
Follow Me: The Gospel of Matthew

Victory Life Church

Sunday, March 1, 2020 — Part 1, The Kingdom of Heaven

Shout out to the Hugo campus! 20 years this month as a Victory Life Church.

Introduction

Matthew 4:17 (ESV) From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

An "announcement" is a declaration of something that *has* happened, and because of this event that has taken place, things will be different. In similar ways, but of much lesser impact, when there is an announcement of a new head coach for a professional sports team, or a new president of a university, or a new General Manager of a restaurant, or a new CEO of a company, or a new Prime Minister of a country, this event that has already taken place creates a new reality that will make things different, and everyone within that particular realm is going to have to arrange their lives around it.

Jesus — Kingdom

Kingdom of Heaven

The Jewish understanding of the cosmos was that "heaven" was God's space and "earth" was humanity's space. God had made "the heavens and the earth" and had given rulership (stewardship) over the earth to humanity to rule on His behalf. Mankind failed.

What is the "Kingdom of Heaven"?

- The range of God's effective will; the realm in which what God wants to happen actually happens
- God's rescue operation (salvation plan) for his whole world, where He will confront evil, restore God's reign, and creating a new family
- It refers to an activity ("God's reign and work" — Daniel 4:3, 34) and to a covenant people in a specific place (God's people under His rule — Psalm 145:10-13)

Simply put, "the kingdom of heaven" is God's domain, His rule and reign. Jesus is announcing that God's domain is invading mankind's domain, His rule is taking over humanity's rule, and it is happening in the work of Jesus Christ.

“When [Israel] longed for the kingdom of God, they were not thinking about how to secure themselves a place in heaven after they died. The phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ ... does not refer to a place, called ‘heaven,’ where God’s people will go after death. It refers to the rule of heaven, that is, of God, being brought to bear in the present world... Jesus’ contemporaries knew that the creator God intended to bring justice and peace to his world here and now.”¹ ~ N. T. Wright



Old Testament Background

The first mention of “kingdom” or “ruling” in Scripture is found in the first chapter of the Bible. This sets the context for how to understand “kingdom” and “ruling”

Genesis 1:27-28 (ESV) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and **have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

This text is using the language of kings and queens, humans ruling with God and on His behalf as stewards of His authority, His run. By Genesis 3, humans rebel, they want to rule on their own, defining good and evil for themselves. They end up creating another kingdom (in Scripture sometimes called the “age of sin and death”, or the “kingdom of this world”, or just simply “the world” or “this age”), which becomes a rival kingdom in rebellion to God. Humans have rejected God’s kingdom and made our own, and what is God’s response: the rest of the story of the Bible. God forms a people out the rebellious humanity (Genesis 12), rescues and liberates them out of the evil kingdoms of this world (Exodus 1-15) and brings them to Himself (Exodus 19-20). Exodus 15 is the iconic climactic moment of the Exodus story: Israel has just walked through the sea and it has destroyed Pharaoh of his army and they sing a song of victory.

Exodus 15:1-2, 18 (ESV) Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord , saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he

¹ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, pg. 36-37

has become my **salvation**; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord will **reign** forever and ever.”

What does it look like when God shows up as King? He confronts and defeats evil, and rescues His people, invites them to live under His reign (He calls them a “kingdom of priests” Exodus 19:6). Salvation (“yeshuwah” in Hebrew) is used as one of the first times this word is used in Scripture and it refers to God’s powerful act of liberating His people from slavery.

KING — PEOPLE — REIGN

Israel fails at living under God’s reign. They sin, like the rest of humanity, and rebel, leading to the destruction of the Temple and exile in a foreign land under pagan reign. But Israel’s Poets and Prophets kept the hope alive that God would come and establish His kingdom on earth once again and bring His people under His reign.

Isaiah 52:7-10 (ESV) How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes **salvation**, who says to Zion, "**Your God reigns.**" The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the **salvation** of our God.

Despite the fact that humanity has rejected God’s reign, God’s own people have rejected His reign, He will come back and reclaim His world as King, He will re-form a people who will live under His reign, and bring salvation and rescue for all the earth. God is taking back His world and what we have done to there place.

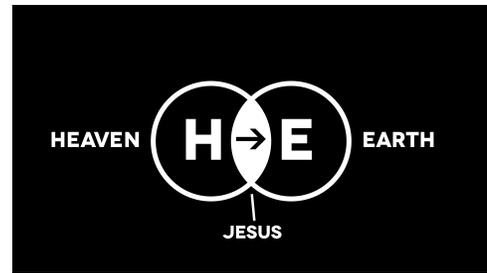
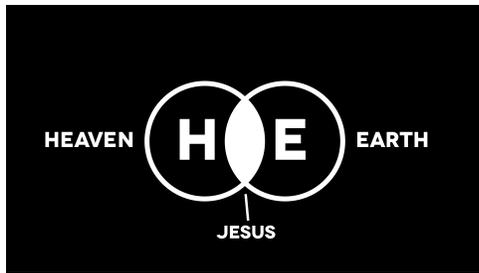
“God is now unveiling his age-old plan, bringing his sovereignty to bear on Israel and the world as he had always intended, bringing justice and mercy to Israel and the world. And he was doing so, apparently, through Jesus.”² ~ N. T. Wright

At Hand

The announcement of the “kingdom of heaven” being “at hand”, it means the God is in charge now, which calls into questioning all that I have done trying to be in charge myself, what humans have done throughout history trying to be in charge. This announcement calls us to account for how we have been in charge. What are we going to do with the news that God is in charge now? Jesus invites us to repent.

Example: Electricity being “at hand”

² N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, pg. 36-37



Jesus comes announcing a reality that God’s presence and rule is at hand, it is close. Humanity has lived a certain way that has wreaked havoc on God’s world and our lives. Now, He invites us to change the way we think (“repent”) and recognize this new reality and opportunity, living within the movements of God’s redemptive work.

What kind of Kingdom is Jesus going to bring? What’s the first thing you do when God is taking back His world? He talks a walk by the lake.

Calling a New People

Matthew 4:18-19 (ESV) While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Jesus comes as the new King, and forms a new core PEOPLE, and invites them to live under His REIGN.

It was common for respectable teachers (rabbis) to usually wait for disciples to choose them, only the most radical ones were said to choose their disciples. When Jesus calls these disciples to “come, follow me,” it was a call to walk behind him, to humbly observe His way of live, living in the kingdom of heaven, in order to live that same life.

“As Jesus's disciple, I am his apprentice in kingdom living. I am learning from him how to lead my life in the kingdom of the heavens as he would lead my life if he were I. It is my faith in him that led me to become his disciple. My confidence in him simply means that I believe that he is right about everything: that all that he is and says shows what life is at its best, what it was intended by God to be.”³
 ~ Dallas Willard

“This is a call for us to reconsider how we have been approaching our life, in light of the fact that we now, in the presence of Jesus, have the option of living

³ Dallas Willard, *Renewing the Christian Mind*, pg. 280

within the surrounding movements of God's eternal purpose, of taking our life into his life."⁴ ~ Dallas Willard

"The reality of God's rule, and all of the instrumentalities it involves, is present in action and available with and through the person of Jesus. This is Jesus' gospel."⁵ ~ Dallas Willard

"A "spiritual life" consists in that range of activities in which people cooperatively interact with God—and with the spiritual order deriving from God's personality and action...A person is a "spiritual person" to the degree that his or her life is correctly integrated into and dominated by God's spiritual Kingdom...Spirituality is a matter of *another reality*."⁶ ~ Dallas Willard

In being Jesus' new people who live under His reign, our value system must be re-oriented around love. Jesus extends His love for us in Him calling us, but then gives us a new vocation. In this vocation is a calling to reach out in love to others just as Jesus reached out to us. People are the most important in His kingdom, not things or systems or problems. Our mission is to love people and reach them for Jesus and His Kingdom.

What does it look like when Jesus takes over the world?

Conclusion

Matthew 4:23 (ESV) And he went throughout all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the **gospel of the kingdom** and **healing** every disease and every affliction among the people.

Matthew, Chapters 5-7 — "teaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Word)

Matthew, Chapter 8-9 — bringing the kingdom into reality (Deed)

This is what it looks like for Jesus to take over the world: for His words to transform our minds and lives, and His works bringing healing and restoration. Jesus is calling a new people to repent of their own kingdom building and to live under His reign. The same Jesus who walks around like He owns the place, getting in our business and confronting our pride and selfishness, is also the one who looks for the outsider and heals the afflicted and broken.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to start from a position of trust, even when I do not understand or even agree, but simply because He is King.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pg. 16

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pg. 28

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Chapter 5: The Nature of Life, pg. 67