

YOUR KINGDOM COME

Matthew 13v31-35.

Message preached at Longhirst Hall, Northumberland by Ian from City Church on 9th January 2005, setting the scene for County Church's first Members Course ("Foundations").

The "Kingdom" was Jesus' great theme, as it had been for John the Baptist. "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" was John's message (Matthew 3v 1-12) and it was Jesus' too (Matthew 3v17). This "kingdom" message announced the rule of God. In Jesus' ministry words about this kingdom were accompanied by miraculous works of healing and deliverance. The rule of God was being expressed - His government had come .

John made it clear that the kingdom was coming because the King was coming. John is the voice calling (literally) in the desert and his purpose was to make a way for the Lord (Matthew 3.3) His baptism of repentance was preparation for "one much more powerful than himself". (Matthew 3.11) The Kingdom comes because the person of the king comes.

The coming of the Kingdom is not a one off event, like a letter coming to your house. It doesn't come in one go. The Kingdom comes, and keeps coming, and then comes again! It is a dynamic "coming". John the Baptist had amazing prophetic revelation about the Kingdom's coming. It was coming in the person of Jesus, who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He saw two key aspects of the Kingdom, baptism in the Spirit and the judgement of God, but what he didn't realise was that that this would take place over several thousands of years. He saw to the heart of the issue but knew nothing of the timescale. This partly explains his doubts about Jesus while in prison. "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else.?" (Matthew 11v1-6)

The kingdom keeps on coming, hence Jesus tells us to keep praying "Your Kingdom come". There is more to come, and then more. So the coming of the Kingdom starts in Jerusalem with the Holy Spirit being poured out on the first disciples. But then the kingdom keeps coming as these same disciples experience fresh outpourings of the Spirit, (Acts 4v31) and new believers at Samaria (Acts 8), Caesarea (Acts 10) and Ephesus (Acts 19), all receive the baptism of the Spirit.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a great marker point for the coming of the Kingdom. The Spirit gives us power and gifts and ensures we are the real thing! The church is not just a human organisation but is the dwelling place of God. It is vital that you as a church are continually being filled with the Spirit. But the fiery judgment that John also saw is coming too. The kingdom is coming with fire, but in the opposite direction - from the future into the present! The judgment of God is happening around us now. God is revealing men and women's hearts through acts of judgment. This is how the kingdom comes. We need to be comfortable with this as Christians, because at the heart of the gospel is a message of escape from judgment.

This concept of an ever coming kingdom is clearly seen in Jesus teaching on what the kingdom is like. Matthew 13v31-32. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”**

The kingdom of God has come to Northumberland in your coming. It is not the first coming, or the only coming. It is another coming; another expression of the kingdom. You are one small seed in His hand. One seed! Not even a bird's breakfast. But as it grows it becomes big enough for many birds to rest in it. Who would have imagined that this could happen from such a tiny seed. It is beyond human sense. It is vital that you see yourselves through the eyes of the kingdom. God is at work. You are what God has initiated, and the answer to many longings and prayers.

The seed grows naturally, given sun and rain. In time it grows. That is what seeds do. Seeds grow into trees which become fruitful; and it is not just one tree that comes from the small seed, but many. One man plants the seed, another waters it, but God makes it grow. (1 Cor.3v6) So, you will grow.

City Church Newcastle may be a larger church now, but it took three years before we had our first membership course of 19 people. For us that was great. I recall an occasion when God spoke to us through a prophecy when we were still around 20 people. It was of shoes that were too small and did not allow for growth. That week we knocked down a wall in the room we were meeting in to make the room bigger; and the next Sunday, suddenly, 75 adults came! It was like a sign from heaven. God was making us grow.

Another thing to take notice of is that the make up of the tree is all found in the seed even when it is still very small. That's true for you at this early stage of forming a church. So, those of you who are here now are all vital. This stage of hiddenness and smallness is a vital one. What is in you as a group is going to be multiplied! This is underlined in the parable Jesus tells next: v33. **“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”**

Mixing yeast and flour to make dough is not like putting sugar in your tea. The yeast has to be worked all the way through. It is hard work kneading yeast in. There is slapping and pushing and pummelling and folding; and it all takes time. If this isn't done then the loaf of bread will be hard and stodgy. We have all suffered at the hands of friends who have gone through a home bread making phase!

You are at a stage where the active ingredients necessary for healthy church growth need to be worked in afresh. Your members course starting next week is very significant in this process. For every single person. There will be hard work involved - yes, slapping and pummelling and folding! If you have heard it all before, don't switch off; open up your heart and ask God to work it in afresh. So, as I close, here are three important ingredients you will need at this stage.

1. Perseverance that comes from faith. It can be hard in a small church. We have a growing work among students now, but at our very first student event only one person turned up. He never returned, and I don't blame him! When we were still small in number Ben Davies from Bracknell came and preached. After the exodus of children and workers there were barely twenty people left in the room, and plenty of empty chairs. He stopped in the middle of his preaching, pointed to the chairs and said "These empty chairs are an offence to the gospel. Get them filled. And when they are full, buy some more!" What he said hit me and caused me to really believe God - and it has stayed with me. And, I have been buying chairs ever since!

2. Enthusiasm, passion and life. In our earliest days in Newcastle we had no musicians, so Matthew and I had to get guitars and do the best we could. It was not high quality music, but we had plenty of passion and enthusiasm. There was also lots of laughter in the church. We had fun together. When there was a special event we would all go together. This is a vital ingredient for growth.

3. Willingness to embrace new people. The closeness that comes from smallness can sometimes shut others out. So make sure that as new people come among you they are drawn in to the middle and not kept on the edge.