subdue do not mean to exploit. It means to steward, to take care of, to bring order into chaos. In other words, extend God's kingdom into all of creation. But if we only get two more chapters into the Bible, that's it just two more chapters, Genesis three. And we rebel against God, reject him and decide to do things our way. Which would be like if a five-year-old got in your car and started driving it around on the street, what would happen? What would well carnage, right? If a five-year-old drove a car, I mean things would get crashed into things would get wrecked. That's this world because we're driving it instead of God. And so now there's lying and stealing and violence and all kinds of stuff.

So God made a plan to call one man named Abraham and his descendants would become the nation of Israel. And Israel's job was to spread the good news of God's love to the whole earth and to form an alternate society, grounded in justice, love and mercy and extend that better way

of living AKA, the kingdom of God into the entire world. And you can see that in the laws that God gives the nation of Israel, a lot of which are about extending God's kingdom of justice, love, and mercy. So for instance, God says, "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner, I'm the Lord your God." In other words, I'm the king here. These are my rules. Don't, keep all your money and food to yourself. Leave some of it for the poor and for immigrants, do not deceive one another.

Do not go about spreading slander. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native born. Love them as you love yourself. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless. Wouldn't it be a great world. If we all did that that's, God's kingdom, then later when the Israelites weren't doing this, weren't doing what God told them to do, God sent people called prophets. And the prophets were really irritating people. You don't want prophets in your church because the prophets were pointing out two things to Israel. First you're worshiping false gods. And second, you are not bringing God's kingdom. For instance through the prophet Isaiah. God tells the Israelites that their worship and their fasting is an offense to him because he says, on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife.

You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. In other words, go ahead and have your worship services I'm not listening because you're not bringing my kingdom. Your worship is in vain. Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen to loose the chains of injustice, to set the oppressed free to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter. The prophet Amos gets even spicier. He condemns the men of Israel because, "they trample on the heads of the poor and deny justice to the oppressed." And then he goes on and says, "Hear this word you fat cows of Bashon. You women who oppressed the poor and crush the needy." Whoa. I run all my sermons every week by a sermon review team on Thursday morning. If I'd written that, I think They'd probably say "You might want to rephrase that, Scott." All of this culminates in Jesus who brings God's kingdom and is himself the king of God's kingdom.

And Today's passage shows that the kingdom is about three things, all beginning with the letter R. First the kingdom of God is about reconciliation. Jesus says, "Repent for the kingdom of God has come near and repent means to turn around and enter into a relationship with Jesus." He died on a cross to pay the price for our sins that needs to be paid or there's, no justice so that we could be reconciled to God. So that we could come near to God and be reconciled to him. That's the kingdom of God, reconciliation between us and God, and then reconciliation between us and each other.

Second, the kingdom is about restoration. The text says people brought to Jesus, all the sick and demon possessed and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. Whenever Jesus heals someone in the Bible, that's not him, just like doing a favor to someone, those are previews, those are pockets of the kingdom of God happening right here, right now on earth as it is in Heaven. They're previews of the full healing. All of us will receive after death if we know Jesus they're previews of the restoration of this world that will happen when Jesus returns.

It's a little pocket of the kingdom when someone is healed, foreshadowing the complete healing of this earth without all the pain, without all the suffering, without all the death. Whenever things

are restored to God's, original design, that's the kingdom of God. When bodies are restored, when marriages are restored, when friendships are restored. When we bring justice to victims of injustice that restores this world to what God intended it to be, reconciliation, restoration. And then third rejoicing because we have interminable hope and a Heavenly purpose. If my hope is in my kingdom, if my hope is in my accomplishments, my success, my comfort, or if my hope is in some political figure, I'm going to be disappointed because those things are always going to fail. But if I put all my eggs in the kingdom basket, I have indestructible interminable hope because the kingdom of God cannot be defeated and it is eternal.

And if I am part of bringing that kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit, then I have Heavenly purpose. And suddenly my job is not pastor or student or teacher or electrician. My job is agent of the kingdom wherever I go and that's like a cool job title, agent of the kingdom. And I can be part of creating those pockets of the kingdom wherever I go. I recently read an article about how there's different kinds of depression and there's depression that comes from chemical imbalances or other causes and that needs to be treated. But a lot of depression is people having absolutely everything they could ever want and still being depressed because it didn't fulfill their deeper needs for meaning and purpose.

And the author said in those cases, depression is a rational response to a culture that's out of control. And the author said, "We need to help people craft lives that are more meaningful and built on a firmer foundation than personal success and financial achievement. The way our culture tells us." Many Americans are depressed and anxious because something is wrong with our culture, not because something is wrong with them. That'll preach, that'll preach, rejoicing happens when we have meaning and purpose when beyond ourselves. I recently saw this meme where a man asks an angel in Heaven, "Angel tell me, did I waste my life posting memes?" Thousands of people read your memes, you wasted the lives of thousands of people.

And of course this in itself is a meme. And I wasted part of my life looking at that meme. Now, none of us want to waste our lives, let alone someone else's lives. Life in the kingdom is never wasted. It is filled with rejoicing, reconciliation, reconciliation, rejoicing and I'm, sorry, reconciliation, restoration and rejoicing. So two action steps for this week. First, every day this week, ask yourself honestly, is Jesus the king of my heart today, today to see It's easy to say Jesus is the king of my heart in general because that doesn't actually ask us anything. Jesus, is he king today?

Will I obey him today? Will I do what he says today? Because here's the thing, we can't experience the kingdom unless we obey the king, unless God is calling the shots in my life, I'm going to be like that. Five-year-old driving a car. And so often that is who I am making a mess of stuff. If I'm driving, if I'm king I'll live for the wrong things and get depressed. I won't feel reconciled to God or others, is Jesus king of my heart? Today I can't experience the kingdom unless I obey the king. And then second action step. Look for ways to bring pockets of God's kingdom this week. Wherever you live, work, play or learn. You can go into your school or your workplace or the store or soccer or wherever you are and you can just see a bunch of people there. Or you can see a spiritual zone where every person, every conversation, every decision is either claimed by the power of this culture or counterclaimed by the righteous redemptive making new of all things rule and reign of Jesus.

Wherever we go this week through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can bring pockets of the kingdom. There's a church in Washington DC that I visited years ago. And it just focuses on two things, helping people experience Jesus that's the inward journey. And then the outward journey through Jesus power, bringing God's kingdom mostly in that neighborhood because the church it's not a very big church. The church is in a neighborhood with a lot of poverty. And so they encourage all of their small groups to pray about how God would want to use them to bring his kingdom in that neighborhood and amazing things have happened.

One of the systemic problems in under-resourced neighborhoods is access to capital. So some small groups in this church, they decided to use the context they had to help people in that neighborhood who had ideas for businesses, get loans. And then start those businesses in that neighborhood to provide employment for people who lived in that neighborhood. And folks in this small group talk about how much joy it gives them to see these businesses thriving and changing the neighborhood. The church opened a job training center, started a Christian coffee house where non-Christians come and hear the gospel. And the process they've transformed several square blocks in Washington DC from poverty to a very prosperous neighborhood, not through gentrification, but because of this church.

And they've seen God's power along the way. One small group prayed for months about how God might want to use them as a group. And they heard God saying, start a medical clinic in that neighborhood because people in that neighborhood don't have access to healthcare. And they couldn't imagine where they would get that much money to start a clinic. So they started praying that God would open the door. They prayed for two years for that. After two years, one of the women in the church, her aunt who had no kids, died and left. This woman inherited a ton of money and it was enough to start the clinic.

She gave every cent of it to start the clinic. And she said nothing has given her more joy, gives her more joy than to see people come out of that clinic. So relieved that they got to see a doctor or their kids got to see a doctor. But bigger than that, God did a miracle. They didn't know how are we going to get the money? They couldn't imagine where it would come from. This woman knew she was in her aunt's will. She had no idea that it would be that much money. And she doesn't regret giving that all away, not one bit. In fact, she also told a story of a businessman who was one of those people who had everything you could ever want and he was still depressed. And he volunteered in this clinic.

And one day there was an older man there, an older patient who was dying and he was just covered with sores and rashes and all kinds of things. And this businessman thought, "If I have to touch him, I will just freak out." At which point he spilled some of the food he was carrying onto this patient. And he knew that he would have to touch him in order to wipe it off. And so he reached down. And when he touched this older man, this patient, he instantly felt this energy go through his whole body. And the patient woke up and this patient didn't speak English, but they still started to talk through hand gestures and stuff like that. And pretty soon they were laughing hysterically, patting each other on the shoulder. And this businessman said he felt power and energy in his whole body from head to toe.

He went home that day and he could not stop laughing because he was so filled with this miraculous joy because for the first time in his life, he had really felt the presence of Jesus, reconciliation. A few days later he came back to the clinic. And by now this older man was really close to death. So this businessman kneeled down and whispered in this patient's ear, "Old man, I owe you my life for you have taught me how to hunger and thirst for joy again, that's the kingdom of God." Reconciliation. Jesus came close to both of them, restoration of hope, rejoicing. And from then on, this businessman was not depressed. Now, you do not have to start a medical clinic. Maybe it can be closer to home, maybe it's fixing a policy at work that is unjust in some way. Maybe it's befriending a lonely person in your school or maybe it's just interrupting your golf game to listen to someone in pain.

And when the kingdom of God is happening in us, through us and around us, we experience reconciliation, restoration, and rejoicing because this is so much bigger than our small kingdoms. So much bigger than our small gospel of sin management and fire insurance so I don't go to hell. So much bigger than my ambitions, my career, my comfort, so much bigger than the kingdom of the Democrats or the kingdom of the Republicans. So much bigger than the kingdom of the United States or of China or of France. So much bigger, more beautiful, more exciting, more daring kings come and go.

Presidents come and go. Nations come and go. But the kingdom of our God and of his Christ will reign forever and ever and ever. Hallelujah. And all of God's people said, "Amen." Jesus, you are the king and you bring a better kingdom than we could imagine. Holy Spirit, empower us to obey you. Holy Spirit, help us see the moments and the opportunities we have to bring pockets of your kingdom this week, wherever we are. And Holy Spirit, through your power, bring it and we'll give you all the glory. In Jesus name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What's the "good news" that Jesus announces?
- Why did the disciples decide to follow Jesus?
- From this passage, what is the Kingdom of God that Jesus announces in verse 14?
- Why does Jesus say the Kingdom of God is near?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.