

The Gospel Is About The Kingdom

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us to turn back to Colossians, and we can read again from chapter 1, verses 13 to 14. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

This morning we are continuing and concluding a short series that we've done called The Good News of the Kingdom. That title comes from a phrase that you see many times in the New Testament.

At the very start we saw it in Matthew 3.35 where Jesus went about proclaiming the gospel, the good news of the kingdom. And it's reminding us that the message that Jesus proclaimed is the good news of the kingdom.

And over the last two or three weeks, we've been using this title to help us think a little bit more about what the gospel is all about. And so each sermon is looking at an aspect of this phrase where we're talking about how the gospel is good, the gospel is news, and the gospel is about the kingdom.

We first of all saw the gospel is good. That's because it brings us to incredible heights of joy all because of the depths of Jesus' grace. Last week we looked at how the gospel is news and we saw how it gives us the information we desperately need.

[1 : 25] It quenches our thirst for truth and it reveals how all the amazing promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus. This week we're looking at the final part. We're thinking about how the gospel is about the kingdom.

And this is maybe an easy point to overlook, but it's actually incredibly important. It's crucial if we're going to understand the gospel accurately that we recognize that it is all about the kingdom. Colossians 3 1 13 to 14 captures the fact that the whole Bible and the whole of history is lived out in terms, in the context of the conflict between the domain of darkness and the kingdom of his beloved son.

That tension between the kingdom of evil and the kingdom of God is a tension that runs right through the whole Bible and it's the tension that's given rise to all the triumphs and tragedies of human history.

And it's also a reality that you and I face and experience every week of life. Some aspects of life are so good. They're positive and beautiful.

[2 : 46] Other aspects of life are dark and cruel and wrong. And so these categories, domain of darkness, kingdom of God, are immensely important for us in terms of understanding the gospel.

Sin has left us as slaves and has left us under the grip of death. And so ever since the fall, darkness has been dominant.

Evil has been an epidemic. Sin has caused endless suffering and death has been relentlessly destructive.

And we're powerless in the face of that reality. That's why humanity has never been able to fix itself. That's why death is still our biggest problem.

But the whole point of the gospel is to deliver us from this. The gospel wants to take us out of that domain and place us in a new realm. That's why everybody who trusts in Jesus is rescued from slavery to sin.

[3 : 56] And everyone who trusts in Jesus is made a citizen of his kingdom and everyone who trusts in Jesus is brought under the righteous and holy lordship of Jesus Christ.

It's all about coming out of the kingdom of darkness and into his beautiful kingdom. That's central to the gospel. In fact, when Jesus began preaching, that was his message.

After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and said, the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

The gospel is all about the kingdom of God. And that's crucial for us to remember it immediately highlights several key truths that we must never forget. All this is telling us that spiritual warfare is real.

That conflict between good and evil is real. And so good and evil are not illusions. They're not social constructions. They're supernatural realities. And in terms of these kingdoms, you are a target for both.

[5 : 00] The kingdom of evil wants to destroy you. The kingdom of God wants to give you eternal life. This tells us that Jesus has come to be our king.

And so when we think of Jesus, we should think of King. And while that kingship involves some responsibilities for us towards him, we must never forget that the fact that Jesus is King is revealing the responsibilities that he embraces for us.

Jesus has come to rescue us, to claim us as his own, to defend us forever. This language of kingdom of domain of darkness, kingdom of God is also teaching us that if the word Lord means anything, it means that following Jesus will result in us striving to obey him in every part of our lives. And as we do that, we discover that that spiritual conflict that faces all of history chooses our hearts as a battleground. And so if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you're going to find that your desire to follow Jesus is always battling with the fact that sin is so tempting.

And there were caught in this conflict. But if Jesus is Lord, it means that he's in charge. And it means that our desire is to listen to him, to follow him and to become more like him.

[6 : 23] And that applies to us all as individuals. It also applies to us collectively. And that's one of the beautiful things about being part of a church under the Lordship of Jesus. He gathers us at the start of every new week.

And he is building his kingdom. He is restoring a new humanity, one that is beautifully different, beautifully different from all that is happening. From all the influence of darkness that we see in the world around us.

And maybe most of all, this language of kingdom is telling you that the scope of the gospel is vast. Jesus is king over all.

And that means that the gospel should make a difference to everything. And so the gospel is all about the kingdom.

And we're going to think about that a little bit more under three headings. We're going to think about how this is a kingdom that rules in our hearts, that reaches our nations, that reigns for eternity.

[7 : 29] So first of all, the starting point for where Christ wants to rule is in our hearts. And that's one of the great emphasis that Jesus makes in his teaching. Jesus is not looking for outward conformity to an external religion.

That is not what his message was about. Jesus preached a message that transforms people's hearts. And so although Jesus reigns over every single square inch of the universe, when we talk about where the kingdom of God is found, the first place that we should think about is in here, in our hearts.

That's where Jesus wants to rule. And this is so, so important. Because the key thing we have to recognize is that your heart is exactly where Satan wants to rule as well.

That's the avenue through which the kingdom of evil tries to accomplish its purposes. That's the avenue through which all the cruelty of the domain of darkness comes forth.

Because if you think about it, every act of hatred, of racism, of cruelty, of abuse, of manipulation, of corruption, where does that all start? It starts in people's hearts.

[8 : 49] It starts with desires that they have, choices they make, plans they decide to implement. That's where the domain of darkness has, that's where it wants to rule.

That's where so many of humanity's problems come from. So last week, very exciting week for me, John and I did our CBT, which is compulsory basic training for riding a motorbike.

So that either makes me really cool, or it's the start of a midlife crisis. But anyway, we did it. We went training Monday night, Friday night, we did our CBT training.

I have to say the instructor column was fantastic. And he said something that really struck me. He pointed over to the motorbike in the corner, he said, there's nothing dangerous about that motorbike.

The dangerous thing is the person sitting on it. And he said that, that motorbike riding is all about your choices, your approach, your attitude.

[9 : 53] That's where the danger comes from. And in terms of sin, that's teaching us, that's reinforcing this lesson. That the domain of darkness wants to reign in our hearts so that we will make terrible choices.

Choices that will hurt us, that will hurt other people, and that will lead us away from God. And Jesus wants to change all of that. And he does it by coming to rule in our hearts.

Now, all of this is seen really clearly in the second passage that I can read for us in Colossians chapter 3. And I just want to highlight a few things that come up through these verses.

In verses 1 to 2, Paul speaks about our minds. And that's an incredibly important term. It's something that comes up in the New Testament loads of times.

It's pointing us inwardly, again. It's getting us to think about what we think. It's pointing us towards our reactions, our attitudes, our desires.

[10 : 58] All of these are absolutely crucial. Then you go down a little bit, you come to verse 5, and it talks about all the stuff that we are to avoid as Christians. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry.

All of these are primarily inward things. It's all internal stuff that then leads to outward action. So harboring lust is going to lead on to sexual sin if it's not repented of.

Fostering anger is going to lead to outward aggression. So coming to idolatry is going to lead us to pour our time, our resources, our attention into an object or a thing that's not God.

And every time that happens, we are being ruled over by evil. And that's where we see that shouting at a colleague or at your family is not an act of strength, it's a capitulation.

Looking at pornography isn't an act of freedom, it's an addiction. Living for your career or your bank balance or your reputation isn't a triumph.

[12 : 10] It's a surrender. That's what the domain of darkness wants to do to us. It wants to imprison us in all of these different areas. And the Gospel wants to do the opposite.

The Gospel is delivering us from that reign of darkness. That's why every day we look to Jesus and by His grace we leave all that stuff behind. And that transformation is described in verses 9 and 10 in a beautiful way where Paul talks about putting off the old self and putting on the new self.

Old self off, new self on. That's such a brilliant description of what becoming a Christian is like. And it's so important because you have got to remember that becoming a Christian, you don't stop being you.

So there's still a self there. You don't stop being you. You don't have to become this weird other person. You don't have to have this kind of awkward personality transplant.

You don't stop being you. And that is what Jesus wants because He made you. He made you you. But what Jesus wants for us and what the Gospel will do for us is that by His grace we put off the old patterns of behavior, the old attitudes that ruin us and spoil us.

[13 : 29] And instead as we follow Him, we become a new restored, better, beautiful version of ourselves, of the people that Jesus made us to be.

And the new patterns of behavior are described in verses 12 to 14. You can see it here.

Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another.

What kind of stuff is all of that? It's internal stuff. It's all about the heart. That's where Jesus wants to rule.

And that gets emphasized at the end here that the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts, that the word of Christ is to dwell in you richly.

And that brings us peace. And it's reminding us of the importance of letting God's word dwell in our hearts every day. And there's a balance here that I think is beautiful because if you think about it, how often, if you think about your heart, if I think about my heart, maybe this is a ridiculous illustration, but seeing I've spent my life, my last week of my life, neither on a biker, riding motorbikes this week, you think of your heart as a bike.

[14 : 45] How often, how often do fear, tension, anxiety, frustration, try to get on the motorbike of your heart and drive off?

Drive off to take you to the point of frustration and anxiety and fear that happens to us all the time. And yet we're being reminded here that if you're a Christian or if you become one, it doesn't have to

be like that.

Every day we can press the truths of the gospel onto our hearts. We can press into our hearts the fact that he is good, the fact that we are in his hands, the fact that he will never leave us, the fact that our sins are utterly dealt with at the cross, the fact that heaven is ahead of us and that nothing can take us from him.

These are the truths that his word reveals. As these truths are pressed into our hearts, peace will get on the bike and lead us in a much, much better direction.

And if all of these dynamics are ordered aright, then it will have such a positive influence on our speech, on our behavior, on everything that we do, and that means that whatever we do, in word or deed, we can do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, everything for his glory, constantly giving thanks to him.

[16:06] That is what kingdom life is all about. Jesus wants to rule in our hearts and lead us in his direction. But the scope of the gospel doesn't just reach inwardly into our hearts.

It also extends outwardly. The gospel of the kingdom reaches our nations. Now, there's three things I want to highlight here briefly. First, I need to highlight what the gospel is not doing, what the kingdom of God is not about.

The kingdom of God is not advancing through military conquest or through political control. That's not how Jesus builds his church.

That's not how the gospel advances. And yet throughout history, Christians have got this wrong so many times. And you don't have to look far into history to see tragic occasions where Christians have gone to war, sometimes against other people groups, sometimes amongst themselves, all because they're thinking that they're advancing God's kingdom.

Jesus never told us to do that. He never told us to do that. And there's also been many times when Christians and the church have actually wanted to control nations, whereby national governments and everything are kind of under the church's control.

[17:28] If you look at history, what you'll discover is that that results in either poor government or a corrupt church or both. And again, Jesus told us never to do that.

He never told us to do that. The kingdom of God does not advance through military force. It doesn't advance through political control. In fact, much of what is in the Old Testament is there to teach us that neither of those things work.

God's purposes were always, always different, always awaiting the fullness of Jesus coming. And it's Jesus that shows us how the kingdom of God advances.

And so what did he do? He went around preaching the good news. And you see in many other places he went around doing good, preaching and doing good and living out a life that demonstrated the love and mercy and grace of God.

So we've got to make sure we understand what the kingdom of God is not doing. Second thing I want to highlight about reaching our nations is that we need to recognize that the kingdom of, the gospel of the kingdom should have an immensely positive influence on our nation.

[18:47] If you look at Jesus, as he preached, as he traveled around, he improved people's lives. So he did that by healing the sick, by welcoming the outcast, by comforting those who were grieving.

Jesus had a positive impact on everybody that encountered him. And we might not be able to do the miracles in the way that Jesus did, but the gospel should still result in our lives having an immensely positive influence on our communities and ultimately on our nation.

And history shows that this has often been the case. The church has made an immensely positive difference to our nations. And it's fascinating because I think that a lot of this history is actually forgotten and a lot of it is our own history in Scotland.

And so I want to give you a couple of examples. One of the greatest examples of this is Thomas Chalmers. You may not have heard of Thomas Chalmers. He was a very prominent minister in the 1800s and he was a key figure in the formation of the Free Church.

He often spoke about the Christian good of Scotland. In other words, he was thinking about how is the gospel going to be good for our nation.

[19:57] Central to that was preaching the gospel, but that preaching was also to be accompanied with compassion towards those who were in need and practical care and help towards those who were suffering.

So Chalmers did two things. He planted churches where the gospel would be preached and he helped the poor in his community. And he was crucial in that. And it's so important, we forget this, that now we have governments that do so much good in terms of education, healthcare, welfare, social work and everything.

Our governments do so much that's so good. We have to remember that not that long ago, governments were just chancellor of the Exchequer and Ministry of Defence. In other words, they dealt with wealth and they dealt with armies and fighting and war.

And they did not do much of the other stuff that our governments today. The other stuff for most of history was done by the church. That's why if you look at our nation, if you look at Scotland, it's the church who built schools in every parish.

It was the church that coordinated poor relief. It was the church that sought to help the sick. If you look at Scottish church history, around the same time as Chalmers, you had men like Andrew Thompson who campaigned for the abolition of slavery.

[21 : 08] You had Thomas Guthrie who advocated for tolerance for other religions and who established schools for the poorest children in Edinburgh. You had James Begg who pushed for better housing for the working classes.

And there's something so fascinating here that everything that secular Scotland today cherishes. Schools, affordable housing, healthcare, poverty relief and a tolerant society.

Where did it all come from? It all came through the church. Now, I am absolutely not saying that the church was perfect. There's a ton of things that we got wrong.

But the history of Scotland proves without any doubt that the Gospel has brought many, many wonderful things to our country. And that should always be the pattern.

And it's really actually very, very simple. The good news of the Kingdom should have a positive impact. The influence of Christ's reign brings more compassion, more joy, more kindness, more generosity, more patience, more justice, more honesty and more love.

[22 : 19] And all of that happens through us as His people, as the citizens of His Kingdom. And all of this means that if at work or in our homes or in our schools we are bringing less compassion and less patience and less kindness, then we're not following our King.

We're disobeying Him and letting Him down. It's important that we remember that if the cross is preached accurately, then it's going to offend people.

People don't like the cross. They don't like to be told that they're sinners. They don't like to be told that a hideous cross where what effectively looked like a rejected criminal died is actually the most important event of history.

People are offended by the cross when it's preached accurately. The Bible says that will happen. It happens all the time. But although an accurate presentation of the cross is going to offend, an accurate life of discipleship is going to attract.

It's going to be attractive even to people who refuse to believe. And in many ways that's where the witness of the church is so powerful because people can look at your life and they can see that this message of a hideous crucifixion 2,000 years ago is actually the message that has brought the most beautiful and astonishing and inspiring transformation in somebody's life.

[23 : 51] And it's reminding us all that this week, you being a witness for Jesus and you being a better colleague, a better friend, a better parent, a better child, a better sibling, that's not two different jobs.

It's all part of living out our lives under the kingship of Jesus. The good news of the kingdom should make a massive difference to our nation.

You can just be a positive, beautiful blessing to the people that you're going to meet tomorrow morning. The third thing under this heading is to say that the positive impact of the kingdom of God is not just about our nation.

It's for all nations. In other words, that means that living as citizens of God's kingdom means that we should be motivated for mission. We should be motivated for mission. Paul speaks about that back in chapter one.

He talks about the gospel going into the whole world bearing fruit and increasing. And for 2,000 years, that's what's happened. The gospel has been spreading across the nations. It's been bearing fruit to the glory of God.

[24 : 54] In fact, this link between mission and kingdom is crucial. You see it so clearly in the great commissioner Matthew 28. Jesus talks about all authority being given to him.

That's the language of kingship. And so he says, go and make disciples. And that's why we can never approach mission by saying wait.

We can never think about reaching a community by saying wait. Instead, we always, always want to go. Every week we come together to be refreshed, renewed, encouraged.

And then we go again into the mission fields that God has placed us in. And I wanted to say a couple of things about that. It's important that we remember that that work of advancing God's kingdom is something that we can all participate in.

All Christians can participate in this. So it's the mission work, whether it's nationally or internationally. It's something that we can all pray about. We must do that. It's something that we can give financially towards.

[25 : 56] And some of what you give to our church each week gets sent to mission work in Scotland and abroad. But I want to just spend a moment saying that it's something that you can also do.

It's something you can also do. So you can do mission every Friday night at Finders, our teens ministry. Or you can do mission by joining the local choir or the football team and being a Christian presence among other Christians who are already there.

Maybe you can lead at a free church camp next summer. Maybe you can go on a short term mission trip like the OM team who came to us in August. Maybe you could go somewhere for a few weeks. Maybe even you could go somewhere for a few months.

Maybe even somebody in here or what you online has been called to a full time role in church.

Maybe please just think about these things.

Please think about them. This is also just a wee opportunity to say that all of this is a big reason why it's so important to think about church membership.

[26 : 57] There are many people in Carly Way who are believers but not members. Many people who are believers but they are not yet members. We can see from a mile off that you love the Lord Jesus.

We can see it. We can see the fruit of the Spirit in your lives. We can see that you love the Lord.

You don't need to persuade us of anything. We've seen it long ago.

There are lots of people in that category. Younger ones and older ones. There are people who are believers but they are not yet members. There are two things that break my heart about that.

One is that it means you don't sit at the Lord's table. It means you don't get that beautiful gift of Jesus nourishing you and building you up in your faith as we gather together to remember his death.

It also means that you are closing the door to opportunities to serve. That's heartbreaking because there are people who can offer so much and yet it's extremely difficult to get you involved in things.

[28 : 05] You say, I don't want to say that I'm a Christian. It's very hard to involve people in key ministries in the church with their reluctance to do that. It's almost like at the Lord's table Jesus is saying, I want to give you a beautiful gift and you're saying, I won't receive it.

At the same time you have so many gifts that you could use to be a blessing to others and you're saying, I don't want to share it. I totally get and understand why you are reluctant but it would just be awesome if you would just take that step.

If any of you would like to talk to me about that, I would love to do that. Last of all, I'm nearly finished. This is going to be the quickest point of all. The gospel is about the kingdom and that's because that kingdom reigns for eternity.

Paul always speaks about this. You go to chapter one and he'll talk about a hope laid up in heaven. You can see it there. You go to chapter three.

He'll talk about Christ being at the right hand of God. He'll talk about Christ returning. You can barely go like four or five verses in Paul's writings when he doesn't say something about eternity.

[29 : 17] The good news is about the kingdom. This is the kingdom that's going to last forever. The reality of the kingdom is forcing us to think about ultimate authority, ultimate reality, ultimate destiny.

The crucial thing is that the domain of darkness loves nothing more than to distract you from all of that.

You've got to remember that the devil, I don't think the devil ever goes to anybody and says, follow me instead of Jesus. What the devil does is, goes to people and says, just think about something else.

Just think about something else. You must not do that. We've got to recognize that the gospel message, this good news, is all about eternity.

It's all about where you and I will spend eternity. And there's two key things we've got to make sure we understand. We've got to understand that there's nothing more important than this. There is nothing more important than this.

[30 : 34] You will only be in eternity for one second when you will realize that my car, and my house, and my salary, and my pension, and my reputation, and my football team, and everything else I've done is not as important as I thought it was.

There's nothing more important than this. That's the first thing you've got to remember. But the second thing you've got to remember is that this is good news. There's nothing more amazing than this. There is nothing more amazing than this.

And I don't stand up here every week to tell you to follow Jesus because it's important, even though it's the most important thing that there is. I stand up here and tell you to follow Jesus because it's flipping brilliant.

And knowing Jesus is the best thing that can ever happen to you. And that is what we long for you, that you would come and know the joy and peace and hope that only he can give.

This is the good news of the Kingdom. It's good news for you. Amen.