

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Part 1 – Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand

I. The Gospel of the Kingdom

1. It was Jesus' message.

Matthew 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

2. It was the message Jesus commissioned the twelve to carry when He sent them out.

Matthew 9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” 10:1 And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease... 5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying... 7 as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

3. It is the message attached to the great commission.

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

4. Gospel means very simply 'good news'. The gospel of the kingdom is not only the good news of how to enter the kingdom, but the sum of all the good news that Jesus taught about the kingdom: What the kingdom is about, what the kingdom is like, how to enter the kingdom, what to expect as a part of the kingdom, how to live as a citizen of the kingdom, and the assurance of a coming day when the kingdom will come to earth in fullness.

5. Knowledge of the ways of the kingdom is not a requirement for entrance into the kingdom... acceptance of the King and His ways is. Jesus taught that we were to baptize men in repentance and bring them into the kingdom, and then we were to disciple them in all that He taught.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

6. It is, however, essential to living as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. We have been brought in by grace, however until we are naturalized we often feel more at home in the world than in the kingdom. There is a real risk for believers that we fall again into bondage to the spirit of this age and the ways of this world and do not experience the new life that is ours in the kingdom.

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

7. It is essential that we become kingdom-minded – that we renew our minds according to the thought patterns, reward systems, lifestyle and truths of the kingdom and not the ways of this world.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

II. Preparing the Way: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’” 4 Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

1. John had a simple assignment – to go before the Lord and turn a generation, making them ready for His appearing.

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of ‘the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’”

2. John had a simple message – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”
3. John's message was one of confrontation, and his ministry one of agitation. Not in a mean-spirited way, but he was sent to turn and to turn requires disturbing the way things are going.
4. John was sent in a time when the majority of the land was settled in their walk with God. Certainly there were exceptions, but the majority of the people had aligned themselves on one side or the other: the religious or the sinners.
5. Jesus' appearance would shatter every box that the people had put God into, suddenly reopening the question of God for both the sinners and the Pharisees.
6. John's mission as much as anything was to soften that blow – confronting people with the question of God again and forcing them to reconsider their answer – that perhaps they did not know all that there was to know about God and His ways.

7. It was a message Jesus Himself would take up when John was imprisoned: “Rethink what you 'know' about God. Have you really met Me? Have you really made your decision concerning Me?”

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee...
17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

III.A Voice Confronts a Generation: Five unsettling things about the ministry of John the Baptist

1. His message: 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'
 - a. John confronted a generation with the reality of eternity – it was his God-given mandate in order to prepare the way for Jesus' appearing.
Isaiah 40:6 The voice said, “Cry out!” And he said, “What shall I cry?” “All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”
 - b. To the Jewish people what he meant by kingdom of heaven (kingdom of God) was no mystery and no spiritual allegory. He was speaking of a real kingdom in which a real King sat on a real throne that would really come to earth one day. The Old Testament is full of the promises – some of which we're very familiar with.
Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.
 - c. He came to remind people that God *was*, and that just as He promised, He was *coming*.
Isaiah 40:9 O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” 10 Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him.
 - d. And in fact, He *had come* – just not in a way they recognized yet. The King was at hand and therefore the kingdom was at hand.
2. His response: 'Repent!'
 - a. John's entire ministry is based upon an unsettling premise: that as much as we want God to come, and as much as we need Him to come, we are not automatically prepared for Him to come.
Isaiah 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

- b. The One in whom we delight is coming – that's the good news of the kingdom, and His ways are not at all like ours – more good news of the kingdom, and He wants us to live in His kingdom – still more good news of the kingdom, and that means a transition and a refining – the momentary light affliction news of the kingdom.

Malachi 3:1 “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts. 2 “ But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

Matthew 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

- c. The kingdom of God is truly in every way the inside-outside-upside-down kingdom. Nothing makes that more clear than Jesus' first sermon on the kingdom that Matthew collected as the Sermon on the Mount (**Mt 5-7**).

Isaiah 55:8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

3. His audience: the sons of the kingdom

- a. John came to the very ones to whom the kingdom had been promised (who Jesus calls the sons of the kingdom in **Mt 8:12**)... and told them to repent because the promise was about to be fulfilled.

Matthew 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- b. Many had long ago said yes to the idea of the kingdom, now they were being asked to accept it in reality – and not all did. And on the other hand, many who had before rejected it, now seeing it accepted it.

Matthew 21:28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ 29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

- c. The kingdom inevitably comes to all – whether they want it or not. The choice to be made is in what way it comes.

Matthew 21:42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

- d. Jesus lays out in Matthew 11 and 12 two very different ways to come into contact with the kingdom.

Matthew 11:11 “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Matthew 12:28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you... 30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

4. His platform: the wilderness

- a. John was not a professional minister – he had grown up in the wilderness.

Luke 1:80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

- b. John's ministry was not defined by his platform or his congregation, but by the burden of the word of the Lord that was given to him in the wilderness.

Luke 3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins

- c. His platform was not a synagogue or a temple – he took the message outside the religious comfort zone.

- d. His pulpit was his baptistry – his ministry had one purpose, not to get people to fill his pews, to get people to repent – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Matthew 3:5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

5. His credentials: camel hair and locusts

- a. John had no one's endorsement, no one's influence, no one's platform. The credibility of his ministry came down to one simple fact – he actually believed what he was saying. His lifestyle reflected an abandonment to the message he was trumpeting.

Matthew 3:4 Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

- b. There were undoubtedly other voices speaking of the coming kingdom. The distinction is all of those other voices were speaking from a comfortable place of authority in the kingdoms of this world that they had no intention of giving up. They had no credibility.

Matthew 11:7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John:

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. 10 For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’

- c. While others were speaking of the kingdom from a safe, detached position, John had actually wrestled with the kingdom of heaven and entered into it. He was a man fully surrendered to eternity and fully free from the pull of the kingdoms of this world.

Matthew 11:11 “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

- d. John possessed that unusual quality that the Apostles later ministered in and turned the world upside-down: he had not simply gotten hold of the message, the message had gotten hold of him. The kingdom that he was calling others to was the one thing that he would live and die for, just as Paul would after him.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

IV. A Voice Is Needed: Two more unsettling things about the ministry of John the Baptist

6. His existence: the need for a voice

- a. Man's memory is no match for God's longsuffering. In His mercy God waits and in his impatience man scoffs and forgets.

2 Peter 3:3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” 5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

- b. In the waiting all grow sleepy. The midnight cry is God's mercy in calling people to prepare for the Lord.

Matthew 25:5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. 6 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’

7. His mandate: make ready a people prepared for the Lord

Luke 1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of ‘the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’”