

Introduction

Today Steve Hartung is celebrating his 75th birthday. He came on the scene a little over a year before the end of what remains one of the darkest periods of death, conflict, and aggression the world has known. Steve was born in February 1944. Germany surrendered on May 2, 1945 and then Japan in August of that same year. The aggression of both Germany and Japan were menacing to the world. These were imperialist powers seeking to extend their dominion by direct territorial acquisition. Germany had taken over much of Europe one country at a time. Hitler sent his armies in and seized control through occupation. Japan had been doing the same thing in Asia. Victories in both the European and Asian theaters meant putting a halt to two evil and hostile take-over attempts. Countries who had no right over others were engaging to be lord over them.

An evil takeover to apply aggression and bring oppression upon others is one thing. Throwing off wicked oppression and bringing deliverance to captives is quite the other. World War II in Europe was brought to a conclusion by heroic efforts of Allied Troops featuring many Americans who threw off the oppressive intentions of the Nazis and set many captives free.

The coming of the kingdom of heaven is not the theft of sovereignty by an imperialist-minded, power-hungry, self-aggrandizing dragon. No, that is the work of Satan when he invaded the Garden of Eden. Human beings allied themselves with the deceiver in revolting against their creator and the world was plunged into darkness under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

The coming of the kingdom of heaven is completely the opposite. It is not a takeover but a take-back. It is the restoration of righteousness and justice that was overthrown in the Garden. The rightful king will retake the throne that was his from the beginning. His enemies will be put down. To those gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth one important Sabbath day, Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah the following:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Jesus rightly informed those who heard that this Scripture was fulfilled squarely before them.

The message that the disciples of Jesus are to proclaim to the world is that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” That is to say the king of heaven is about to restore his sovereignty over the world. He is about to take things back. He is about to re-enforce righteousness. He is about to bring the nations under his righteous rule. He will strike them down with his sword and rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. And his freed captives will reign forever together with him in glory.

A month back, on Sanctity of Life Sunday, we turned our attention to Psalm 72. There we find the prayer of David for his royal son—the king who would follow in his stead. He prays that the king will govern God’s people with righteousness and justice. He also sets forth what it looks like when that happens. Under his dominion the poor and needy are delivered and the oppressor is crushed. Jesus saw the masses in his day as the poor and needy and the weak and the oppressed. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless.” His remedy for their condition, his mission to deliver them, was to multiply himself by dispatching his own disciples to seek their deliverance. Matthew 10:5-15 reveals how they were to go about the task. We began to examine this text last week. We will resume today.

[Read Text; Pray]

Last week as we began to examine this text, we noted that Jesus was giving instructions for how it is that his disciples are to approach the ministry of evangelism and disciple-making in the world. Instruction #1 was to start close to home. He sent them to their own people first. For instruction #2, Jesus told them to speak the message simply and clearly. The message was and remains that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The implication is that people must make proper preparations. They must repent of

breaking God's law and trust and submit to the coming king. They must enter by the narrow gate which is the way of life. It is not the easy way but it is the only way. The third instruction was that the disciples display their credentials. The credentials would assure hearers that these apostles were genuinely sent by the king. We drew attention to three of these last week. They were to do works of power and compassion. They were to be generous, serving not themselves but others. And they were to go in faith, trusting God to meet their needs. And the God who would guide would also provide.

As we continue to work through the details of the text, we find three additional instructions on how to work the harvest.

We come, then, Instruction #4

I. Demonstrate a Kingdom Outlook.

A. That is the way I would summarize what Jesus tells the disciples about where they are to stay. This statement is in verse 11. "And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart."

Whoever was worthy would be whoever was willing to be hospitable to them. Who seems open? Who seems willing? Who seems to have a disposition towards seeking the truth? Approach them. And stay with them while you are in that town. Hospitality is a biblical mandate. Jesus seems to be saying that the disciples should find those who are hospitable and stay with them. The disciples would be recipients of that hospitality. It would fuel their ability to do the speaking and ministering that they needed to do. They should stay in the same place as long as they remained in that town. And here is where the kingdom outlook would be apparent. The kingdom is not consumed with who is mighty, noble, or wealthy. It does not seek to keep company only with who is refined or makes you look good to the world. A kingdom outlook sees the inner poverty and needs of people not their outward abundance and means. A kingdom outlook upon people rejects the partiality of the world. The disciples of Jesus were not to hop around in a town always looking for the next best thing. They should trust the providence of God in first guiding them to stay at a given house and remain there.

The thing that matters when you are reaching out to people is not fancy accommodations. It is not prestigious and catchy company. These are the things that matter to you when you love the world and the things in the world. These are the kind of things that would have driven the Pharisees and the Scribes had they been looking for a place to lodge. When you do things to be seen, you are being ruled by the flesh. But the kingdom outlook sees just people, people who need the Lord. It is not inclined to people because of what they have to offer but because of whom you have to offer them.

B. James in his epistle counseled the brothers to whom he wrote this way: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (2:1-4) You are not loving your neighbor as yourself."

This kingdom outlook does not prefer people based on fleshly desires and valuations but sees all people the way Jesus does—through the lens of their need. We should minister to people with the kingdom outlook. Furthermore, we should do the same thing in terms of church. One should not seek to be part of a church that makes them look better to the world or makes them feel better about themselves. I'm here for now until something better or more appealing or more exciting comes along. No, we need to keep a kingdom outlook.

Instruction #5.

II. Present the Kingdom Offer.

A. In verses 12-13, Jesus instructs the Twelve, "As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you."

B. The house probably does not point to the house in which the disciples would be lodging but any given house they might approach in order to

share the word and works of their ministry. The greeting to which Jesus is referring is the wish or hope of peace. It was expressed in the Hebrew word "Shalom." The kingdom of heaven offers peace with the king of heaven whose reign is about to be asserted. A Paul says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace is what God offers to all sinners. By our sin we have become His enemies and his combatants. By nature we are at war with God. We belong to a dominion that has long been behaving in hostility to the rightful king of the land. The flag of that land flies high in our hearts. We raise it every morning when we rise to live for ourselves and our own selfish desires.

I assume you know about the Acuity flagpole up in Sheboygan. It is the world's tallest flag pole that flies the American flag. Passers by can see it from miles around as they travel along I-43. I drove by that flag last July when it was at half staff for Officer Mike Michalski. Little did I imagine then that that flag would become such an important landmark for me. My grandson Titus now lives only .9 of a mile to the east of that pole. The American flag is raised on that pole to express patriotism, to express our identity and our allegiance and national pride. A flag also exhibits dominion. When the Nazis occupied Paris, they raised a Nazi flag atop the Eiffel Tower. People pledge allegiance to their countries by pledging to the flag of those countries.

Every sin is our own pledge of allegiance to ourselves, an act of defiance against God. It is our statement of independence from him. But the God who made the heavens and the earth, whose wrath is about to be trod, has come to us rebels and offered us peace through the blood of his son. The offer of the gospel is for peace. Polluted sinners, corrupt sinners are offered peace with Holy God. That is an amazing offer!

C. And it is an offer that should be offered by his messengers in peace. That is the demeanor with which the disciples were to approach people with this glorious offer. It is a disgrace when people claiming to preach the gospel are filled with vitriol and hostility. They do not express the spirit of the gospel and should not be surprised when people want no part of their gospel. If that is what it does to you, who would want it?

Peaceable, gentle, sincere, compassionate—that is how the gospel deserves to be shared. James wrote the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

D. And said Jesus, "If the house is not worthy, let your peace return to you." You know you cannot force people to accept the gospel. And when they reject it, there is a resulting recognition of distance between the one who makes the offer and the one who refuses. It disturbs the peace. But understand that you cannot force people into peace with God. If they reject it, let it return. You don't have to be nasty. You shouldn't be. But do not try to preach peace, when there is no peace. The situation is abundantly clear. If you reject God's offer of peace through his son, you will not have peace with God.

Instruction #6.

III. Lay Bare the Kingdom Warning.

A. The kingdom warning is for those who will not receive or listen to the message. They reject it for some other message. Those who reject the message should be warned. And notice how the warning comes. It was to come not as a denunciation, not in fact as a verbal warning at all. It would come not as a personal attack, but as a visual exhibition which would communicate quietly but unmistakably. The act would speak loudly though silently. The silence is part of the effect. The disciples were to shake off the dust from their feet when they left that house or that town.

There would be no doubt among the onlookers as to what was meant. This custom was common among the Jews. Whenever they had to pass through Gentile lands, as soon as they crossed back over into Judea, the Jews would shake their feet off their sandals to get every possible particle of Gentile dust off their feet. The Gentiles were unclean. They were cut off from God. This is precisely what Jesus prescribed should be communicated to rejecting Jews. No matter how good they thought they were, no matter how pure their Jewish heritage, if they rejected the gospel of the kingdom, they too would be cut off from God.

This is the truth for everyone everywhere who rejects the gospel of the kingdom. They are cut off from God. It does not matter that the god of

their making is a god who loves everyone and who maintains no standards of holiness. So they think they are a good person and they do not need to repent and they do not need a Savior, they prove all that is a lie when they reject God's offer of peace. The king of the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus, instructs his messengers to demonstrate to those who refuse his peace treaty that they have no peace with him. They are cut off. They were given an opportunity and they refused. They have no part with the king. What a sad, sad fact! If you will not respond to the gospel, you are rejecting Christ himself. And if you deny him, he will deny you. You will not come into his kingdom. Messengers need to warn gently but clearly, not with hostility but with gravity, that rejection of the good news of Jesus Christ is a rejection of heaven. There are those who will be redeemed, delivered, embraced by the kingdom. And there are those who will receive justice and will be crushed by the kingdom. Those who reject the kingdom's overtures of peace will find themselves to remain enemies of King Jesus for all eternity. They will forever be cut off.

Everyone here this morning who has not repented of sin and accepted the peace terms of the kingdom—you know what I am saying?— Everyone here who has not turned from their sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ needs to absorb this message. The gospel is coming to you. The gospel instructs you to turn from yourself and living for you; it instructs you to cast yourself in faith before Jesus trusting in his work on the cross to accomplish your forgiveness before God. If you will do this, you will have eternal peace with God. But if you reject this offer, God will reject you. The dust of his sandals he will shake off as he leaves you and goes to another.

The lesson for Christ's messengers is that when a person will not respond to the message, move on. Move on to the next person. Devote your time to those who have an interest. When people reject, just move on. Somberly and seriously communicate the consequences of rejection and on to the next.

B. There is an additional aspect to this kingdom warning. It is sobering indeed. "So I will be cut off from God; so what? Big deal," some may say. Well it is a very big deal according to Jesus. Those who reject the gospel

commit the greatest act of sin and will experience the worst punishment imaginable. God hates sin. And the God who reveals himself in the Bible punishes sin. It is on account of sin that the wrath of God is coming. What is sin? It is any and all defiance of God. Adam and Eve defied God when they disobeyed him in the Garden. We defy God with every thought, attitude, and action which breaks his holy law. Selfishness, covetousness, greed, pride, lust, immorality, theft, hostility, bitterness, unforgiveness, dishonesty, unacceptable worship, blasphemy, dishonoring authority. It is all sin. Among the sins which God especially despises are sins of sexual immorality. The Jews knew it well. One of the reasons God moved out the Canaanites from the land of Promise was their extreme immorality. But two cities stand out in the Bible for being recipients of God's strongest act of judgment—Sodom and Gomorrah.

The height of their immorality was exhibited when two angels in the form of men came to lodge with Lot. When night fell, the men of the city surrounded Lot's home and demanded he hand the visitors over so they could abuse them. It was for their gross immorality that God obliterated the two cities with brimstone and fire, saving only Lot and his immediate family. These cities are a solemn warning of the certainty of future and final and tormentous judgment of unforgiven sinners.

And yet what Jesus says here is even more terrifying. Listen, everything Jesus ever said is true. But whenever he wanted people to really sit up and take notice, he would remind them of his truthfulness. And here he says, "Truly, I say to you" he says. There is no if's, and's, or but's here. It is all serious business. The king of the universe is issuing the most solemn of warnings. "Truly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."

I shudder to imagine it. Think of the gravest displays of destructive power and pain you can imagine. As I was thinking this week about World War II, I watched a video or two about the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to bring the conflict to a halt. The dramatization of the destruction is breathtaking. In Hiroshima alone a city was leveled and 80,000 people were killed directly. If a bomb conceived and manufactured

by human beings can bring that magnitude of destruction, what will be the just wrath of Almighty God? We can only imagine, but we should.

And Jesus wants people to know that unto those who reject the gospel offer of peace with God, the judgment upon them will be less bearable than it will be for Sodom and Gomorrah, for the cities upon which he rained fire and brimstone. All sin is evil. But the guilt is greater for those whose opportunity is greater. To whom much is given, much will be required. Those who reject the gospel need to bear this in mind. So do those who carry the gospel.

Conclusion

Every day in this city people are called before judges to answer for criminal actions. Sentences are carried out. Knots seize up in stomachs. Hands go cold and clammy. Hearts pound forcefully as people wait to hear the verdict or the sentence. If people are so gripped in those moments, how much more ought they to be gripped as men and women hear the message of the gospel and either respond or reject!

People mistake the patience of God to mean he will not judge at all. It is a grave mistake against which the Bible warns. The gravity of future judgment needs to be remembered. It helps us see the urgency and the gravity of the moment in which people are told that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Any amount of ugliness the messenger might exhibit fails to take into account the mind-blowing reality of God's justice. We cannot make people believe, but we can warn them; and we should. If they scoff, they are only storing up more wrath for themselves on the day of wrath when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed.

Last week at the end of the sermon I highlighted the joy experienced when men, women, boys, and girls come to Christ. Those who go out into the fields come rejoicing bringing their sheaves with them. But sadly, some will not come. Many will refuse. They may laugh derisively. They may look at you like you are crazy. I talked to two individuals this week who were being derided for their testimony. It is tough. And it is going to be that way sometimes. Don't let it stop you from the privilege and responsibility to share the kingdom's gospel, warning of the wrath to come but pointing to

the peace God offers through his son Jesus Christ to those who will repent and believe in him. For all who do, there will be eternal joy when Christ comes!