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WHAT ON EARTH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

(I had the privilege of preaching this message in our Vineyard church on Oct 4-5.)

So here comes this Rabbi, this teacher, wandering around the country. We know who He was, but they didn't have a clue. He was the One for whom they had been looking for hundreds of years!

What does He do? What does He say? How does He start?

Mark describes it as follows: ***THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND. REPENT, AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.*** (Mark 1:15, NKJV)

Wow! What a loaded declaration!

First, He said, **THE TIME IS FULFILLED.**

This moment was the culmination of their history:

- Abraham was called by God about 2,000 years before Christ.
- Abraham's family spent 430 years of slavery in Egypt.
- Moses came and delivered them, then they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness.
- Joshua led them into the promised land.
- Judges ruled the land for 320 years (Samson, Gideon....)
- Kings ruled the land (Saul, David, Solomon....)
- Prophets were raised up (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah Jeremiah...)

During all these centuries, there came forth a progressive revelation of God - - through the history of civilization, in particular the history of the Jews - - revealing facets of God's nature and character and purpose: "God is Creator, there is only one God, He is universal, He is holy, He is Judge, He is omniscient and omnipotent, He is Redeemer, and on and on." These revelations came forth through over 1,500 years of history (the canon of Scripture was closed about 430 years before Christ came on the scene). This was a unique way of revelation, there has been nothing in history like it.

And all of this revelation pointed to the coming of the Messiah, "Christos" in Greek, "Christ" in English. Messiah simply means "Anointed One." The custom in Israel was to anoint a new King or a new High Priest with oil, symbolizing his appointment by God. Over 300 prophecies pointed to the coming of the Messiah, the King, the High Priest who would be the Mediator between God and man. These prophecies fit Jesus of Nazareth and can fit no one else. For instance, the Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah, He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, written 700 years before Jesus!), He would be crucified (Psalm 22:16, written by David 1,000 years before Jesus, and before crucifixion was invented!), etc. The odds of even a dozen of these prophecies fitting one man are incalculable.

Let me share a couple of Scriptures that are totally out of context: Luke 24:27 was spoken by the resurrected Christ to

the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus says to them, *O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.....And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* (Luke 24:25-27) And in Luke 24:44-45, He appeared to the disciples and said, *These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.* Jesus was saying that their entire Bible (Moses was the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament; the Prophets was all the major and minor Prophets; and the Psalms was Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc.) was written about Him! Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies! He is the ultimate revelation of the one God!

Next, Jesus says in Mark 1:15, **AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND.** Note: It is "at hand," near, close, not just close in time, but close physically; in fact, you can reach out and touch it, you can reach out and touch Me! I am carrying it.

The focus of Jesus' ministry when He walked the earth was the Kingdom of God. This phrase is used 107 times in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Actually, Matthew uses the phrase Kingdom of Heaven, which means the same, because the book of Matthew was directed primarily to the Jews and they did not write or speak the name of God, Yahweh or Jehovah, because they felt His name was too holy to be used directly.

- Matthew 4:17 - Jesus says at the beginning of His public ministry: Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.
- Matthew 4:23 - Jesus went about all Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing all kinds of sickness and healing the demon-possessed.
- Luke 8:1-2 - Jesus went into all the villages preaching the Kingdom of God and healing all their infirmities.
- Luke 9:1-2 - Jesus sent out the twelve and gave them power
and authority over all demons; He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.
- Luke 10:9 - Jesus sent out 70 others, and said, Heal the sick
and say to them, the Kingdom of God has come near you.

Do you notice something in the above Scriptures (and there are many other similar passages)? Note the connection of the Kingdom of God to healing the sick and authority over the demonic. 1 Corinthians 4:20 says, *For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power!* What Jesus brought was not just inspirational words about God, but power - -

- Power to set people free from their sins
- Power to heal their broken hearts
- Power to heal their sicknesses and pains
- Power over the devil

- Power over death itself.

That is the God we serve! He is alive, active in the world, powerful to set us free and to establish His Kingdom among us.

Jesus poses this rhetorical question again and again: "What is the Kingdom of God like?" or "With what shall I compare the Kingdom of God?" He answers His question by telling stories, parables, 40 of them, which He calls "Mysteries of the Kingdom."

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a sower who went out to sow seeds, some fell on rocky ground, some among thorns, some on good ground. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which grew into a great tree. It is like a woman who hid leaven in the dough, like a pearl of great price, like a net cast into the sea, like workers in a vineyard, like wise and foolish virgins, like a man who gave talents to his servants and went away, like a man who threw a party, like a lost sheep, like a prodigal son." 40 parables explaining the Kingdom of God.

So, what is the Kingdom of God? Could you give a simple definition? Since it is the focus of the New Testament, the focus of Jesus' ministry, why is it so obscure to us?

It is not the church, although it certainly includes the church. It is God's sovereign rule over the whole universe, which we enter by faith in Christ. God is Creator, and He is King over the heavens and the earth. But, there is presently another king over the world (mankind), a kingdom of evil. The devil has a kingdom. In Matthew 12:26, Jesus said, *If Satan is divided against himself, then how will his kingdom stand?* Is God king over the world right now? Have you looked at the news lately? It looks like the inmates are running the asylum: chaos, evil, war, crime, sin, disease, starvation, terrorism, political ads! It doesn't look like heaven, it looks like the suburbs of hell. On this earth there is presently the rule of evil, the kingdom of darkness. But Light has come into the darkness, the Light of the world, and the darkness will not overcome it! Jesus has come to set up God's Kingdom right in the midst of the darkness.

In Exodus 8:1, Moses confronted Pharaoh, and speaks for God: ***Let my people go!*** Pharaoh did let them go, but it took more than words, it took miracles, plagues, the power of a mighty God. Moses was a type of Christ.

Jesus comes into the world, confronts the devil, and His voice is like thunder: ***Let my people go!*** Jesus was not a type, He was the Real Deal! And Jesus won the victory over darkness on the cross. Victory is certain, but it has only begun. He left the mopping up operation to you and me so we can be a part of it.

Where is the Kingdom of God? In Matthew 6:9, the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to say, *Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* This prayer states plainly that the Kingdom of God is where God's will is being done. And Jesus tells us to pray that God's Kingdom come on earth. If God's will is being done in you, then the Kingdom of God is within you. God's will is already being done in Heaven, we are to pray for it to come on earth. First of all, in this earth that is my body. We are made of clay, of dirt. A scientist said

that the average man is composed of eight buckets of water and a bucket and a half of dirt. If you don't believe it, wait a hundred years and look around. It is strange we can have so much pride when all we are, physically, is water and dirt. We are to pray for God's will to be done in my body, my life; and in my business or school; and in my community; and in my nation. That is our purpose on earth, to bring God's Kingdom in every sphere of influence.

Many would say, "Well, Glenn, that's high-flown rhetoric. But it all seems imaginary: a Kingdom of God versus a kingdom of evil. That, to me, is just religious jargon. It is not my reality, my paradigm, my worldview. I know people are not perfect, and bad things happen, but I believe people are basically good, and I don't believe in a literal devil. I can't see two kingdoms. I just don't perceive the world like that."

In John 3:3, Jesus says to Nicodemus, *Most assuredly, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.* You may attend church regularly, but if you can't see, perceive, comprehend, the Kingdom of God amidst a kingdom of darkness, there are two possibilities: (1) You have not been born again (2) You are still blind to spiritual reality, in which case you need to read and meditate on the teachings of Jesus and pray for revelation.

Jesus says further, in John 3:5, *Unless you are born from above, you can't enter the Kingdom of God.* Pray, ask God for revelation. We must see this. This is the focus of the Bible.

Next, Jesus says in Mark 1:15, **REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.**

The essence of sin is (as I put on my cardboard crown): I am my own king! All sin comes from this.

- I am in control
- I choose my own lifestyle
- I decide what is right and wrong for me
- If it is right for me, no one can tell me different
- I am the center of the universe
- All selfishness, greed, substance abuse, porn and sexual addictions, crime, war come from this

Look at the first one: "I am in control!"

A husband dominates his wife - berates her, is selfish with the money, criticizes her, curses, or even beats her

A wife manipulates her husband

Father or mother dominate and control their grown children

People become superstitious and have lucky coins, fetishes, etc.

People enter the New Age, astrology, etc., to control their circumstances

People use MONEY to try to control and protect themselves, to give them security

Let me say that the idea that I am in control is an illusion. Money can't protect you. Look at what has happened in the stock market during the past few days. We are not even in control of the time of our death. A drunk driver, or a teen sending a text message, could run over you on the way home from church. Only God is ultimately in control.

The only wise course is to lay Your crown at Jesus' feet, abdicate your kingdom, and make Him King of your life. Surrender the control of your life to Him. You don't elect a

king, you acknowledge Him and obey Him. Some people say, "I'm not ready to decide. I think I will stay on the fence for awhile." There is no fence. Jesus says, "You are either for me or against Me." Today, you are in the kingdom of self or the Kingdom of God.

GOOD NEWS! (Mark 1:15)

That is the final insight that Jesus shares. The Kingdom of God is "Gospel" or "Good News." Look at 1 Peter 5:14 from the Amplified Version: *To all of you that are in Christ Jesus (the Messiah), may there be peace (every kind of peace and blessing, especially peace with God, and freedom from fears, agitating passions and moral conflicts). Amen.*

- Peace with God -- no guilty conscience, no shame, no fear of judgment, a sense of well-being.
- Freedom from fears -- no lying in bed worrying about your health, your children, the economy
- Freedom from agitating passions and moral conflicts -- I don't have to explain that
- Overcome escapism -- of addictions, fantasies, porn, revenge
- Overcome bitterness of past wounds -- abuse, rejection, abandonment, trauma
- Peace in your marriage/family (I can testify from my own life and marriage that this is real.)

Am I saying that these blessings are automatic when we accept Christ? No, of course not. None of them are automatic or easy. *Through many tribulations we enter the Kingdom of God.* It is hard spiritual work to attain any of these things. But in Christ they are possible, and without His help they are impossible. We can't achieve peace. We can't work it up. We can't make it happen. In fact, we don't "achieve" it at all, we "receive" it as a gift of God that comes by faith and obedience.

- And another gift from God is: No more fear of death. That is a big one for many people. Hebrews 2:15 says that Jesus "Sets free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Boy, that is good news, isn't it?

What do I have to give up to get these blessings? That is what many people have asked me over the years. The thought that comes to me is, "Wait, don't you get it? It's not what you give up, it's what you get. This is not bad news, it is good news."

On the last day of the seminar in Requena, Peru, there had been some wonderful breakthroughs. There had been much repenting, weeping, healing, renewal of vows to God, and then joy and celebration. The atmosphere was completely different. Then Jaime Useche, my Colombian friend who organized the meeting, and who is a truly Christ-like man, stood up and shared his need. They had expected 600 people to come to the seminar, but 750 had come. Besides paying for the facility, Jaime had to buy food for everyone for three or more days. They are poor. Many of these folks eat only one meal a day, and many paddled a dugout canoe for two or three days to come to the meetings. During the previous three days, only \$30 (American) had been taken up in the offerings, and Jaime told the crowd that any help they could give would be appreciated.

After he made the appeal, there was silence for a long time. Then a pastor stood up, came forward, and put his cell phone in the basket. That was a tremendous sacrifice, because no telling when or if he would be able to get another one. It touched the hearts of the people, and they started coming forward by one's (Photo that I took in Jaime's room) and two's to put what they had in the basket. They gave just over 900 soles (which came to \$300 American dollars). That was huge! Many were giving up food for themselves and their families and putting everything they had in the

offering. And they gave five cell phones, 26 wrist watches, and two

pairs of shoes.



Jaime stood there with tears running down his face. He knew what a sacrifice they were making. But he also knew that this sacrifice was breaking the spirit of poverty over many lives. For the Kingdom of God is upside down! You give in order to receive

Please, I am not quoting the mantra of the so-called Prosperity Gospel. I have seen those characters on TBN: "God told me that if you will send \$80 or \$800 to my ministry as a seed, He will multiply it back to you a hundred times! This is a promise from God!" Those liars! Appealing to people's greed in order to pay for their jets and mansions. The Kingdom of God is not about money, it is about getting true riches that money cannot buy.

Listen to this parable that Jesus told in Matthew 12:33: *The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. A man found it, and in great joy he goes and sells all he has and goes and buys that field.*

The land of Israel is a land-bridge leading from Egypt and Africa to Asia and Europe. It has been a trading route for thousands of years. And it was also a route for invading armies coming from Egypt, from Assyria, from Babylonia, from Greece, on their way to fight their enemies. When a hostile army was on the way, the people hid their valuables. They didn't have secure banks like us. (Ha!) So they buried their treasure in the ground. Then, perhaps they were killed or taken into exile by the enemies, or perhaps they left it there while they were being occupied, and in course of time they died and the land was claimed by someone else. The law in Israel was that any treasure discovered on land belonged to the owner of the land.

So this tenant farmer was plowing one day and his plow struck a hard object. He dug into the earth, found a box, opened it, and there was a treasure that had once belonged to a king or nobleman. It was worth a fortune. He carefully reburied the treasure, then ran to liquidate everything that he had in order to buy the land. He sold his tools, his mule, his inherited valuables, even his poor home, and with tremendous excitement (that he carefully tried to conceal) he bought that land. He had discovered something that was so incredibly valuable that it was worth everything that he owned.

That is Jesus' description of the Kingdom of God! If we only had eyes to see!

Then is there nothing to give up? Of course there is something to give up. Anything, everything that would cling to us and prevent us from claiming the treasure that God has hidden for us. Our control, our reputation, our selfishness, our addictions, ungodly relationships. Whatever. It is simple, but not easy. Jesus said that the violent take the Kingdom of God by force. Not violence against others, but

against our own selfishness and fallen nature. We have to get violent with ourselves and choose this gift no matter what the cost.

Someone might say, "Glenn, I don't trust myself. I am too weak. I have tried to follow Christ before, and I failed. What if I fail again?" Join the club. We all fail. He is merciful, or I wouldn't be standing here. He's not looking for a chance to whack you. Repent again, get up, and start over.

INVITATION:

Hey! I have good news for you. Best news you ever heard. The King has come. He is calling for you. He loves you. He has been waiting for you to come to Him for a long time. Throw down your crown, give up your control, kneel before Him, and give Him your love and loyalty.

God Bless,

Glenn

Web-site: www.glenbrownministries.com

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.

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