

March 9, 2025

PROCLAMATION AND DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Mark 1:14-45

(2 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)

When you read the gospels and the book of Acts, you can't help but notice the centrality of the kingdom of God. In our text this morning, as Jesus begins his public ministry, Mark tells us that the first declaration he makes is, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (v. 15). It's the first topic Jesus brings up in his ministry. Then, at the very end of the book of Acts, the last words Luke records tell us that Paul was "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31). It was the last thing the apostle Paul was talking about. From the first words of Jesus to the last words of the book of Acts, the kingdom of God is front and center. But my guess is that for most of us, mention of the kingdom of God doesn't make us immediately think, "Right, I know what that is." Rather, we probably stammer about trying to explain it or simply acknowledge our ignorance.

But I'm certain that you're more familiar with the reality of God's kingdom than you think. The idea of the kingdom of God is as old as creation itself when God made the world and put Adam over it. In that moment the Lord was demonstrating his reign over his good world. He'd put a human (his image-bearer) as his representative ruler over the creation as he put all things in subjection to under his feet (Psalm 8:6). That snapshot in Genesis 1-2 is a picture of God's kingdom. And yet we know that all things didn't stay in that state of paradise. Adam sinned against his God and subjected the creation over which he was to rule as an image-bearer and representative of God to the dominion of Satan, sin, and death.

But the Lord didn't abandon his plan to establish his glorious kingdom. In fact, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God made a promise. He would one day bring forth from the woman another who would be his king and reign over his world (Gen 3:15). This one to come would bring God's saving reign into a world that had been cursed. Our God would one day make everything right. And when you go through the Old Testament from that point forward, the Lord describes what this will look like. He speaks of there being forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:31-34), the end of death (Is 25:8), and a new heavens and new earth (Is 65:17). In other words, as God would establish his kingdom, he'd send his king into his creation and bring his saving blessings so that everything would be made new and glorious. And so the whole Old Testament is looking for the arrival of God's kingdom—the arrival of God's promised king who would come and make all things right.

Therefore, when Jesus bursts onto the scene of his public ministry, after his Father identifies him as his promised king at his baptism (i.e., "You are my son"), it should not be surprising to us that with the arrival of God's king comes the announcement from that king that God's kingdom is at hand. That is, Jesus is bringing the saving blessings of God's kingdom into this present, evil age. Now, of course, he doesn't bring the fullness of God's saving reign. That will not come until the resurrection and the fullness of the age to come. But with Jesus' arrival and the inauguration of the kingdom, he's giving us a taste in this age now of what eternity under his rule will be when he returns, and we are raised. So, what are the elements of God's saving reign that Jesus shows us

will characterize his kingdom? I want to note three things. First, the king brings a community of people into his kingdom.

As King, Jesus comes to call a community of people into his kingdom

That is, the kingdom of God will be filled with those whom he has called to himself. This is perhaps the first and most obvious thing we realize as Jesus comes as God's king, bringing God's kingdom into this age. Notice, right after proclaiming that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (v. 15), the very next thing we see is that Jesus is calling individuals to follow him so that they might be part of the community of the king.

We read in verses 16-20 that Jesus passes alongside of the Sea of Galilee, sees Simon (whom we know as Peter) and Andrew fishing, calls them to follow him, and they drop their nets and follow him. Then, going on a little farther, he sees two other brothers (James and John) fishing, calls them to follow him, and they leave everything and follow him as well.

Now, our first response might be to imagine that this would have been a common scene in the first century. Perhaps it was common for rabbis to walk around in the first century, command people to follow them, and people leave everything behind and do so. But, actually, that's not the case. You might have individuals approach a Jewish teacher and request to be his pupil, but this scene of Jesus commanding others to follow him and them leaving everything behind and following him is odd. So, it raises the question: why would Jesus do this odd thing of going around, gathering a community to follow him, and even commanding them to do so?

Well, first, I think it's because Jesus is showing us that God's plan is to bring a people to himself and be part of his saving rule, to be a part of his kingdom. In other words, the arrival of God's king and rule could be carried out with Jesus authoritatively destroying everyone. After all, all of us like sheep have gone astray, there is none who does good or seeks for God, etc. But Jesus is showing us that God's kingdom, his rule, is first a *saving* rule. Jesus comes to bring people out of their condemnation and ruin and into his kingdom, under his rule. We see this in the judgment scene we heard read earlier from Matthew 25. Notice that the scene of judgment begins with Jesus sitting on his throne as king (Matt 25:31). Then, he judges, constantly referring to himself as king ("Then the King will say . . ."). And when he pronounces the blessings of salvation on the sheep in this judgment scene, he says, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34). That shows us that Jesus' mission as God's king involves him savingly bringing people into his kingdom. But we can say more.

We also see that Jesus' bringing people into his kingdom comes with a call or command. Do you see that in the text? Jesus commands Peter and Andrew to follow him (v. 17) and we're told he "called" (v. 20) James and John. This helps us understand the implications that Jesus is God's king, reigning over God's kingdom. Jesus isn't coming to say, "Feel free to do whatever you want, but I've got a pretty good offer if you want to consider it. So, take it or leave it."

No, he comes with a command. He is the king who must be honored. Even as he announces the kingdom of God is at hand, he immediately follows it with the command “repent and believe.” In other words, the announcement of the gospel is good news, and it is an invitation to know immense blessings of salvation that we don’t deserve. But it’s more than an invitation. The reality is that if you do not follow God’s king, you’ll face judgment. The judgment text of Matthew 25 doesn’t merely end with the subjects of Christ’s kingdom being welcomed in. It also includes those who did not bow to the king in repentance and faith going away “into eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46). Christ brings people into his kingdom through his command that they come—repenting and believing.

Next, we see that Jesus’ call is effective. He calls these four fishermen, and we’re told that all of them leave their nets behind and follow him. That’s odd behavior to explain. But when we consider what the Lord said in the OT, it makes sense. In Ezekiel 34, for example, the Lord pictures his people whom he will save as sheep who have been scattered all over the earth. And the Lord announces, “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out” (Ezek 34:11). The language is clear. God himself is coming to gather his people (his sheep) to himself, and he’ll succeed in bringing them to himself.

We’ve already noted that Jesus is God the Son multiple times last week, so it shouldn’t be surprising to find Jesus calling people to himself, as Ezekiel promised God would one day do. In fact, Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd, gathering his sheep in John 10 and explicitly says that when he calls his sheep to himself, “They will listen to my voice” (v. 16). So, here’s Jesus on the scene, calling his sheep to follow him, and they are listening and following. His call to them effects what it commands, we might say.

But there’s one more thing we need to note. As Jesus calls these four fishermen, he tells them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (v. 17). In other words, those whom Jesus calls to belong to his kingdom will be used by Jesus to call others into his kingdom as well. In other words, they’ll serve as ambassadors for Christ, of a sort, calling others through the gospel to repent and believe and come to Christ. This is the privilege we have as followers of Christ. It is as we preach the gospel that our Lord will call others to come to him, and they’ll indeed follow him. The shepherd will effectively gather his sheep to himself through our proclamation of the gospel. What a privilege we then have as followers of Jesus, the king. Therefore, the first thing we see as Jesus proclaims the arrival of God’s kingdom and calls people to him is that God’s redemptive plan involves the king calling a community of people to be part of his kingdom. God’s kingdom will be filled with redeemed people. And they come through the call of Jesus. Second, we see that King Jesus comes to conquer the kingdom of darkness.

As King, Jesus comes to conquer the kingdom of darkness

Because of Adam’s sin in Genesis 3, when Jesus comes into the world as God’s King, he comes into enemy-occupied territory. That’s clear the second Jesus enters into the synagogue in Capernaum to teach. Mark tells us in verses 21-22 that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue there, and the crowds were amazed as he was teaching with authority. Now, this shouldn’t surprise us since Jesus is nothing

less than the God-man. So, whereas other Jewish teachers would say, “It has been said” or the like, we know from other recordings of Jesus’ teachings in the gospels, that Jesus said, “I say to you.” He didn’t even say like the prophet, “Thus says the Lord,” as if he were a mere mouthpiece for God. He said, “I say to you,” because he is himself God the Son.

But what I want us to take note of is another response from another source that Jesus’ teaching elicits. Mark tells us that as Jesus is teaching, “Immediately there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God’” (vv. 23-24).

One thing you’ll see throughout the gospels is the presence of God’s king in this world (that is nothing less than enemy-occupied territory) provokes the demonic forces to expose themselves. Moreover, the demons know that as God’s king, Jesus will rule over them and destroy them, ultimately. That’s why this demon asks Jesus if he’s come to destroy them. And though the answer is that indeed Jesus will eventually do so, now he simply shows his rule over them by driving the unclean spirit away. Mark says, “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him” (vv. 25-26). And so the crowd was amazed that Jesus not only taught as one with divine authority but also had authority over demons. Moreover, this was not a one-off. We’re told in verses 34 and 39 that Jesus continued to cast out demons.

Now, before getting to the main point here, let me note that one reason the Lord keeps the demons silent (and forbids others from speaking as well about who he is) is because everything that Jesus has come to do must happen in Jesus’ timetable and design. He doesn’t want people to get the wrong impression of what he’s come to be and do, for example, and try to mount an attack against Rome. Nor does the crowd’s response to him need to lead to his death prior to the time needed to instruct his disciples. He is exercising control over every moment, even as he drives out this demon and shuts his mouth. But it is to this action that we need to return.

One thing Christ’s act of driving out this demon shows is that the coming of God’s king and God’s kingdom means the destruction of his enemies. It means that Satan, sin, and death will be overcome. And this shouldn’t be surprising because the first promise of salvation after the man and woman fell in the garden was presented in terms of God’s promised king crushing the head of his enemy, the serpent (Gen 3:15). Now, because Jesus is introducing into this age a sign of what will be in the age to come, he doesn’t destroy all of his enemies in that first coming. But he’s giving us a clear indicator that at his return, when he brings his kingdom in all its fullness, Satan, sin, and death will be thrown into a lake of fire and destroyed forever.

Now, one additional point I want to make before we move on is that we’ve benefitted from Christ’s triumph over the forces of darkness just as that man in the synagogue did when Jesus drove the evil spirit from him. Obviously we understand that we have benefitted from the Lord calling a people into his kingdom, but we might not see our benefit from Jesus’ triumph over the forces of darkness. But consider two things. First, Ephesians 2:2-3 pictures all of us before we were saved as following the prince of the power of the air and the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience. Then, when describing our salvation, Paul tells us in Colossians 1:13-14 that Christ “has delivered us from the

domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

What this means is that when you and I first came to faith, repenting and believing, it is because God’s conquering king exercised his might over the forces of darkness to whom we were enslaved, bound the enemy from having any power over us, and brought us to himself. In other words, our salvation is much more like this picture of Jesus driving out the demonic forces from this man than we might think. And again, one day he’ll destroy Satan, sin, and death forever. This brings us to the final element we see in the text. As king, Jesus removes the devastating effects of sin.

As King, Jesus comes to remove the devastating effects of sin

As Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord in the garden, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they ushered in a reign of death. It’s not coincidence that only a couple of chapters later in Genesis 5 that the refrain “and he died” is repeated again and again. From Genesis 3 until now we’ve got accustomed to sickness and death simply being a way of life. In this life we’ll battle all kinds of diseases, and eventually we’ll die (unless Christ returns first!).

And yet as Jesus comes onto the scene as God’s promised king and gives us a picture of what God’s rule will look like, we find that he’s removing these devastating effects of sin. We see this multiple ways. First, when he comes to Peter’s house, he finds that she’s sick with fever, and he drives the fever away, just like he’d done with the evil spirit. Then, we’re told that that evening he was not only continuing to drive away demons but was healing many who were sick and had been brought to him (vv. 32-34). Then, after trying to get some time away from the crowds to pray in verses 35-39, we read in verses 40-45 that a leper came to him, saying, “If you will, you can make me clean” (v. 40).

Now, what makes the nature of this last episode different from others is that leprosy could contaminate another person if the leper was touched. It’s not like you can catch a fever or cancer from another, but if you came into contact with a leper, that could be devastating. And so one with leprosy would be largely removed from society, and if he had to be around others, he’d announce his arrival so that others might distance themselves. Yet, far from shrinking away from the leper, we’re told that Jesus, moved with pity, actually reached out and touched him, saying to him, “I will; be clean.” And Mark tells us, “And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean” (v. 42), and Jesus instructs him to go the priest as Moses commanded to confirm that he was indeed free from leprosy.

It is an amazing scene. But it simply adds to what Mark is showing us right out of the gate. Jesus, bringing God’s kingdom, will remove the devastating effects of sin, such as disease and death. Now, yes, because Christ reigns right now as king, we get tastes of this now. The Lord will be pleased to bring healing at times, as even some of us can attest to in miraculous ways. And yet he will not fully eradicate the effects of sin until the second coming. But on that glorious day the effects of sin most certainly will be removed. There’ll be no more sickness, pain, or death. All the painful realities that we’ve simply gotten used to as part of life will be no more.

From the moment Adam and Eve sinned God promised that his kingdom was coming. His saving rule would come through the arrival of his king. As Mark begins record of Jesus’ public ministry, he is

showing us that Jesus is God's promised king, and the kingdom he's bringing will mean a gathering of those whom he redeems, the destruction of every force of darkness, and the eradication of the devastating effects of sin. We get tastes of them in this age, but persevere in this age because we're going to see these realities in fullness when our king returns to consummate his kingdom. And we know that day is sure because the one who lived, died, and was raised told us he'd come back for us. Until then, let's come to the table, remembering his redeeming work and giving him thanks. Amen.