

I'm going to do things a little bit different today, although (as it turns out), this is going to be the second short sermon in a row (amazing – almost unheard of)... Some of you might be praising God, “It’s a miracle – I’ve been praying for this for years”.

Don’t get too used to it.

Robyn and I are going to be away for a few weeks,

- so you probably **will** get another short message next week, because Jake is renowned for his short messages; and
- then there’s going to be a couple of weeks where there’s no services;
- but at the end of the month, we’re going to be back. And we’re going to have the 2nd part of this message,(which **won’t** be so short).

Anyway, usually I tend to bite-off bigger chunks of Scripture because when we cut the Bible up into tiny little bits, we are at risk of missing “the big picture”, and “the big picture” is really important.

But with our Bible reading today, I suspect that we run the opposite risk.

Today’s Bible reading, is all about the coming of the Kingdom of God. And in the first 2 verses (right at the beginning), Jesus is addressing the Pharisees, and He tells them what the Kingdom of God is **not**; And then, in the rest of it (which we’re going to leave ‘til next time) (and which is the main

portion) – in that bigger chunk, He’s talking to His Disciples, and He’s talking about end times and the coming judgment.

Now, the trouble with us preacher-types, is we are so keen, to jump right on in, to the coming of the Kingdom of God, and to jump to the special word that is given for Disciples of Jesus (that bit that we love to hear), ,, — We’re so keen to get to that bit, we sometimes only very lightly skim over these 2 verses at the beginning, or we treat them as an introduction or something...

And so we are in danger of missing the profound significance of these two verses, where Jesus is addressing the Pharisees....

So, let’s get into it, and to focus our minds, I’ll read those first two verses again.

²⁰ Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, ²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

It’s always been the way, that some folk are intrigued by signs and wonders.

Some church-goers today, are what I call “signs and wonders junkies” – it’s the source of their excitement – it’s the source of their joy... Every Sunday, they front up to church, with the

hope and the expectation, of “*More signs and wonders please*”....

But why? I suspect that for many, it’s evidence for them, that God has turned up...

And so, if there isn’t signs and wonders, they’re a bit disappointed; they may even feel cheated; or at least let-down... “*Did God not turn up today???*”

And of course, many **un**believers want a sign, or they use the **absence** of a sign as their excuse for “unbelief”. “If God wants me to believe, all He has to do, is give me a sign”:

- Speak to me from heaven;
- Turn the sun black;
- Raise this person that I love, from the dead;
- Heal this person;
- Put a Million Dollars in my bank account;
- (insert your preferred sign here)... - “*Do that one thing for me, God, and then I will believe in you*”.

And you know what: there’s nothing new about that – One time, Jesus summed it up: “**An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign**...” He said that to the Pharisees and the Sadducees – the ones who were supposed to be closest to God – He said that to them because they were demanding to see a sign from heaven.

So, let me be clear about this: Jesus is against “sign-seeking”. Why???. It’s because “sign-seeking” abdicates the role of

faith. Are you with me? If I can witness an amazing, miraculous sign – especially if it’s a tailor-made sign for me – that I’ve requested, then I don’t need faith. You see, many people say, “I’ll have faith in God, if He just gives me a sign.” ... That ain’t faith.

Hebrews 11: (ESV) ^{11:1} ... faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And the crazy thing is, (in what I’ve observed), “Those who crave the signs and wonders the most, will often claim that it’s because they have such a big faith...” But the reality is, “The faithless” crave signs and wonders.

And in Jesus' day, it was the Pharisees who were the faithless. They were the ones who craved signs and wonders (more than anyone). So there you go: If I am a person who craves signs and wonders, Biblically, I am a lot like a pharisee.

So, the Pharisees wanted to know when the Kingdom of God would come. They wanted to see the heavenly signs / Astronomical / cataclysmic signs, to prove to them, that the Kingdom of God had arrived...

What’s behind that?

The expectations of their day, was that God would send His Messiah – His Chosen one – His Anointed one, to reclaim the throne of Israel. They believed that Messiah, would be a

mighty conqueror – a Saviour who would turf out the occupying army of the Roman Legions...

But the problem is, there had already been numerous **false-messiah's**. And so they had the expectation, that the real one – the real coming of the Messiah, would be accompanied by celestial signs and wonders... That way, they wouldn't be trapped into following a false-Messiah, and fail in their rebellion, and end up on a Roman cross themselves...

But Jesus said to them: **"The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed"**

They were wanting to see signs and wonders. But the Kingdom of God is **not** coming in ways that you will see...
... At least, not yet.

You see, the Kingdom of God has two aspects to it: "The now"; and "the not yet". It has begun, and it is present in some ways, and yet it has not yet arrived in all of its completeness.

Jesus has already spoken a fair bit about the Kingdom of God.

- He said to His Disciples, **"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God."** (not because they're poor, but because they are His disciples, they are blessed, even though they are poor).

- He's been preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God.
- And He's told them that the **least** person in the Kingdom of God, is greater than John the Baptist.
- In the preaching of the Gospel, the Kingdom of God has come near;
- The Kingdom of God is something that starts out tiny and insignificant, and grows unexpectedly enormous (like a mustard seed that grows into a tree?) (or like a little bit of leaven that makes an industrial-sized lump of dough to rise?)

But He's also been warning them, that those who reject the invitation to the Kingdom of God, will miss out. And that by the time they **do** see the Kingdom of God, it's too late.

Luke 13:28 (ESV)

²⁸ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.

Why is it too late? It's too late because:

- they didn't enter through the narrow door while it was still open.
- even though they saw Jesus, they rejected Jesus....

And so, what Jesus is telling the Pharisees now, is shoring up, all of the teaching He's already given about the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God has the sense of “The now”, but “the not yet”.

And the first 2 verses of today’s Bible reading, are about the Kingdom of God “**Now**”. And then the remainder (when He’s talking to His Disciples), is looking forward to the “Not yet” bit – it’s looking forward to the Day of Judgment when Jesus returns and His Kingdom will come in **all** of its power... And that will be a glorious day for those who love Jesus.

And on that day, the King and His **Kingdom**, is going to be **very** visible. But the problem is, by the time the Kingdom is made visible because the King has returned, it will be too late. The door to enter the Kingdom, will be shut.

There will be an immediate cut-off. And on that day, anyone who hasn’t already prepared, and anyone who haven’t already received Jesus as their King:– for them it will be instantly too late.... But we’ll leave that until we get up to it when I get back from conference & holidays (in a few weeks time).

Today, we’re talking about “The Now” of the Kingdom of God.

“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,²¹ ... [Look!], the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

Is there anyone here who’s good at avoidance? You know, when:

- a person makes you feel uncomfortable; or
- when you're not ready to forgive a person, and so you feel a bit "guilty"; or
- when something's happened, and things are a little bit "awkward"...

Are you somebody who does the avoidance thing?

Jesus didn't. He didn't hide from the Pharisees. He was right there in the midst of them. They're asking Jesus, "When can we see the Kingdom of God?" and Jesus is saying, "Hello".... The Kingdom of God was right there in their midst.

The Kingdom of God is where the King is. And Who's the King? Jesus...

At Buckingham Palace, when the Union Jack is flying on the flagpole, it means that King Charles is not at home. But when the Kings Royal Standard is hoisted, the King is in residence.

With the Kingdom of God, the whole world belongs to Him, because He made it. But it is the presence of God, that constitutes His Kingdom. What is most important? The Kingdom or the King??? The King (of course). The King was right there in the midst of the Pharisees, and they not only missed Him – they despised Him....

Where is the Kingdom of God today? The Kingdom of God, is in the heart of every believer. The Kingdom, is where the King is (right?). And when you and I repent of our sin, and

invite the Lord Jesus into our hearts, that isn't an empty phrase. That is exactly what He does. He moves in. By His Holy Spirit, King Jesus takes up residence...

And so, the Kingdom of God, is in the heart of every believer. And this is why coming together (as the worshipping community of Christ) is so profound... As Christians gather together, there is the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said:

Matthew 18:(ESV) ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

When we gather today in the Name of The King, The King is among us. This is the Kingdom of God of "the now".

And because we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, we long for the "not yet". We long for the day when Jesus returns. And on that day, the whole world will know that He has returned. It will be instant, and it will be visible. Don't you believe for a minute, those who tell you that Jesus will have a secret coming. If He is, it's so secret, it's not in the Bible. But we'll leave that until next time.

Make sure you're here next week: Jake's preaching next week;

Then 2 weeks off;

And then (God willing) we'll be back here on 29th September.

But there is one more very important thing, that cannot wait until then. What happens, if the Kingdom comes in all of its fulness, before then???

What happens, if the King isn't in residence in your heart???

When the King returns, that will be the Day of Judgment. And the Day of Judgment, will be too late to take action. The return of the King, is something that the people of the **Kingdom** celebrate, but the nations of Earth will mourn.

And so, if you are not yet a Disciple of Jesus – If you are not yet a subject of the King / a Citizen of the Kingdom of God, don't leave it until it's too late.

I urge you: Yield to the King today; Submit to the King; Pledge allegiance to the King, and He will welcome you with open arms.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
We praise You, for You are the King.

There You were, in the midst of the Pharisees,
and they missed You.

Here You are, in the midst of us,
- Let us not miss You.

Lord, Your Word tells us, that The Way is Narrow.
No one can come to The Father,
except through the Son.
And so we do this Now.

Lord, we confess our sin.
We have done wrong;
Let's be blunt – we have done evil.
And our most vile sin, is the rejection of You (our King).
Lord, Forgive us.
Cleanse us.
Make us worthy, to be in the presence of our Holy,
Heavenly King.

And Lord, we thank You.
We welcome You into our Hearts.
And we pray:
Hoist your standard in our hearts,
that the Whole world would know, that You are in
residence.

What a Joy it is, to be part of the Kingdom of God...

Thank You Jesus.

Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 16:4