

The Impossible Kingdom

Readings: Gen 17:17 – 27, Mark 4:26 – 34

Twenty six years ago, the economic climate in New Zealand was crazy. Interest rates were exorbitant and many people were struggling financially. Howard Taylor, an associate pastor with Spreydon Baptist Church, had a crazy idea. That idea was to start a bank – a bank which loaned money interest free and took deposits which would not pay interest either. It was stupid idea that would never work.

Howard started Kingdom Resources because he wanted to see God's Kingdom expand. He wanted to make a difference in the lives of struggling people. A no interest bank was a big dream. Somehow a journalist heard of it. Howard's dream hit the Press. Money poured in. People volunteered to help.

Last weekend, I attended and spoke at, the 25th celebration of Kingdom Resources. I told my story as a previous staff member and included briefly what God is doing here.

Kingdom Resources has thrived. Last year they helped over 2800 adults and children. They have around 100 volunteer budget advisors and have loaned over four million dollars. People have got out of debt, learned to save money for their annual bills, gone on training courses and got jobs. People have come to know Christ as their Lord, Saviour and friend. Through the power of God's Holy Spirit, what seemed impossible became possible.

Kingdom Resources grew from Spreydon Baptist where Murray Robertson was Senior Pastor for 40+ years. Some will remember he came here when I was first Vicar. Murray said how encouraged he was by what was happening through our church. He said "What God is doing won't stop you know." I believe those were prophetic words. God is at work in our midst and through

us in the wider community. We are partnering with God as he grows his Kingdom in this place. Hallelujah!

That growth is happening in mysterious and surprising ways. Perhaps before we think about this we need to say what we mean by 'The Kingdom of God.' How would you describe or define the Kingdom of God?

In the First Testament, the phrase isn't used. Yet God is creator and sustainer of all life and so is called 'the great King over all the earth'. Ps 47:2 'His Kingdom rules over all' Ps 103:19 and is recognised as an everlasting Kingdom. Ps 145:13

In the New Testament, It is the central theme of Jesus' preaching. Especially in the Gospels, 'the Kingdom of God' and 'the Kingdom of Heaven' are common and used interchangeably.

Mark 1:15 The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!

What Israel had been waiting and hoping for has come in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus ushers in the present reality of Kingdom living.

Who can tell me what Luke 4:18 – 19 says?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,

that the blind will see,

that the oppressed will be set free,

19 and that the time of the Lord's favour has come

One very simple definition is 'all that God rules over'. The Kingdom is wherever Jesus rules; wherever people are being set free.

So what is our role in this?

On Monday I spoke with a couple of gutsy Jehovah's Witnesses. (It takes guts to come to preach at a church house.) They tried to tell me how important it is that we work hard and do good deeds in order to be part of the Kingdom. I disagreed. Jesus is the one who has made the way for us all to be part of his Kingdom. The work is done. We simply trust his work.

Living as Kingdom people means we will want to work for the freedom of others. We want to be good people. But we want that because we have experienced God's grace, not as a means to enter the Kingdom.

Everything about God's Kingdom is contrary to human logic. The Kingdom spread because the Kingdom's King was killed. The leaders thought they Christianity would die too. God had other ideas!

God always works differently to how we expect. We have a problem. We are human. We think in limited ways. We have limited expectations of ourselves, others and God. Our dreams are often too small.

When Abraham was 99 God appeared to him, gave him and his wife new names, and promised a son. God chose Abraham to become a new nation; nations in fact.

Abraham was human like us. He laughed. Later on Sarah laughed. God didn't get angry. He understood the laughter. God and Abraham had this cool conversation. God said "I get it Abraham. It is funny. It's not what you'd expect. It's so funny; call your son 'laughter'."

And later that same day, Abraham demonstrated his understanding that God was in control. He obeyed God in dramatic fashion. Circumcision, is a serious sign Abraham was convinced God knew what he was doing. Somehow

Abraham was convinced that the impossible would happen. (That doesn't mean he never had the odd doubt btw.)

And the impossible happened. God's Kingdom expanded through the bloodline of Abraham and Sarah. They didn't have anything to do with it. Well they did; they slept together. Their lovemaking so far might have been fun, but it didn't produce offspring. In spite of their advanced ages, God did the impossible – produced a son – Isaac – laughter. Abraham and Sarah are very significant characters in the growth of God's Kingdom.

Each of us has a need to be significant; to matter. That's a God-given thing. And yet this need can get out of control.

Brian Tamaki is an easy example for us to pick in this. Not many proclaim themselves Bishop. In 2009, 700 men swore a detailed oath of allegiance Bishop Tamaki. The oath document actually refers to Mr Tamaki as 'king' – scary stuff.

Perhaps the danger of self-promotion is why Jesus emphasises the mysterious nature of Kingdom growth in his parables. The person sows the seed but has no influence on its growth.

Mk 4:27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

4:29 All by itself, the soil produces grain

all by itself! We cannot make stuff happen. We don't even know how it does happen.

Next, Jesus emphasises the tiny-ness of the seed. God's Kingdom is like a mustard seed. It's really small. And yet it produces a big bush; a bush that has branches strong enough for birds to perch on.

Can you hear Jesus saying "You plant a seed, doesn't matter how tiny, you plant it and leave it alone. I'll water it. I'll make it grow. My Kingdom doesn't

depend on you or your strengths, or abilities, or efforts. It doesn't depend on you."

I find that so freeing. Let me tell you a crazy story. I was doing some planning. On my computer calendar, on 22nd June I had written "God says, 'in a years time', this day last year." Weird huh! What did that mean? I went back to my prayer journal for 22nd June 2013. I'd been reading Gen 18. This is what I had written in my journal:

"Susan, why did you laugh and disbelieve, saying "Me? Have a vibrant and growing ministry in this church? A woman with a husband who does not even go to church? A woman beset by timidity and lack of self-discipline? One whose mind wanders from anything to nothing? Why should my church grow?"

Then I'd written from Gen 18:14

Is anything too hard for God? I'll be back this time next year and the ministry will be bearing fruit!"

And this church is growing. People are coming. Attendance is down at 9am. People are getting older. That is hard. Yet we rejoice in what God is doing - in the 10:30 service, Friends n Fun, Girl's Brigade, Youth Group and Lunch on the Hill. We rejoice in the emerging ministries of freshperspective mentoring and Budget Advice. We rejoice in the people God is bringing to us.

God is doing this, not because of me or even us. God is growing his Kingdom, in this small part of the world, because of who he is. He is a God of the impossible. You may think "I am nothing; I have nothing." But what dreams do you have? Our Lord is not finished with you yet.

Jesus Christ works through the most unlikely people by the power of his Spirit. He does it in ways we don't understand, to grow his Kingdom, to bring Good News to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind and to set the

oppressed free. The Lord has decided to bestow his favour on us, because his plan has always been to grow his Kingdom.

Now that doesn't mean we do nothing. No! We are to sow the seeds. Those seeds are birthed from our dreams.

I invite you to take a moment and talk with the Lord about your dreams for God's Kingdom.

PAUSE

We dream, we sow, we take risks, we make mistakes (I make lots – you won't have noticed them of course). Do you have any crazy, impossible ideas or dreams? What if God wanted to bring those dreams to fruition? What little seeds might he want you to sow so that he can water and grow the Kingdom? We are not responsible to grow the Kingdom. We do our best. My best is pretty pathetic. So is yours. No, yours is awesome.

I do encourage you to tell someone about your dreams. It's may not be your responsibility to make it happen. It is your responsibility to speak it out and see what God does.

If it is of God, the God of the Impossible Kingdom is responsible to make it happen. And he will.

Let's pray:

Loving God, fulfill the dreams you have given us. By your power, grow your Kingdom through. We pray this so that our Lord Jesus' name of may be glorified in us, in the wider community, throughout the world, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen