

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Kingdom of God Is in Your Midst*"<sup>i</sup>

On Sunday morning's we are working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse.

As you can tell from the title and the Scripture reading, this sermon is about the Kingdom of God. I think the Kingdom of God is confusing to people because of the number questions I have received about it, and because of the times I have heard people talk about it and it was seemed like they didn't know what they were talking about.

There are some topics in Scripture that are more important than others, and this is one of them. I want us to understand what the Kingdom of God is, and isn't, and hopefully this sermon will accomplish that.

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What is the Kingdom of God?

It is the kingdom Jesus rules over. Every Kingdom has a king, and this is the Kingdom where Jesus is King.

**2 Peter 1:11 There will be richly provided for you an entrance into THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.**

Jesus brought this Kingdom Him in His first coming when He came from heaven to earth. Every believer is part of this Kingdom because it's the Kingdom for people who have Jesus as their King.

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Let's start with **Matthew 3:2**...

**Matthew 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

John the Baptist was paving the way for the Messiah. He said **the kingdom of God** is at hand because He knew Jesus was bringing the kingdom of God with Him.

Matthew's Gospel says **Kingdom of Heaven**, but it's the same as **the Kingdom of God**. You can read parallel accounts in Matthew and the other gospels, and Matthew says kingdom of heaven while the other gospels say kingdom of God.<sup>ii</sup>

The title **Kingdom of Heaven** only occurs in Matthew's Gospel because it's the Jewish Gospel and the Jews were sensitive to the word "God" being used. To avoid offending his Jewish readers, Matthew says **Kingdom of Heaven**.

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Notice John told people what to do to prepare for the kingdom: **repent**. We enter the Kingdom by repentance and faith in Christ. That was and is still how to enter the kingdom.

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Now turn one chapter to the right to **Matthew 4:17**...

**Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

The ESV and NKJV say **at hand**, but they have footnotes that it could also read **the kingdom of God has come near**, which is how the NIV translates this verse.

I like **the kingdom of God has come near** for two reasons...

First, it is past tense: it says the kingdom **HAS COME**, which it had, because Jesus brought it with Him.

Second, it says **has come near**, which is also fitting because Jesus was on the earth and people could see Him, hear Him, and even touch Him. He had the kingdom with Him, so to be near Jesus was to be near the kingdom.

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Now turn to **Luke 4:42**.

The phrase **Kingdom of God** occurs 54 times in the gospels, and 32 of those times are in Luke. Luke is THEE Gospel that gives the most attention to the **Kingdom of God**.

**Luke 4:43** is the first time the phrase Kingdom of God occurs, and it's very fitting. Let me back up to **verse 42** to get the context...

**Luke 4:42** the people sought [Jesus] and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them **43** but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

People were trying to keep Jesus from leaving them, but He told them he had to go so he could preach the kingdom. He went so far as to say this was his **purpose**.

And we see Him fulfill this purpose throughout His earthly ministry. Let me quickly show you some verses. Turn to **Luke 8:1**...

**Luke 8:1** Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. And the twelve were with him,

Jesus goes through the cities and villages preaching the kingdom of God, and then He commissions the twelve to do the same. Look at **Luke 9:1**...

**Luke 9:1** And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, **2** and he SENT THEM OUT TO PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF GOD and to heal.

The word **proclaim** contains kingdom imagery, because it describes a herald coming and making an announcement for the King:

- The Twelve Apostles would announce that the King – or Messiah – had arrived.
- They would tell people about the acts – the miracles and teachings – of the King.
- They would describe the King's Kingdom:
  - They would tell people what the kingdom was like.
  - They would tell people how to enter it.

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Look at **verse 11**...

**Luke 9:11** When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.

Jesus, the King, attracted huge crowds, and look what He preached the kingdom to them.

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Look one chapter to the right at **Luke 10**. Jesus sends out the seventy and look what He says to them in **verse 9**...

**Luke 10:9** Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' **10** But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, **11** 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

He tells the seventy to preach the kingdom of God, but if people reject it, they should move on but first let them know, "*The kingdom of God was brought to you, but you blew it.*"

I could show you lots of other verses, but you get the idea that the Kingdom of God was being preached during Jesus's earthly ministry.

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Now let me ask you two easy questions and then a hard question...

Look back at **Luke 9:2**...

**Luke 9:2 and he SENT THEM OUT TO PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF GOD and to heal.**

What did they preach, or **proclaim**?

The Kingdom of God!

Now look at **verse 6**...

**Luke 9:6 And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.**

What did they preach?

The gospel!

Those are the two easy questions. Now the hard question...

How can **verse 2** say they proclaimed the kingdom of God and then **verse 6** says they preached the gospel?

There's only one way: proclaiming the kingdom of God is the same as preaching the gospel.

And this brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson One: They preached (Part One) the Kingdom of God in the Gospels.**

Here's why I think this lesson is important...

If I asked any of you to explain the gospel, you're going to mention Jesus's death. In fact, if we heard a gospel presentation that didn't mention Jesus's death, we would probably say it's not a gospel presentation.

This leaves us with a nagging question...

"How did they preach the gospel before Jesus died?"

This can even lead to some terrible conclusions like, "Maybe there was no gospel before Jesus died."

But we can see from **verse 6** that the gospel was being preached even though Jesus hadn't died yet.

Here's what you need to understand...

Because the revelation people have had throughout history, the presentation – or preaching – of the Gospel has been different at different times. BUT the Gospel itself – or the way man is saved – has always been the same: by grace through faith.

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Take these verses for example...

In **verse 6** it might look odd to say they were **preaching the gospel** because there was no mention of Jesus' death, burial, or resurrection, but it hadn't happened yet so they couldn't preach it.

Instead, they preached what they could at the time, which was:

- God become a Man in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- He came from heaven to earth.
- He brought His kingdom, the Kingdom of God, with Him.

This was the primary message in the Gospels.

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Think of the way Jesus began much of his teaching...

**The kingdom of God is like...**

We might think it would make more sense if He said, "Salvation is like..." or "The gospel is like..." but to become part of **the Kingdom of God** was to be saved or believe the gospel.

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Now I know the next question you're asking...

*"Okay, then what did they preach in the Old Testament before the Messiah came with the kingdom of God?"*

Great question!

They preached that the Messiah would come. And this brings us to the next part of lesson one...

**Lesson One: They preached (Part Two) the coming Messiah in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament people were saved by believing God would send a Messiah, like we are saved by believing God did send the Messiah. People looked forward in faith to the Messiah coming, like we look backward in faith believing the Messiah has come.

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Let me give you two verses that support this...

**Galatians 3:8 God...PREACHED THE GOSPEL...to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."**

This clearly shows the gospel in the Old Testament. We're told it was preached to Abraham. This is the prophecy that the Messiah would be one of Abraham's descendants. That's how all the nations would be blessed in, or through, Abraham.

As Abraham believed this prophecy that the Messiah would come, he was saved...

**Genesis 15:6 [Abraham] believed the Lord, and [the Lord] counted it to [Abraham] as righteousness.**

This is justification: Abraham believed and was justified, or declared righteous, by his faith.

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Listen to this verse...

**(NKJV) Hebrews 4:2 The gospel was preached to us as well as to [the Israelites in the wilderness].**

The author of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said the gospel was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness just like it was preached to us, church age believers.

We aren't told what exactly this Gospel presentation looked like, but there was some way for the Israelites to look forward in faith to Jesus so they could be saved.

If you want to know my opinion, here's what I think...

They saw Christ – or looked forward to Him in faith – through the amazing types and shadows they were exposed to in the wilderness:

- They saw Christ through the Bronze Serpent: **John 3:14** “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”
- They saw Christ through the manna: **John 6:32-33** “Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, My Father gives you the true bread from heaven (referring to Himself). For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”
- **1 Corinthians 10:4** says Jesus was the rock in the wilderness that provided Israel with water, so they definitely saw Christ through the Rock.

So, when Israel was seeing these types and shadows of Christ, they were seeing Christ, albeit in a veiled – or shadowy – way.

Understanding this also helps you hopefully understand why there is such a dramatic change between the preaching in the Gospels and Acts. Here's what I mean...

Preaching the Kingdom of God is the theme of the Gospels, so when the Book of Acts begins, we would expect to continue reading about the Kingdom of God being preached. But instead, there is an incredibly abrupt change.

What do we see preached in Acts and the rest of the New Testament?

The answer brings us to the last part of lesson one...

### Lesson One: They preached (Part Three) Christ crucified in the church.

On this side of the cross, we preach Christ's death, burial, and resurrection:

- **1 Corinthians 1:23** we preach Christ crucified.
- **1 Corinthians 2:2** I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

When we share the Gospel with others, we say, “*Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, three days later God the Father raised Him from the dead.*”

Here are a few examples demonstrating this is the message after the cross...

When Peter preached to Cornelius and those with him, he preached Christ's death, burial, and resurrection...

**Acts 10:39b-40** They put [Jesus] to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear.

When Paul preached at Antioch...

**Acts 13:29-30** When they had carried out all that was written of [Jesus], they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead.

In the epistles:

- **1 Corinthians 15:3b Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4...he was buried [and] raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,**
- **Colossians 2:12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.**

On this side of the cross we preach Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Now go ahead and turn to **Matthew 13**.

Let me explain the context...

Jesus preaches the parable of the sower. Some people don't understand it, so the disciples ask Jesus why He speaks in parables...versus speaking more plainly. Look at His answer in **verse 13**...

**Matthew 13:13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**

He says they see, but don't see, and hear, but don't hear. He means they see physically, but don't see spiritually, and here physically, but don't hear spiritually. They see Jesus teach and they hear the words, but they're not understanding the truth.

Now look at **verse 16**...

**Matthew 13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.**

He says the disciples and some others were able to spiritually see and hear.

**Matthew 13:17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.**

He's talking about Old Testament saints who would have loved to see and hear what the people in Jesus's day were able to see and hear.

It's interesting that He mentions **prophets** because they are the people who see. That's why they are also called seers. They could see things. But even they couldn't see the things the people in Jesus's day got to see.

So, what was it the people in Jesus's day were able to see were not able to see?

You might be tempted to say, "The Messiah." That's partially true, but everyone could see Jesus in the flesh, so that doesn't explain why Jesus would say some people could see and others couldn't.

What people couldn't see was the Kingdom of God. Look at **verse 11**.

**Matthew 13:11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.**

Remember the kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God. That's what Jesus is discussing, and some people could see the Kingdom of God, but others couldn't.

And why is that?

Because the Kingdom of God was spiritual versus physical, and this brings us to lesson two...

## Lesson Two: Jesus spiritually established the Kingdom of God at His First Coming.

Listen to this verse describing the kingdom of God being spiritual versus physical...

**Romans 14:17 The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (not physical) but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (spiritual).**

Now if you've got a spiritual Kingdom versus a physical Kingdom spiritually blind people are not going to be able to see it.

And if you want to see the spiritually blind us to people in Jesus's day turn to **Luke 17**, our new verses in Luke's gospel...

**Luke 17:20a Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come,**

Let's pause here and deal with the religious leaders' question.

As we have seen, John the Baptist, Jesus, the twelve, the seventy, and probably plenty of others had been preaching the kingdom of God had come.

So how could the religious leaders ask this?

It is not a sincere question. They are mocking. They do not think the Kingdom had come, because the Kingdom was established spiritually but they were spiritually blind so they couldn't see it.<sup>iii</sup>

Look what Jesus says in the next verse...

**Luke 17:20b he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,**

This means the **Kingdom of God** did not come in ways that could be **observed** physically.

**Luke 17:21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."**

The people in Jesus's day couldn't say, "Look here is the kingdom," or "Look there is the kingdom!" because it was a spiritual kingdom that couldn't be seen.

But Jesus could say, "The kingdom of God is in your midst" for the same reason John earlier said the kingdom of God was at hand and Jesus said the kingdom of God was near: having Jesus in their midst meant having the kingdom in their midst.

Now let me show you something interesting...

Turn to **Luke 21:25**.

Do your Bibles have a heading around this verse?

- **The Coming of the Son of Man**
- **The Return of Christ**

Jesus is telling us how to tell when His Second Coming is approaching. We know that right before the Second Coming is the tribulation, which **verses 25-28** describe...

**Luke 21:25** “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Now Jesus tells them the parable of the fig tree to help them understand when His coming is close...

**Luke 21:29** And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that **THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR.**

How could Jesus say **the kingdom of God is near** at His Second Coming when we know the kingdom had been near since His first coming?

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Think about what we pray...

**Matthew 6:10** Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Why would we pray for Jesus’s kingdom to come when He already brought it?

The answer brings us to lesson three...

**Lesson Three: Jesus will physically establish the Kingdom of God at His Second Coming.**

Listen to this interesting verse...

**Ephesians 1:10** [God’s] plan for the fullness of time, [is] to unite all things in [Jesus], **THINGS IN HEAVEN AND THINGS ON EARTH.**

God wants Jesus to unite all thing in heaven and earth, and He does that by having Jesus bring the kingdom of God from heaven and physically establish it on the earth.

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The kingdom was never physically established on the earth at Jesus’s first coming because the King of the Kingdom was rejected and crucified.

Jesus will return at His Second Coming, destroy His enemies, and physically establish His Kingdom on the earth.

**Philippians 3:20** Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have spiritual citizenship while we wait for our King to return and physically establish His kingdom on the earth. When He does our spiritual citizenship will become a physical citizenship.

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Let me have you turn a few chapters to the right to **John 3.**

**John 3:1** Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Jesus's response to Nicodemus doesn't look like it has anything to do with what Nicodemus said. There are many times it looks like Jesus either wasn't listening well or He didn't understand what people were saying to Him, and this is one of those instances.

We know that can't be the case, so what is going on?

It is the opposite of the way it looks. Jesus could see people's hearts. He knew everyone better than they knew themselves, so He could look past what they were saying to address the greatest need in their lives.

In Nicodemus's case he hadn't been born again. And this brings us to our last lesson...

#### Lesson Four: Nobody is born into the Kingdom of God.

In **verse 3** Jesus said people can't even **see the kingdom of God** without being born again.

Look at Nicodemus's response...

**John 3:4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Now Jesus said people can't **enter the kingdom of God** without being born again.

Why must we be born again to see the kingdom of God?

Jesus gives the answer in the next verse...

**John 3:6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh (physical birth), and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (spiritual birth).

The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, so we can't enter it physically. We can only enter spiritually, which requires spiritual birth. That's why Jesus said in **verse 5** and then again in **verse 6** said that we must be born of the Spirit. This is regeneration or being brought to life spiritually.

This spiritual birth happens through repentance and faith in Christ when He becomes our King. Then we are born again into the Kingdom of God.

If you have any questions about anything I shared this morning, or I can pray for you in any way, I will be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to speak to you.

Let's pray.

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i Done:

- John MacArthur
- RT France
- Stein
- Hendrickson
- [The Invisible Kingdom of God, Part 1 \(gty.org\)](http://www.gty.org)
- [The Invisible Kingdom of God, Part 2 \(Luke 17:20-21\) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)
- [Seven Characteristics of the Coming King, Part 1 \(gty.org\)](http://www.gty.org)

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<sup>ii</sup> Kingdom of Heaven is the same as the Kingdom of God. Jesus used the terms interchangeably: Matthew 19:23 And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the KINGDOM OF GOD.” In parallel accounts Matthew uses kingdom of heaven while the other gospels say kingdom of God. Compare Matthew 11:11-12 with Luke 7:28; Matthew 13:11 with Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10; Matthew 13:24 with Mark 4:26; Matthew 13:31 with Mark 4:30 and Luke 13:18; Matthew 13:33 with Luke 13:20; Matthew 18:3 with Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16; and Matthew 22:2 with Luke 13:29.

<sup>iii</sup> In Jesus’s First Coming He was the Suffering Messiah who fulfilled **Isaiah 53** and **Psalms 22**.

But they were expecting the glorious Messiah who would be like Moses, David, and Solomon, all rolled into one:

- They expected the Messiah to deliver them from the Romans the way Moses delivered the Hebrews from the Egyptians or David delivered the Israelites from the Philistines.
- They expected the Messiah to restore Israel to the golden years they knew under Solomon.

All of this will occur at Christ’s Second Coming.