

Texts: Luke 10:25-37 and Hebrews 9:1-15

Sunday 29th September 2019

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

We are now into week six of our current sermon series on 'the kingdom of God' and hopefully we've seen how central 'the kingdom of God' is to the biblical story. In **Genesis 1 and 2**, we saw the pattern of the kingdom, with God's people, living in God's place, under God's rule and enjoying God's blessing.

In Genesis 3, we saw how the pattern of the kingdom was lost through Adam and Eve's rebellion, **and then with Abraham in Genesis 12 to the reign of King Solomon in 1st Kings**, we saw how God sought to form a people for Himself once more,...

a people who would live in God's place, under God's rule, with the king God had chosen and so once again enjoying God's blessing.

In the book of 1st Samuel we read about the future king who would come, a king who would be a son of God and a descendant of David, and a king whose reign would be eternal. This would be no ordinary king.

Two weeks ago we ended on the climax of Israel's history, that golden moment with King Solomon, but we noted that soon afterward Solomon strayed from the Lord and so the kingdom disintegrated. What we didn't cover, and didn't have time to cover in last week's all age service, is that God's prophets did not only speak a message of hope and encouragement,...

the prophets also warned God's people to turn from their rebellious ways because otherwise God would bring His judgment upon their sin.

But as with Solomon, the people, and especially the kings after Solomon, largely ignored the prophets and rebelled against God. **And so, God brought His judgment upon His people and He dismantled what He had brought about such that His people were taken into exile. The whole of the nation of Israel is in exile around 600BC, although it happened in two stages because the kingdom became divided into a northern and a southern kingdom with two separate kings.**

But even in exile, God still raised up prophets, such as Ezekiel, to bring hope, comfort and warning to God's

people, affirming the promises God had made and that if they turned back to Him, there would be a future.

In the period of 540 to 440 BC, God brought back a portion of the people to the land He had given, under the leadership of men like Ezra and Nehemiah, whose accounts we can read in the Old Testament books under their name. To that small remnant of the nation, God also sent prophets, again to encourage and to warn, and the last of these was Malachi, whose book finishes off the Old Testament – and then from Malachi until the beginning of the New Testament we have 400 years of silence: 400 years of without any word from God, 400 years of waiting.

Until, finally, it is time for the arrival of Jesus and a new prophet is raised up in the person of John the Baptist, and following on from his ministry, Jesus appears. Mark tells us that when Jesus began His ministry, **Jesus proclaimed: ‘The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’**

(Mark 1:15)

With these words, and it is echoed in each of the gospels, though in different ways, but with these words we are meant to see that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, as Paul **will say in 2 Corinthians: ‘For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.’**

(2 Cor. 1:20)

We are meant to see that all the patterns and all the promises of Israel's history point to Jesus, are fulfilled in Jesus and this is also true for the pattern of the Kingdom of God.

We are hopefully familiar by now, that part of God's kingdom is a people who are His, and this was meant to be the people of Israel, descendants of Abraham, a people who would reflect the character of God and His ways. But as we've just reviewed, Israel went astray, especially under the influence of their kings.

But then Jesus comes and **He says in John 15**: 'I am the true vine...you are the branches.' (John 15:1, 5) The 'vine' was an image used by the Old Testament prophets to speak of Israel, and so Jesus is saying that He is the true Israel, together with any who are joined to Him;...

and so all who are in Christ are God's people, but they are His because of the faith they have placed in Jesus, because of the relationship they now have with Jesus.

Similarly, with regards to God's place, that place where God would dwell with His people, the Apostle John, earlier in his gospel, speaks of Jesus this way in the introduction: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.'

(John 1:1, 14)

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. God came to earth and was found in human likeness;...

the Word became flesh, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity moved into the neighbourhood. The very presence of God dwelt among us in the person of Jesus.

However, Jesus was not only the true Israel and the place of God's presence, **Jesus was also the true King, in whose life the rule of God was lived perfectly, and in whose life we also see the hallmarks of God's kingdom and blessing.**

Luke records at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, **these words:**

**'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the **Lord's favour.**'**

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue

were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'
(Luke 4:18-21)

Here are the hallmarks of the Kingdom – spoken first by the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier, foretelling what the Kingdom of God upon the earth would look like. This is what it would look like as the reign of God came amongst His people through the promised Messiah.

And Jesus quotes these words, saying that they are now fulfilled in Him for they will be seen through His ministry, and affirm Him as the promised King. But these are no empty words of Jesus, He will go on to fulfil them.

In Matthew's gospel, we read of an incident **where two men meet Jesus:**

‘Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’

The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’

Jesus stopped and called them. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked.

‘Lord,’ they answered, ‘we want our sight.’

**Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.’
(Matthew 20:30-34)**

The blind see, the prisoners are set free, the Lord’s favour, His blessing, breaks out amongst the people. Here is the true King, that promised descendant of David; son of God, son of man; in whose life the rule and blessing of God are seen.

So, everything in the Old Testament prepared the way for Jesus, acting as a signpost towards Him, helping us to understand who He was and what He fulfilled: that in Jesus, the kingdom of God is embodied and is in our very midst.

And that foreshadowing in the Old Testament is captured by the writer of Hebrews time and time again. In Hebrews chapter 9 the focus is primarily on the tabernacle, that place and symbol of God's presence amongst His people.

In verses 1 to 5, the writer reminds us of the tabernacle, which we touched on this briefly a few weeks' ago.

But here in Hebrews, the writer gives us a quick reminder, to get our bearings and prepare us for what he will go on to say about Jesus. So, we are reminded about the two rooms, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. We are also reminded about the pieces of furniture to aid the ministry the priests would conduct.

But then in verses 6 to 7, that limitation of access, that limitation of relationship which was highlighted two weeks' ago, is spelt out here for us. **We read:**

'When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.' (Hebrews 9:6-7)

In reminding us of these limitations, the writer of Hebrews affirms for us the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin – that the sin of His people created distance between God and the people, and this sin could not be overlooked by a truly loving, truly just, truly holy God, and so sin would bring the judgment of God upon the people. Sin was so serious that any entering into the very presence of God would bring instant judgment and instant death upon themselves. And so, there is a limitation of relationship, there still exists a degree of division, a degree of distance, between the holy God and His people.

The writer goes on in verses 8 to 10, to say that the Holy Spirit was showing something in the tabernacle being setup this way. We read:

‘The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.’

(Hebrews 9:8-9)

So, the Spirit of God, in giving these specific instructions for the layout, structure and the workings of the tabernacle was showing that distance still existed – the conscience, the debt, between humanity and God... had not been fully overcome. There was a degree of relationship, but not full access and intimacy.

But then, in verses 11 to 15, things change, and they change because Jesus came. He came as a new high priest, one of greater stature, to stand before God on our behalf, and where He went was not to an earthly tabernacle, but to a heavenly tabernacle, to the very presence of Father God, to His very throne room. And He did not gain access to there through the blood of an animal, no, He entered that Most Holy Place in the heavenly realms by His own perfect, sinless blood.

And so, because Jesus' priesthood and sacrifice and place of ministry are all greater, what He achieves is greater – He obtains an eternal redemption for His people, an eternal freedom and right relationship with God. He is then the mediator of a new covenant, He ushers in a new promise, a new relationship between God and humanity,

because He died as a ransom to set us free from the penalty of our sins, that we might be forgiven once for all, and have direct relationship, and intimate access to God.

All this was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, with the tabernacle being a living parable, a living story of what God yearned for His people but which was not feasible through the first covenant, which we call the Old Covenant, or the Old Testament. And so, Jesus came, and He fulfilled what had been foreshadowed.

And yet, when He came, so many people missed this, even though they were steeped in its history and symbolism and limitation – they missed it. They missed who Jesus was, what He meant, what He offered and

achieved. And even when He died and rose again, people still missed it, and they still failed to respond in faith.

Friends, have you missed it? You could have been attending church all your life, just like the Israelites, fulfilling religious duty, but missing it, missing the significance of Jesus.

Friends, do you see who Jesus truly is? And does He captivate your heart? Because if Jesus appears meaningless, or if Jesus seems irrelevant, or if Jesus doesn't fire you up with thankfulness to God, you might have missed it! The writer of Hebrews was writing to people who were giving their lives, in death, because of their faith in Jesus. To what degree, have we grasped an understanding of Jesus that would fuel such faith in us?

And this isn't just for people who know they are not Christians – this point of application is for us all, even the committed Christian: **does Jesus fire your faith? Or have you become a bit lukewarm towards Him? Because if you grasp Jesus, if you see just a minute part of who He is and what He has done, and if you can appreciate that for what it's worth, you can't be lukewarm. But if you are lukewarm, maybe you've also missed it, or maybe you've taken your eyes and your heart off of Jesus. So, have we missed it, friends, have we missed Jesus and all that He embodies and offers?**

But you know, the people of Jesus' day also missed another crucial part of God's kingdom and of the mission of Jesus. They had forgotten that the promise to Abraham was also for the nations. **God had promised: 'You will be**

a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ (Genesis 12:2-3)

The people of God had missed this, even though the prophets would affirm it again and again, they missed it, or they ignored it. And so, when Jesus comes embodying the kingdom it jars with people, because He tells stories like **that of the Good Samaritan. Sometimes we think this story is about simple, good morals, but it was revolutionary in His time, because Jesus was challenging people to realise that within the heart of God, was a heart for the nations. The kingdom of God is not about me, mine and us – and that shocked and frustrated the people of Jesus’ day, for they couldn’t see beyond themselves, and they anticipated the Messiah bringing blessing only for them. They missed that God had a heart for the nations.**

Friends, have we missed this also? Have we missed this aspect of the kingdom? Do we see, in the example of the Good Samaritan, that the way of the Kingdom is to give of ourselves for those who are without? Do we see, that the kingdom isn't purely about me or you?

The cross is the ultimate embodiment of this – that God would give of Himself for the sake of rebellious humanity – He gives Himself up for others before they can even think to reciprocate. So, can I ask friends: does that sound like you? Are you giving of yourself for others?

We have a vacancy list needing filled so that people can see Jesus, meet with Jesus, receive from Jesus through the people of Jesus. Are you playing your part? Is there some way you could get involved?

Or what about the Alpha course we're running just now – did you invite anyone along? If you have a heart for the nations like God, then you might have, even if they turned you down. It's not too late by the way, people can still come this week for the very first time if they accept your invitation in the next few days.

Brothers and sisters, in Jesus the Kingdom of God came, He is the embodiment of God's people, place, rule, King and blessing. Have we missed this, or are we lukewarm towards Him?

What's more, in Jesus, the way of the kingdom was also embodied, because He was outward looking, sacrificial and self-giving for the sake of the nations, are we?

Because what we have in Jesus is not just for us, for as the writer to Hebrews says, the death of Christ is meant to change us, such that we serve the living God. Who are we serving? Who are you living for? Ourselves or God?

I pray we may all grasp Jesus afresh today, and for the first time or for this time and this week, may our hearts be so captivated by Jesus that we live for Him, the One in whom is the kingdom of God.

May it be so. Let us pray.