

The Breaking in of God's Kingdom

Mark 9:38-50

N T Wright, a gifted Bible scholar, is correct in reminding us that when we approach this text, we must understand that all of the teaching and healing that Christ and His disciples were engaged in, was taking place under wartime conditions. The Kingdom of God was breaking in upon a world of people in rebellion against the God who created them. By God's grace many people received physical healing and some were entering into life through repentance and faith in Christ. But the majority of Jewish people were not embracing Christ as their Savior and Lord. A battle was brewing. Christ was going to be rejected by His own people and put to death – and many casualties among Christians would follow. But the Jewish opposition that was lining up against Christ was going to suffer a massive defeat, a Day of the Lord – and it would occur within 40 years [a generation] from the events of Mark 9.

And so let me clearly state that Christ's kingdom **was indeed** breaking in upon the earth and it **was indeed** going to bring about wonderful blessings. But we must remember that Jesus taught in Mark 4:30-32, that His Kingdom was going to have a very small beginning, like a mustard seed. And **Matthew 23:33-34**, reveals that Christ's Kingdom was also to suffer a bloody beginning. Listen to Jesus' scathing words to the leaders of Israel,

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! . . . ³⁴ I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.”

There were difficult days ahead and Jesus wanted His disciples to be like the Marines, who pledge to have each others' backs and to leave no wounded behind. Jesus expresses this kind commitment to the weak among His followers in Mark 9:37,

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome [just] me but [also] the one who sent me.”

In the parallel passage of Matthew 18:10, Jesus tells His disciples, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” In this fallen world Christians are going to have trials and tribulations, but the good news is that the God of the universe is on our side, just as we read last Sunday in **Psalm 34:15-16**,

“The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; ¹⁶ [in contrast] the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth” [if they do not repent].

Before we get into our actual text, we should also understand that the little children Jesus is referring to in Mark 9:37 – includes weak and lowly adult Christians – living in humble circumstances. This is just conjecture, but it may be that when Jesus spoke about welcoming little children and Christians in humble circumstances – the Apostle John became convicted about how he and the other disciples had just treated someone who was helping people in Jesus' name. Please follow in your Bibles as I read Mark 9:38-40,

“‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us’ [as John was

speaking he may have been reliving the hurt and confused look on this man's face when he was chastised by the disciples for doing good].'³⁹ 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said. 'No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything **bad** about me [and the number of people saying bad things about Jesus was increasing daily],⁴⁰ **for whoever is not against us is for us.**'"

The man chastised by the disciples was casting out demons by the authority of Jesus. It wasn't a requirement for him to be in the daily presence of the twelve in order to do this. Jesus had other followers. And I praise God that there are millions of Christians in various denominations all over the world who are faithfully worshiping and serving Christ. I regret that Bible-believing churches don't do more kingdom things together, even though we may have some differences.

There are some people who believe that what Jesus declared in Mark 9:40, "whoever is not against us is for us" – contradicts Matthew 12:30, where Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." Let me assure you that both statements are true in the context in which Jesus spoke them. For example, how many of you have heard the saying, "Two heads are better than one" [Proverbs 15:2]? Do you believe it? And how many of you have heard that, "Too many chefs spoil the broth"? Do you believe it? Both statements are true in their proper context.

In the context of Matthew 12, the religious leaders of Israel had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. After Jesus reminded them that Satan is not stupid enough to destroy his own work, He went on to testify that He was casting out of demons by the power of God – as a

demonstration that the Kingdom of God had come upon them. In that context, neutrality was not possible. If the religious leaders were right, then Jesus was evil and Satan was stupid. If Jesus was right, then He was destroying the works of Satan because He is righteous and more powerful than Satan. On that issue, people were either with Jesus or against Him. And a growing number of Jews were against Him.

We have already been reminded that Christ's Kingdom was going to start small, but it wasn't going to stay small. It was destined to grow mightily. In order for Christ's Kingdom to advance, Christians must be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus. And when we encourage and support other Christians who do that, we will be rewarded. Jesus speaks of this in verse 41, "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." Question: Do you believe that God blesses those who bless Christians and support Kingdom causes? I do. But the opposite is also true. Those who betray and oppose Christians – without repentance – will face God's punishment. This is not a new concept. It goes all way back to what God promised Abraham in **Genesis 12:2-3**, "I will make you into a great nation and . . . I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." But what does that promise have to do with Christians? The Apostle Paul tells us in **Galatians 3:29**, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." It should be of no surprise that Jesus says in verse 42,

“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me **to sin**, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”

That is not a pleasant thought! But when a person knowingly causes someone new in the faith or someone who is young in life experience to **believe a lie** or to **engage in wrong behavior** – that person will be seriously judged by God – if they do not repent. The United States presently has a loud voice in our culture which is saying to young people that fornication is normal and healthy. Use a condom and all is well. What we do not hear from the loud voice of the media is that in 2012, there were 110 million Americans diagnosed with STD [sexually transmitted diseases]. One of the most serious forms of venereal diseases is HIV. It wasn't until 1980 that the first case of HIV in the United States was diagnosed – while the person was still alive. 36 years later [2016] there were 1.2 million cases of HIV in the United States with over 658,000 people dying from it. Why don't we hear this from main stream media?

Male homosexuals make up a very small portion of our population [less than 4%] and yet they account for **over half** of all the new HIV cases. That is sad. It is not something to rejoice over, and yet we have churches that march in Gay Pride Parades to show their support for that lifestyle. Jesus said it would be better to be cast into the sea with a large millstone hung around our neck – than to encourage someone to sin. Jesus continues to show the awfulness of sin in verses 43-48,

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where “the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

Jesus is basically saying that if a person is **ruled by sin**, then he will be **ruined by sin**. Cutting off hands and feet will not stop us from sinning. Jesus clearly taught in Mark 7:21-23 that the root of sin comes from within. It is from our hearts that the evil things we do are conceived and then birthed. What Jesus IS saying in these verses is that IF we could be rid of sin MERELY by cutting off hands and feet or gouging out eyes, it would be worth it – a thousand times over.

The Greek word Jesus uses for hell is gehenna, which originally referred to the Valley of Hinnom, which is a deep, narrow glen to the south of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times the Valley of Hinnom was where Jewish worshipers of the false god Molech, would sacrifice their children in order to gain Molech’s favor. I read that large drums were loudly beaten during the sacrifices so as to drown out the screams of the burning babies. Good king Josiah stopped this horror and desecrated this area by turning it into the garbage dump of Jerusalem. It became a place of filth, wreckage and continual fires – which made it a powerful picture of hell, the place where the wicked of the earth will go. It is a place to be avoided at all costs. That is a reality that should motivate Christians to share the good news as we look for ways to serve unbelievers.

But let me share something else that is quite sad. Because Israel, as a

nation, rejected Christ and persecuted His followers, in A.D. 70 the entire city of Jerusalem became a gehenna, a place of filth, wreckage and continual fires. The destruction of the stone temple at that time marked the official end of Old Covenant Israel. There is now a new and greater temple on earth – the Church of Jesus Christ. The destruction of the stone temple was not the end of God’s love for Jewish people. But God’s redeeming love can no longer be enjoyed except by entering into the New Covenant through faith in Christ. This is true for Jews and Gentiles alike.

You and I should not forget that there is a war being fought upon the earth today between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

Proverbs 29:2 states, “When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.” Christians, do we want people to rejoice or groan? Then we had better be seriously involved in the battle. We are in a war regarding what is true and what is false, what is real and what is fake. The Apostle Paul teaches us how to properly fight this war in **II Corinthians 10:3-5**,

“For though we live in the world [a fallen world], we do not wage war as the world does.⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds [of lies].⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God [Who is truth and reality]”

Christians are to fight this war through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit as we speak the truth of God’s Word, which has the authority to demolish the lies of Satan’s false world system. The reason we take the study of the Bible seriously at Living Hope Church, is because we believe

it is the holy, inspired Word of God, which tells us how to enter into eternal life and how to live life properly while here on earth.

And this leads us to verse 49, “Everyone [good and bad] will be salted with fire.” In the Bible, both salt and fire - purify. This can surprise us but there was going to be a need for purifying the church is because it became infiltrated by false teachers. Lies do not make people strong and free. Only truth does that. Let me quote from a Jewish commentary on the 9th Commandment – “You shall not lie.”

“While goodness and compassion may be the most important values in our micro, or personal realm, in the macro, or societal realm, truth is even more important than compassion or kindness. Virtually all the great societal evils – whether African slavery, Communism, Nazism, anti-Semitism – have been based on lies! There were probably slave traders, Nazis, communists and anti-Semites who where compassionate to at least some people, but all them told, and most of them believed, some great lie that made or allowed them to participate in great evil.”

Truth is important! We should never be comfortable hearing societal lies. If they are not stopped, great evil follows. And so the early church went through a time of testing by fire. Paul speaks of it in **I Corinthians 3:11-15**. By the way, some of the false teaching came from sincere Christians, who were sincerely wrong about some things they confidently taught. Listen to Paul’s warning to teachers in the Church,

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ [there is salvation in no other Name]. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, [or] wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light [an imminent day of the Lord was on the horizon when Paul wrote this]. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the

quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

I hope that some of you will sign up for our elective class on apologetics [defending the faith] – which is slated to begin Sunday September the 30th. If Christians have areas where we are not speaking accurately for the Bible – if we have wood, hay and straw mixed in with the gold and silver of God's Word, then we will watch the wood, hay and straw go up in smoke under the fire of scrutiny. Error, even when it is sincerely taught, makes the Bible and Christianity look bad. Wood, hay and straw do not stand up before the fire of scrutiny. Truth does. Jesus finishes this section by saying,

⁵⁰ Salt [or truth] is good [it purifies and preserves], but if it loses its saltiness [gets corrupted by being mixed with falsehood], how can you make it salty again? [I know the answer – by correcting our errors] Have salt [truth and integrity] in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

Jesus was having a hard time teaching His disciples that He was going to be rejected and killed, but would rise again. The disciples just didn't get it. But Jesus was able to use flawed men to serve Him – knowing that their present flaws would be mended. He was patient with them during that process. And so we too need to be patient with each other and with unbelievers who follow lies. Listen to **Colossians 4:5-6**,

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace [kindness], seasoned with salt [truth], so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

The good news of the gospel – and the Biblical worldview that goes

along with them, are meant to be shared. Let's be people of kindness and truth. The world desperately needs both. Let's pray.