

Week 4: The Kingdom Of God Is Near

Passage: Luke 10:9-11

Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Introduction:

The clear focus in this verse is that Jesus is the presence of God's saving activity among people. Jesus is the Good News of salvation and restoration to the world. The 70/72 were to journey with a passion to see the gift of Jesus, His peace, His kingdom be embraced by all the people. They were to believe that God's greatest gift is a life transforming relationship with Jesus and they were to take that message to people that were unaware of this. It is a holistic mission – sharing the Good News in what they say and how they act.

Sermon Notes:

Proclaiming the Kingdom of God is near

One way to see God working in our lives or in a particular place is to see it as our mission to share this message that in Jesus the Kingdom of God is near. There is in fact another King and his name is Jesus Christ. For those in the first century it meant Jesus was Lord and Saviour and that Caesar in all his power and might was not. For us in our time we need the reminder that Jesus is King and we belong to His Kingdom. We are to walk to the beat of another drum and not to that of the prevailing culture. We are to proclaim his Kingship, and his Kingship is good for humanity as Luke 4 has already hinted.

Practicing the Kingdom of God

So here in Luke's gospel the disciples were told to demonstrate the Kingdom of God by healing the sick and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. The gospel writer Luke is holding up a snapshot of the new creation Jesus brought, as human beings were being made new. People were being healed, restored, both physically and socially. People were experiencing wholeness and reconciliation where there had been devastation, sickness, oppression and enmity. The 72 were mediators of this new Kingdom as they bore witness to Jesus, and by what they said and did.

Communities of practice

We too are called to live for the Kingdom of God. Opportunities for this are all around us if we have eyes to see and a heart that wants to share. To really believe that God's greatest gift is a life transforming relationship with Jesus is to be committed to sharing that message in both word and deed. It does mean going out and moving in circles where Jesus is not yet known rather than waiting for people to come to us or our church or join our programs. As important as these programs can be there are simply now so many beyond the programmatic reach of our churches. So to go, becomes key.

A good place to start is to look with intentionality at the various 'communities of practice' that operate in your life or the life of others. These communities of practice are activities that naturally occur and you may already be involved in but become places where God can use you to share the message of the Kingdom. Whether it's our work place, sporting clubs, book clubs, movie groups, community playgroups, mothers groups, professional groups or whatever networks we are currently part of, we need to see them as places where we can genuinely serve God – not just as distractions from the real business of what happens at church on a Sunday. The missionary task is one we are to share and an intentional missionary mindset is necessary.

To take it a step further you can be intentional about how you approach this activity. Rather than simply being there for the sport and fun, it becomes a harvest field, where you are now one of the workers who are building authentic relationships with your teammates.

Just like the 70/72 we can prayerfully be on the lookout for the person of peace who may welcome you into the club or team and then seek to live lives reflecting the subversive kingdom values of God's peace in Jesus and His salvation. This type of intentionality is an important key in seeing the activities you do during the week as being part of being a witness as a follower of Jesus, drawing people closer to the Kingdom of God.

Mixed response

Although the message is one of salvation and restoration, Jesus acknowledges that not everyone will welcome the Good News. Some will not receive the Gospel or its messengers. The 70/72 are only responsible to share the message, the response to the message is out of their control but in choosing to reject Jesus it is clear that they are rejecting all Jesus has to offer in salvation and restoration. It will be hard for them, 'more bearable for Sodom on that day than for that town.' These are sobering thoughts. It is God's judgement not ours.

Keeping going

By telling us that some will welcome the message and some will reject it, Jesus creates realistic expectations. Message bearing will carry both with it deeps joys and profound sadness but the mission is worth persevering in. With these words Jesus gives encouragement to keep going— not to be discouraged by people who don't accept the message. We must expect moments that feel like failure. Though heavy and distressing there is a call to persevere in the mission that we are called to. We brush off the things that weigh us down, we continue to travel lightly, and we rely on God.

Insider Story:

Talk with someone who has a mission connection at your church. Ask them to share how they went about telling others about Jesus. How did they know whether to continue in certain relationships, but more importantly, when they were to walk away?

Pray for guidance in who to share your story with in the next week or two. Be alert to those who may want to hear from you.

Watch DVD clip - Global Interaction cross-cultural worker Morris provides insight from his setting.

Conclusion:

- There are times when moving on from relationships seems to be required if the mission of God is to be fulfilled.
How do you think we can discern this in the relationships we have with others?
- God will judge those who hear the revelation of His Kingdom.
Whether they respond positively or negatively is not ours to judge, it is for God.
- God's judgement will be full and forceful for those who reject him. Jesus has already said the harvest is plentiful, how can we be part of the solution? What can we be part of in order to help people from this judgement?
- People will accept and reject the Good News, this message of the Kingdom.
What stops us from sharing the message of the Kingdom to others?

Take Home:

1. How can we show the Kingdom of God is near in our everyday experiences?
2. Write down on a piece of paper who and how you will share an aspect of your relationship with Jesus to someone in the next fortnight.
3. Pray and seek God's guidance on which relationships in your life need to be held loosely. Seek out a mature believer for their guidance in this matter.
4. What part of your week is most like a 'community of practice'? How could you be more intentional about your relationships and weekly activities for the work of the Kingdom?