JESUS WHO LIVED

Posted on November 4, 2014 by Eddie

What Jesus hearers didnâ€™t realize was the sheer scope of Godâ€™s Kingdom, they saw it in terms of Israel, but Jesus saw it in terms of the whole world. Jesus went to the Israel and his ministry was almost entirely concentrated on Jewish people, but he sent his disciples out into the whole world to announce the Kingdom. And that message blew the little world of the Jewish religious zealots and nationalists apart. If God is King, then any notion of nationality goes right out of the window.

Category: Observations

INTRODUCTION

Last month, we looked at Jesus birth; today we are going to look at his life.

Every Sunday, in churches around the world people say the creed, which contains these lines:

> *I believe in...*
>
> *...Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,*
> *who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,*
> *born of the Virgin Mary,*
> *suffered under Pontius Pilate,*
> *was crucified, died and was buried;*

Get that? He was born, put to trial and executed, with apparently nothing happening in between.

However, the Gospels spend a lot of time talking about Jesus life and what he did, they don't leap straight from Christmas to Easter. There is an important theme here; the Gospels talk about Jesus life on earth because life on earth is important. It is not simply a waiting room for heaven, what we do and say on this planet matters.

Mark's Gospel never actually mentions Christmas at all, it starts with the arrival of John the Baptist and then dives straight into Jesus first sermon:

> *â€˜The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!â€™ (1:15)*

Obviously Mark is only giving us the highlights; Jesus must have said more than this. If not, it is the shortest sermon on record; only 14 words in Greek. He would have explained what he was saying with stories and quotes from the Jewish Bible. Mark however zooms in on the central point: Godâ€™s kingdom was coming and people should believe this message and change the way they were living. Teaching about God's kingdom would be central to everything that Jesus did over the next few years.

To us, the phrase the â€˜kingdom of Godâ€™ (or the â€˜kingdom of heavenâ€™) is, perhaps, a little confusing, so we need to unpack it a little.

To Jesus original listeners, the â€˜kingdom of Godâ€™ meant the place where God reigned as king and where his will was done and this was bound up inextricably with the nation of Israel. The place where God reigned would be Israel, finally restored to all of its glory, with the humiliation of exile and foreign rule put behind it and with Godâ€™s chosen Messiah in place. Godâ€™s laws would be

obeyed in the land and it would be obvious to everyone that Israel was Godâ€™s chosen nation. God reigning in his kingdom meant that the Jews would be freed from Roman rule, but it meant far more than just national liberation. It meant that the whole world would be forced to acknowledge that Israelâ€™s God was king of the world. The kingdom of God was a delicious prospect for Jewish nationalists and devout worshippers alike. Â However, Jesus didn't see it quite like that.

What Jesus hearers didnâ€™t realize was the sheer scope of Godâ€™s Kingdom, they saw it in terms of Israel, but Jesus saw it in terms of the whole world. Jesus went to the Israel and his ministry was almost entirely concentrated on Jewish people, but he sent his disciples out into the whole world to announce the Kingdom. And that message blew the little world of the Jewish religious zealots and nationalists apart. If God is King, then any notion of nationality goes right out of the window.

In Mark 4, Jesus tells a couple of parables about the kingdom. In the first one he says that the kingdom of God is like a seed that germinates under the ground and, though no one knows how it does it, it grows into a full plant ready to be harvested. He also said that the kingdom of God is like a tiny seed that grows up into a bush that is so big that birds can make their nest in it (4:26-34).

This was the opposite of most peopleâ€™s view of how the kingdom of God would be. The received wisdom was that the kingdom would be obvious; Israel would be blessed by God and the nations would see how wonderful God is because of the way he dealt with Israel. Jesus, on the other hand, seems to be talking about a hidden kingdom, something that would start small and would take time to grow and develop into something really huge. This wasnâ€™t what people were expecting at all.

And these arenâ€™t the only strange things that Jesus had to say about the kingdom; he also said that people with simple faith, like children (10:15) and not rich and powerful people (10:25) would be a part of the kingdom. This really went against the grain of the normal way of thinking that held that having money and influence was a sign that God was really blessing you.

Today, many people imagine the Kingdom of Â God to mean heaven, the place where God sits on his throne and where believers are destined to spend eternity. However, that doesn't stack up either. Not least because Jesus taught his disciples to pray 'your Kingdom come on *earth* as it is in heaven'.

On one hand, Jesus was preaching what people wanted to hear; that God was about to break into history and reinstate his rule on the earth. On the other hand, his picture of what Godâ€™s rule would be like was strangely subversive and must have left people very confused. However, people certainly couldnâ€™t ignore what Jesus said because he didnâ€™t just talk about the kingdom of God, he demonstrated it.

JESUS DEMONSTRATES THE KINGDOM

Jesus, on the other hand, could control his environment. One evening, Jesus and his disciples were in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee when a storm blew up. Jesus was fast asleep in the stern of the boat, while his disciples became increasingly frantic and worried that they would all drown. Finally, they woke him up and complained that he didnâ€™t seem worried about their danger. Jesus simply spoke to the wind and the waves and told them to calm down â€“ and they did! The wind stopped and the waves died down. Normally waves carry on for days after a strong wind has whipped them up, but when Jesus spoke, both the wind and the waves subsided immediately. Itâ€™s no wonder that the disciples were afraid of him afterwards (4:35-41).

This wasnâ€™t the only occasion that Jesus did something strange to the water of the Sea of Galilee. One evening, the disciples were crossing over to the opposite shore without him when they saw Jesus walking across the water of the lake (6:45-52). Clearly, Jesus had some sort of power over the created world, and this came in very useful. One day, he was teaching a crowd of over 5,000 people and when they were hungry, he was able to feed them all using just two loaves and five small fish (6:30-43). You can imagine what people were saying about this when they got home!

Jesus was able to do more than change the weather and provide people with food; throughout the Gospels we read about him healing people who were sick. In the first chapter of Markâ€™s Gospel, Jesus goes to Simonâ€™s house and discovers that his mother-in-law is ill. Immediately, Jesus takes her by the hand and she is instantly cured. Once people in the town heard about Jesus healing Simonâ€™s mother-in-law, all of the sick people in town gathered at the door and Jesus healed them all (1:29-34). This incident is repeated over and over again through the Gospels: Jesus' ability to heal people was something really special at a time when medical science was incredibly primitive.

Markâ€™s most spectacular examples of Jesus healing someone occurs in Chapter 5. An important Jewish leader called Jairus came to Jesus and pleaded with him to come and visit his daughter who was seriously ill. Jesus set off, with crowds following along and pressing in from every side. In the crowd was a woman with a haemorrhage; this meant that she was ritually unclean and should not touch or be touched by other people. However, she believed that Jesus could heal her and she reached out to touch him and immediately, the blood flow stopped. Despite the crowd pressing in on every side, Jesus knew what had happened, and he stopped and talked to the woman for a while. This must have been incredibly frustrating for Jairus and soon after, messengers came from his house and told him that his daughter had died. Jesus didnâ€™t allow this news to bother him and he carried on to Jairusâ€™ house where the ritual mourning was just getting under way. Shutting the mourners up, Jesus took some of his disciples to the room where the little girl lay, took her by the hand and told her to stand up â€“ and she did! (5:21-43)

Another way in which Jesus was able to do extraordinary things was in his ability to cast out demons that were living inside people and controlling their lives. Just as he did with the healings, Mark gives

a few examples of demons being cast out in the first chapter of his Gospel and then goes on to give some stories in more detail later on. There is a really wild example of demons being chased out of a man in the first half of Mark 5 (5:1-20). The man in question lived on the far side of the lake of Galilee and he had been in a bad state for years. He howled and screamed and cut himself with rocks. People tried to tie him up with chains and iron bands, but he just broke those and carried on. When the demon-possessed man saw Jesus, he yelled at him that he knew exactly who he was and begged him not to harm him. Jesus told the demons inside of the man (there was an army of them) to be quiet and then ordered them to leave the man alone. The demons left the man and fled into a herd of pigs, which panicked, rushed down the hill and drowned themselves in the lake. Not surprisingly, the people in the region begged Jesus to leave their area; the pigs were their livelihood and they couldnâ€™t afford to lose them even if it meant someone being saved from demon possession.

Over and over again, Mark shows us that Jesus had miraculous powers and that people flocked to him because of them. He could deal with inanimate objects, he could heal people and he could cast out demons. Above and beyond their immediate effect, these miracles achieved a couple of things. Firstly, they demonstrated that he was someone that had to be taken seriously. By all accounts he was an amazing teacher and people loved to listen to him, but the miracles added a degree of authority to his words. There were plenty of people who had predicted that the Kingdom of God was coming, but only Jesus backed up that message by working miracles. This wasnâ€™t just another wandering prophet who had arrived out of the desert. This was someone you had to take seriously. The second thing that the miracles did was give a demonstration of the Kingdom of God. Jesus didnâ€™t just talk about coming to rule; he brought healing and freedom for people. He lived out his message in the way he acted.

Jesus could do amazing things, but, strangely enough, he didnâ€™t want people to talk about them too much. When he healed someone, or cast demons out of them, he often told the people he had helped not to let anyone know what had happened to them. The miracles were an important part of what Jesus did and who he was, but he didnâ€™t want them to become the only focus of what he did. He wanted people to focus on what he said, not on the spectacular things he did.

WE SHOULD ANNOUNCE THE KINGDOM

OK, this is nice and easy. Jesus announced that God is King and we need to do the same. We donâ€™t have to produce anything new, it is a simple message â€“ albeit a rather unfashionable one.

Promoting Godâ€™s kingship is not about rules and regulations, itâ€™s not about winning arguments, it is simply about pointing to Jesus who taught and demonstrated the rule of God.

However, we need to just say a couple of things about vocabulary. Often people talk about

â€˜building the Kingdomâ€™ or â€˜advancing the Kingdomâ€™. I know this sounds picky, but we canâ€™t â€˜build the Kingdomâ€™. Jesus message is that God is ruling in a world that is in rebellion to him. We canâ€™t bring God in; this is something that only God does. We can announce the Kingdom, we can welcome the Kingdom and we can tell people about the Kingdom, but only God can build it. It is our job to point people to a work that is complete â€“ not to do the work (weâ€™ll talk about how the Kingdom was actually brought in next month).

We also need to talk about the Kingdom in the way Jesus did. We have to point people to the reality, but also acknowledge that the Kingdom comes in bit by bit, in hidden ways. It wonâ€™t fool anyone if we make big triumphalist statements that just donâ€™t match with reality.

WE DEMONSTRATE THE KINGDOM

I believe that there are two ways in which we demonstrate the Kingdom of God, by act and by symbol â€“ let me explain.

Acts

Acts are simply the way we live. As Christians, our lives should demonstrate the values of Godâ€™s reign, not the values of the secular, materialistic world around us. To put it simply, we must be different.

This impacts us at all levels. As individuals it will show in issues such as sexual morality, how we spend our money and our time and as a community it will effect every area of our lives.

Above everything, it will be shown in the way that we are prepared to forgive, to seek forgiveness and to be forgiven.

Symbol

But we donâ€™t just demonstrate the Kingdom in words, we show it in the symbolic actions of the life of the church.

Communion is an announcement of Jesus death to the physical world and to the spiritual world. It says that this is what we base our lives around. It is a solemn and serious declaration of Godâ€™s rule in the world to anyone who cares to listen.

Likewise, baptism, is symbolic of our dying to life in the old world and rising again out of the water into a new world where God is king. It symbolises the transfer of our allegiance from one kingdom to the next.

These are not small things, they are important symbols which announce that God is King and which

can serve to reinforce our faith when things get tough.

However, those symbols also point to another reality. This new Kingdom only comes about through a death. There is no Kingdom without the cross. That's for next month.

This is part of a talk I gave for Exilio in Southampton last weekend.Â