

2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5

God's Kingdom Will Come

1. By his “eternal encouragement”
2. With a “good hope.

The kingdom of God was supposed to be near. John the Baptist, the prophet of God, said it; **“Repent! The Kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** (Mt 3:2) Jesus said it many times: **“The kingdom of God has come near!”** (Mk 2:15) This kingdom was supposed to be here. But as his lifeless body was being taken from the cross, it seemed to be a lie. The kingdom was not at hand. This kingdom was gone or, worse yet, this kingdom was never there to begin with like he said it was. And when you remember Jesus words about the kingdom and then look at the sign above his head that reads “King of the Jews” and then look at his body suspended on the cross, the irony is overwhelming. Some king we got here. Love what he’s done with the kingdom.

For his followers it was a moment of terror, sadness, and uncertainty. But for some there was still some sense that the kingdom of God was at hand. Even as they heard the gruesome details of Jesus death, there was a thought that maybe this kingdom that Jesus was talking about wasn’t the kingdom that everyone thought he was talking about. Maybe it was different. And we see there was that sense with the man who saw, touched, and even smelled Jesus’ dead body. When Joseph of Aramathea requested the dead body of Jesus to embalm it, and bury it, he knew he was dealing with the dead body of the Messiah, the one who was to deliver his people. Even as he had that confirmation that yes, Jesus is dead; the Gospel writers give us that sense that he still had the hope of the kingdom of God. Mark says as a devout follower, **“He himself was waiting for the kingdom of God.”**(Mk 15:43) Maybe he hoped that Jesus would rise from the dead and restore the state of Israel on earth. But maybe he knew that this kingdom that Jesus was talking about wasn’t an earthly one. It was a different kind of kingdom.

Every week we pray to God that his kingdom would come. Out of the seven petitions in the Lord’s prayer, “thy kingdom come” is probably the most misunderstood. What exactly are we praying for when we say that? What exactly is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven? Are we praying that God would establish his kingdom on earth? Are we praying that God would come soon on the Last Day? What are we praying? The apostle Paul in his last words to the people of Thessalonica, even though he doesn’t flat out say the words, “kingdom of God”, he encourages the Christians to pray that God’s kingdom would come. And as we understand what the kingdom of God really is we then can understand that God’s kingdom will come by his eternal encouragement and with a good hope.

So what is kingdom of God? Here’s the definition. The kingdom of God is God’s gracious, powerful *ruling activity* in the hearts of people through the Gospel. It is God’s kingly activity. When we have this definition, we understand what the kingdom of God is not. It’s not something we can see with our eyes as though there is a geographical location of this so called kingdom. This is what the Pharisees fell into. They asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come.

And Jesus tells them, **“The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”** (Luke 17:20-21) The kingdom of God was right there with the Pharisees. It was in their midst. Remember Jesus told people that the kingdom of God was at hand. However the Pharisees rejected this kind of kingdom. And what were they were rejecting when they were rejecting the Kingdom of God? They were rejecting God’s rule with the Gospel. They were rejecting the truth. Jesus told Pilate, **“My kingdom is not of this world..My kingdom is of another place.”** Pilate then says, **“You are a king then?”** Jesus responds, **“You are right in saying that. In fact for this reason I was born and came into this world to testify to the truth.”** (Jn 18:36-37) Jesus came into this world as a king who rules in people’s hearts with the truth. That’s what his kingdom entails. Wherever the good news of Jesus is there is the kingdom of God. Wherever the kingdom of God is, there the gospel is present with it. Jesus tells his disciples to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Preach God’s gracious ruling activity in people’s hearts. Jesus talks about entering the kingdom of God. We enter the kingdom of God when we receive the gifts of his kingly activity-life, forgiveness, salvation.

So when we pray “your kingdom come,” we’re not really praying to God that he comes to take us to heaven soon, although heaven is a gift from being in the kingdom of God. Rather, when we pray your kingdom come, we’re praying a mission prayer. We’re praying that God rules in the hearts of all people everywhere with his unchanging Word. We’re praying for the spread of the Gospel

That’s what Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for. He says, **“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.”** (2 Thess 3:1) Just as by God’s grace, you enjoyed and continue to enjoy the gifts of God’s kingly activity in your hearts, pray that the kingdom of God might come to everyone as quickly as possible. God uses us to spread that good news of the kingdom of heaven. God’s kingdom will come when he gives us his Word and we give other people that same Word.

And here’s how we spread the Word. Right before Paul’s words we just read, he tells the Thessalonians, **“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”** (2 Thess 2:16) God’s kingdom comes by his eternal encouragement to us.

I only have been to one swimming meet in my entire life. I love sports, but I don’t swim, so it was kind of foreign to me. I just remember when the first race started being confused. There was a lot of excitement and energy but the sounds I was hearing were just bizarre. The whole race this is what I was hearing, Go!.....Go!.....Go!.....Go! I didn’t understand why until I focused in on one swimmer. Every time he would come up for a breath I would hear it. It makes sense. You can only encourage a swimmer when their head is out of the water. That’s the only time they can hear you.

Maybe that's good for swimmers, unfortunately, that's how our encouragement with one another sometimes is when it comes to our mission as a church. Our encouragement to spread the good news of the kingdom goes half way. Because there's someone trying to establish his own kingdom in your heart, it's Satan. And he'll try to make you satisfied that your mission as a church went half way or no way at all. He'll try to make each individual of the congregation be encouraged by their sinful nature. And controlled by this sinful nature we become lax. We think that as long as the kingdom of God has come to me, I'm good. We go half way by coming of up with a mission statement and putting it on our fridge, then saying, "here are these people, God, send them!" Our encouragement goes half way when we look at people in our community who are different than us and we say, "maybe some other church can bring the kingdom of God to them." That's sometimes the way we encourage ourselves and one another. It goes half way.

That's not God's encouragement. God's encouragement is eternal. That's the encouragement that we as a church want to be encouraged with. God doesn't go half way. God is swimming right alongside us. We go up for a breath, he is encouraging us. When we go under water, he is encouraging us. Yes, God wants us to encourage each other, but he wants us to encourage each other with the eternal encouragement found in his Word. In this Word we see that God didn't go half way when he lovingly created us and the world. He didn't go half when he became man. Jesus didn't stop half way on the road to Calvary. He didn't go half way when he brought us back from death by rising from the dead. His encouragement is eternal because what he won for us is eternal. And so when we feel lazy and lax about spreading his Kingdom, we go to his Word where he encourages us with his love and mercy. We are encouraged because this news of the kingdom of God is life-changing and we want every single person in the world to experience God's kingdom coming to them. God's kingdom will come by his eternal encouragement for us to spread the Gospel.

The Thessalonians needed this encouragement from Paul. They were very young in their faith surrounded by persecution and suffering. We can't really imagine what they were going through emotionally and even physically. And what kept them going? What kept them motivated? It was always the hope that came from the message of the eternal kingdom. It was the hope of eternal life. The reason people will enter into the kingdom and the kingdom enters into them is hope. God's kingdom will come with a good hope. Imagine if their hope was in the earthly kingdom that was around them. Imagine if their hope was only for a more peaceful and easy going life. That sort of earthly kingdom might not have happened! But God gives us a good hope, a hope in something that lasts forever. It's with that hope that we encourage each other to spread the Word. It's that hope that we want to give everyone.

We live in an amazing earthly kingdom. As July 4th approaches we give thanks to God for allowing us to live in a country with so much opportunity and privilege and liberty. Our nation has been blessed abundantly. Thank God for that. As Christians in this earthly kingdom, it is our duty to honor our government and our leaders. As much as we thank God for the opportunity to live in this society, this earthly kingdom doesn't offer the hope of eternal life. Only the kingdom

of God does. So Jesus tells us, “**Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well.**” (Mattehw 6:33) As citizens of God’s kingdom, we focus first on how God carries out his ruling activity in our hearts. We focus on his Word, we focus on the hope of the eternal life. We focus on his forgiveness. And after realizing God’s kingdom has already come to us and we realize we have everything we need, we carry out our lives in **a manner worthy of the calling we have received**, in our homes, at our work places, and in our country.

We continue to pray, “Your kingdom come” and God’s will come even without our praying, but we pray this so that God may use us to grow his kingdom and spread the Word rapidly. And God’s kingdom will come as he gives us eternal encouragement and as he gives us the good hope he promises to all people.

Amen.