

**If I were to ask you what subject Jesus taught about most.....I wonder what would come immediately to your mind?.....**answer is that He taught most about **the Kingdom of God**.....this was THE dominant theme in His teaching....word "Kingdom" appears 114 times in the gospels, nearly all on the lips of Jesus....

- He *announced* the Kingdom as He began His ministry in Galilee ....Mark 1:15 "the time has come, he said, **The Kingdom of God is near**. Repent and believe the Good News"
- He *preached about* the Kingdom as He travelled around....Matthew 4:23 "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the good news of the kingdom** and healing every disease and sickness among the people"
- He *told innumerable parables* about the Kingdom....(.....the KoG is like a mustard seed.....yeast that a woman mixed in the dough.....treasure hidden in a field.....a net let down into a lake catching all kinds of fish.....a man scattering seed on the ground.....)
- He taught His followers to pray for the Kingdom....that God's Kingdom might come, His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.....
- Then sent His followers out with a message about the kingdom....Luke 9:1,2 "He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and **He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God** and to heal the sick"

**The message that Jesus brought was first & foremost a message about the Kingdom of God**

**And as we read on from the gospels into the rest of the NT the message of the Kingdom continued to be central to the teaching of the early church.....**

- Paul preached about it regularly.....Q Acts 19:8 in Ephesus "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about **the kingdom of God**"
- Refers to it periodically in his letters....."the KoG is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor 4:20)....."He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves..." (Col 1:13)
- And as we saw in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading.....house arrest in Rome.....Q Acts 28:30,31 "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance **he preached the kingdom of God** and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ"

**Hard not to conclude that the gospel, the good news, has something to do with the Kingdom of God.....with the thought that if we get to the heart of THIS.....just maybe we get to the heart of God's purposes in the world.....**

**So we need to dig a bit deeper into what Jesus and the NT writers say about the Kingdom of God....and what we discover is, first of all that**

**1. It has a personal and inner dimension.....Luke 17:20,21 "Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is', because the kingdom of God is **within you**' .....ie. here Jesus is saying don't look for God's kingdom around you or ahead of you.....but look inside yourself.....that's where the kingdom is.....that is its focus.....that is where it will find expression.....**which was a great surprise to the****

**Pharisees** who had been taught that the Kingdom of God would be a great future day when God would intervene and bring in His perfect rule and destroy all evil.....in response to their question, Jesus says **the KoG is to be found inside you.....it is here and it is now and it is “within you” .....**

But if we think we have then got the Kingdom taped we would be wrong, because secondly

**2. Jesus’ also says that the Kingdom of God IS something for the future.....**

- when He is before Pilate Jesus says very clearly **“My kingdom is not of this world.....my kingdom is from another place”**
- In parable of the sheep & goats, He is clearly speaking about a future Kingdom.....Matthew 25:34 **“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”**
- In conversation with the Roman centurion in Matthew 8 Jesus says **“many will take their places at the feast with Ab, Is & Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”**
- Says that one day **“the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their father.....”** .....tells the disciples on the night of His betrayal that **they will eat and drink at His table in His kingdom, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.....**

**So the Kingdom is apparently both within and ahead of us.....**

**3. But then, thirdly, to confuse matters even further.....Jesus clearly doesn’t only see the KoG as personal & inward and future & beyond.....but as around us here and now.....**.....maybe this is the main thrust of His teaching.....

- It is something we can seek now.....**“Seek first the KoG and all these (material) things will be given to you as well”**
- It something we can enter now.....if you are **“born of water and the Spirit”** Jesus tells Nicodemus you can **“enter the KoG”** .....now.....
- It is something we can pray for now.....**“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”**.....it is about the here and now!
- .....**“blessed are the pure in heart, for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.....”** .....
- Romans 14:17 **“the KoG IS peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”** .....
- .....and there are strong hints that this Kingdom here and now is not just about the kingdom WITHIN.....**but that this is a kingdom that is visible AROUND.....that impacts upon the world and shows itself in events and action**.....from signs and wonders .....to changed lives.....the Jesus who preached the KoG also healed the sick & cleansed the demonised & reached out to the unlovely & called people into a new quality and dimension of life.....**and all the signs are that these are interconnected**...that the KoG is ABOUT.....healed lives & changed lives & people loved & the whole spiritual atmosphere changing.....

**Which leads us having to conclude from the gospels & the NT generally that the KoG is within us.....and ahead of us.....and around us.....it is a NOW reality and a THEN reality.....**.....it is about the inner life....and the outer world.....and the future age.....which at one level is wonderfully confusing (which is Jesus referring to in this passage?!). ....but at another level it is wonderfully inspiring.....

**But it begs the question, well what IS the Kingdom of God?.....if it can be at one and the same time in us....and around us.....and in the age to come.....**

- **clearly can't be a geographical place**.....a territory over which God is King.....how could the Kingdom then be inside us....???
- **Nor can it be a particular set of people**.....this group of people as distinct from that group.....if that were the case how can the Kingdom be something in the future.....???

**What links these three strands together is that the Kingdom of God is GOD's RULE**....as someone has put it, it is **"the divine sovereignty in action"** .....it is God's reign and active rule....**Quote George Eldon Ladd Pg 21**.....**the KoG is all about God's rule and the blessings that flow from the King of Love**.....and we can experience this within....and we can experience this now....and we will experience this then.....as we put ourselves under His rule.....as we enter His Kingdom with the humility of a child ....as we let go of our own kingship and yield to His.....

**And more than this**, the connection between these NOW and THEN strands of the Kingdom, as God's sovereign rule as the King of Love, is that everything we experience of the Kingdom here and NOW, within us and around us, is an in-breaking of the future THEN Kingdom.....

When Jesus says in Mark 1:15 that **"the Kingdom of God has come NEAR. Repent & believe the good news"** .....He's not saying that *the end* is near.....**but that heaven has come near.....that the age to come has broken into this present age...and is happening right now**.....it is **"NEAR"** .....it is here....it has come amongst us.....

....and it is now **"near"**...because **Jesus has come from heaven**.....He has brought in His own Person the active rule of God right into the kingdoms of this world....and He is inaugurating a new Kingdom right in the midst of the old.....**it is an invasion if you like of heaven into earth**...of the age to come into this present age.....so that right here a colony of heaven might be established....an outpost of heaven right in the middle of the earth.....

**...and the EVIDENCE of the Kingdom of God coming is seen wherever Jesus went and in all that Jesus did**.....see some of it starting here in Mark 1.....in the lives touched & changed.....and in the healings and release from demons that left people stunned & amazed.....**it is a bringing into the NOW of the healing and release of heaven**.....it is a taste of tomorrow's bread, today....it is the KoG coming **"on earth as it is in heaven"** .....it is the future breaking into today.....it is the age to come coming right in the middle of this present age.....

**THIS** is what Jesus brought near in His person and inaugurated in His death and resurrection.....**THIS** is the Kingdom that He's building through the ongoing work of His Spirit.....the active rule of God **"within us"** NOW and in our church and world NOW....as an in-breaking of the Day of His perfect rule, when **"the Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever."** .....and the wonderful thing is that everything that Jesus began 2000 years ago continues still today through His Spirit, in an expanding Kingdom.....

**We shall think more on this theme over the next two Sundays** and in the times we are spending together over these weeks....

.....but maybe the MESSAGE this morning is simply this.....**that we live ever more fully under the rule of God, as King of Love, and find the immense blessings of the Kingdom.....within us.....in our church.....in our world.....RIGHT NOW.....**as a first instalment, a down-payment, a promise of the Kingdom-life in all its greater fullness that awaits us when we take our place in a new heaven and on a new earth.....because THAT kingdom is already coming, on earth as it is in heaven.

**Amen!**