

KINGDOM BREAKTHROUGH

SERMON SIX

STORIES OF THE KINGDOM

For me there is nothing better than sitting with someone around a camp fire who can really tell stories that hold your attention for hours. This was very much part of our culture in the past but sadly has been lost. As Jesus walked the dusty streets of Palestine he loved to tell simple stories to those around him but in so doing would share some profound truth that he desired his hearers to understand. These stories we refer to as parables and more often than not these stories were about the Kingdom of God that Jesus had ushered in with his coming to earth. Christ often began his teaching on the Kingdom of God with these words, “This is what the Kingdom of God is like” Mk 4:26 and in Mk 4:30, “Again he said, What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?” and would proceed with the telling of a parable which would teach

one simple truth about the Kingdom of God. If we therefore want to know what the Kingdom of God is like, we need to pay close attention therefore to the stories or parables of Jesus. As we look at the many parables of Jesus we notice an overriding theme in all of them which highlights the relationship between the present Kingdom that has come and the future kingdom that is to come. Out of this relationship we see a crisis of response that arises for the parables highlight the reality that what we do in the present kingdom has huge implications in the future kingdom. Our present responses to the Kingdom that has already come will impact upon our place in the future Kingdom. Join with me this morning as we consider what the parables of Jesus have to tell us about this amazing Kingdom that we are part of.

1. THE FUTURE KINGDOM

The parables of Jesus highlight for us the reality of the future Kingdom that is yet to come.

The sower in Matt 13 looks to the future harvest that is still to come. The weeds and wheat grow together until the future harvest when the wheat will be collected and the weeds burnt. The small mustard seed in the present will, become a great tree in the future. The catch of fish awaits the final moment when the good and bad are separated. In Luke 8 we are told that it is no use hiding the light in a jar because in the future all will be disclosed. We are advised to build on the rock and not the sand in the present for the storm of the future judgement spoken about in Luke 6 will destroy everything that does not have a strong foundation. The rich fool in Luke 12 is caught out because he lived his life carefree but the future caught up with him unexpectedly.

Perhaps the two most profound pictures of the tension between the future and the present is to be found in the pictures of the great feast and the return of the master.

In Luke 14 Jesus is having a meal at a Pharisees house and the statement is made by one of the guests in verse 15, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”. Jesus uses this to tell the parable of the great future banquet, the marriage feast of the lamb that we are all invited to attend. He invites to us to book our place at this banquet and feast and our response to this invitation determines whether we will indeed feast at his banquet. The invitations have been sent out for us to respond. Sadly many have excuses as to why they cannot attend.

The second picture is the picture of the returning master that we see in many of the parables.

In Luke 12:36 the master would return from a wedding banquet. Luke 19 the servants are given 10 minas and would have to give account of what they had done with them when the master returned. In Matt 25 the parables of the talents focuses on the return of the master and the account of what

they had done with their talents. In the same way the tenants of the vineyard face the day of the landowners return in Matt 21 and the virgins face the return of the bridegroom in Matt 25.

And so Jesus in his parables wanted to teach his hearers of the future Kingdom that is still to come. In these parables he speaks of a future harvest, future separation of good and bad, a future storm or judgement, a future banquet or feast and finally a future return of the master. It is clear that the future kingdom is coming very soon and this kingdom would either bring great blessing or terrible judgement. What we do in the present Kingdom will determine whether the future kingdom will be a kingdom of blessing or a kingdom of judgement.

2. THE FUTURE KINGDOM IMPACTS THE PRESENT KINGDOM

The promise of a future kingdom either of blessing or judgement impacts the present directly. Right now the Son of Man is preaching about the Kingdom and sowing the seeds of truth. Some fall on hard soil, some are choked by the weeds but some fall on fertile soil. The mustard seed looks insignificant, the fish are encircled by a great net and the seed is being scattered abroad. We must decide now not to hide our lamp in a jar and to build on the rock and not the sand. The invitations have been sent out for the banquet, the bad manager has been given notice to draw up his accounts. Those who received money and talents from the master must be making it work for them, the owner of the vineyard is sending out his representatives before his return, the oil in the virgins lamps are burning down. The future kingdom demands a response and actions in the present. What we do in the present kingdom determines what we will experience in

the future kingdom. This responsibility leads to a crisis of decision.

3. THE KINGDOM CREATES A CRISIS OF DECISION.

With the coming of Christ he ushers in the Kingdom of God and the last days of man. He brings the future kingdom into the present and demands a response from all who hear the news of the coming kingdom. The master is returning are we prepared for his return? Has the money and the talent we have been entrusted with been used wisely. Have we accepted the invitation to the banquet? Do we have enough oil for our lamps to burn? We see differing responses in these different parables. Some made excuses about not being able to attend the banquet and the rich man was too busy building barns to store his wealth. Some however understood the urgency of the situation and like the men in Luke 13:44-46, “The kingdom of

heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it”. Jesus comes and he sows the seed of the truth of the present and coming kingdom. For some this truth falls on hard ground, does not take root, and so they find excuses not to accept the invitation to the banquet, they bury their talents rather than using them, they live a life of ease not concerned about the coming kingdom. For others however, the seed of truth falls on fertile soil and takes root. They understand how precious the coming kingdom is and they do all they can to secure it for themselves. In all of these parables there is a sense of urgency to respond now because the kingdom of God is at hand. Here I am reminded of the words of Paul in 2 Cor 6:2, “I tell you now is the time of God’s favour, now is the

day of salvation”. There is an urgency that demands a response. The invitation has been sent, the talents have been given and the master is returning. We need to do something about that right now. The kingdom of God has come and we are able to enjoy its blessings but we will be held accountable for those blessings.

4. THE KINGDOM OF GRACE

Even though we have been emphasising the need to respond to the coming kingdom, we enter into that kingdom by God’s grace and not our own work. In the Matt 20 parable there is not connection between how long the labourers worked and what they were paid. It was grace. Those who came to the banquet were the outcasts of society. It was grace. The lost sheep of the kingdom were found by the shepherd in Luke 15. They did not find the Kingdom but the kingdom found them like the woman who searched through her whole house for

one lost coin. The lost son must decide to return to the father’s house, but his acceptance is as a result of the father’s love and grace. Yes we need to choose the kingdom but ultimately it is all about grace.

CONCLUSION

And so in the parables of Jesus we encounter the blessings of the present kingdom but also the responsibility that arises from the future kingdom breaking into the present. In the present Kingdom we have been blessed with much. We have received an invitation to the wedding feast of the lamb. We have been given talents and financial blessing. We have heard the seed of truth that Jesus has spoken into our lives. We have received the mustard seed of faith. The good shepherd comes looking for us, the waiting father waits for us each day to return from the distant country. With the blessing of the present kingdom comes to the responsibility of the future

kingdom that is at hand. Are we ready to meet the returning master and give account of the blessings we have had? Have we wasted our talents and rejected the seed of truth that has fallen on our hard hearts?

God's grace is extended to us in these stories. Will we do whatever it takes to make that grace our own? Will we make the stories of the kingdom our stories?