

Welcome! If you have your Bibles, will you please turn with me to Matthew 4? As you're turning there, know that we are in the middle of this series where we are talking about our mission, vision, and priorities as a church. We have a three-fold mission: **love God, love people, make disciples**, a singular vision: we want **to connect people to Jesus**, and we have seven priorities that will help us be able to accomplish our mission and vision. Our priorities are **worship, gospel, kingdom, scripture, identity, community, and generosity**. And today we get to talk about the **kingdom**.

All throughout his ministry, Jesus taught and preached about the kingdom far more than anything else. When it comes to understanding what Jesus meant by the kingdom, it is really helpful to think in terms of two circles that represent God's kingdom and the kingdom world. God's kingdom is the place where God dwells, there is beauty and justice, love, truth, and peace. The kingdom of the world is the place where we dwell. Now originally, when God created the world, there was no separation. God dwelt among us in the Garden of Eden. The kingdom of heaven was here! Everything was perfect. Eventually, mankind rebelled against God, then indicated they didn't like his rule. These two kingdoms became distant, and we lost the beauty, justice, love, truth, and peace, and were left with sin, injustice, hatred, deception, and animosity. As the Old Testament unfolds, God pursues his people and there are micro-expressions of the kingdom of God coming to the kingdom of the world. The temple is built, miracles take place, there are men and women who seek God's presence. But the problem is, it's always fleeting, it's always temporary, and it's always limited.

And when Jesus begins his public ministry, what are the very first words that he says? Matthew 4:17 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." What does that mean? Quit doing things the way of the world, I'm (Jesus) here, which means the kingdom of heaven is here. No longer will these realms remain separate. The reign of God, the rule of God, has come near again. And whatever the realm of Jesus touches, so comes a reintroduction of the beauty, justice, love, truth, and peace. That's what happens when God reigns! But this time it's not temporary, it's not fleeting. If you turn with me to Matthew 6 you'll see that when Jesus teaches his followers to pray. He says: "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'" (Matthew 6:9). If we can think of it in terms of those circles again, Jesus is saying this is what we ought to pray for. We should pray for the will, rule, and reign of God, and everything that comes with it, to cover the earth. That's our hope.

Now, the Bible says this will ultimately happen. God will bring this about at the culmination of history. Many people have said that what God is trying to do is get our souls, when we die, from here to there. And God of course does say that we will be with him in paradise when we leave this world. But the real mission of God in the Bible isn't to get our souls from here to there, but to get God's kingdom from there to here. And that's what the entire New Testament tells us, God wants to use us, the church, followers of Jesus, to bring that about!

So, as a church, our priority is the kingdom of God. We want to see his kingdom come and his will be done, not just on earth as it is in heaven, but in our city as it is in heaven, in the 317 as it is in heaven. In Habakkuk 3:2, we see this incredible prayer, which has been the prayer of the leaders of our church: “Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known.” That is our prayer! God, we’ve heard you do some incredible things all throughout history, in the pages of the Scriptures, in the lives of saints decades and centuries ago...but Lord, repeat them in our day! Show up in our lives, in our families, in our church, in our city. Your kingdom come, your will be done, here as it is in heaven.

If we are going to see this happen, I want to set before you two things that will be required from us: **faith and commitment.**

Let’s talk about each of those. We’ll start with **faith.** I want to do a bit of a Bible quiz for you. I’m going to list off a few names, and you tell me if you know where in the Bible these people are found, or what significant thing they did. Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, Geuel. Any guesses? Numbers 13. Those are 10 of the men who were sent into the promised land to see the inheritance God told his people he would give them. It’s a fascinating story. God has rescued his people from captivity in Egypt (by far and away the most powerful nation the world to that point in history), he liberated them by performing ten consecutive miracles, and then he brought them through the wilderness and did great works after great works: parted the red sea, brought water from a rock, gave them food every single morning, and defeated their enemies. He’s done it all, and then just as they are getting ready to enter the land that God had been promising to give them for literally 500 years, those ten spies go in to check it out and they come back saying: “The land is better and more abundant than we ever could have hoped for. But you know, we don’t think it’s possible to take. We can’t do it. Their cities are too strong, their people are too big. We don’t stand a chance.” They had no faith. They had forgotten all God had done...turning the Nile to blood, causing the sky to go dark for days, frogs and gnats and loci and hail, parting the ocean for goodness sake! Their eyes were entirely on the obstacles in front of them, not the God beside them. And because they did not believe, because they had no faith, what happened? Instead of receiving what God promised them, they perished in the wilderness. But there were two spies who went with them, and when they came back, do you know what they said? They gave the report in Numbers 13 and 14.

Numbers 13:30 “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

Numbers 14:8 “If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.”

Do you know the names of the two men who had faith? Caleb and Joshua. And though they had to wait 40 years, because they believed, God gave them what they hoped for. He allowed them to enter into the promised land and received their inheritance. And do you know what their names were? Joshua and Caleb. Let me ask you: How many people do you know who are naming their kids Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddi, or Nahbi? But throughout your entire life, you’ve met named Josh and Caleb. I went through my phone, and I had five Calebs and fourteen Joshs.

Those are the men who had faith. Those are the names history has remembered and we name our children after.

What do you believe is possible for God to do in this city? I remember the very first sermon I ever preached at this church, almost three years ago. I shared this passage from Acts 8, which describes what happened as God transformed countless lives in the town of Samaria. And Acts 8:8 summarized it by saying, “So there was great joy in that city.” And I said, “we want God to do such a profound work, transform so many lives, that we would be able to say, “So there was great joy in our city.” It just so happened that weekend was in May. It was the Sunday when we host the big race and the eyes of the world were on our city for the Indy 500. Hundreds of thousands of people traveled to see it in person and millions tuned in on TV. And we said, what if we prayed for a day when the world focused on Indianapolis not to see a race, but to see the hand of God powerfully at work, lost people saved, lives and marriages and families healed, a healthy, vibrant, thriving church that people could look at and know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is alive and that grace and salvation are available to everyone who calls on his name.

God wants us to have the faith that he really can do that! He wants us to believe, deep in our core, that with him, all things are possible. But we need more than just faith, we have to have **commitment**, too.

Now, using the same example of the Israelites and the promised land and after all the people who had no faith died in the wilderness after 40 years, God finally brought the Israelites to the land. But do you know what did *not* happen? God did not snap his fingers and magically deliver the entire country to them. It’s not like God’s people prayed, “Give us the promised land, we have faith, we know you can do it.” And then God sent a tornado, it swept away all their enemies, and then they walked right in, plopped up their feet, and enjoyed the good life of luxury and ease. No! They had to work for the land, they had to fight for the land, they had to participate with God in seeing the land established.

A lot of people like to quote the passage from Joshua 1 about the command to **be strong and courageous (1:6)**. This command is given four times in that one chapter. **Be strong and courageous (1:7)**. **Be strong and courageous (1:9)**. **Be strong and courageous (1:18)**. This is not a passage about overcoming anxiety, this is not about getting up the courage to ask for a raise or a promotion. We are talking about the Israelites preparing themselves for battle against people way bigger and way stronger than them, people who were secure behind fortified cities. And remember the Israelites were liberated slaves who have been wandering around the wilderness for 40 years. They have next to no weapons, no supplies...and though most generals and strategists would say they have next to no chance, they are to be strong and courageous because God is on their side. And God did fight for them, in the town of Jericho, the walls came down miraculously. When they were fighting the Amorites, God gave them 24 more hours of daylight for the battle. God did a great work, but it was not in replacement of the Israelites’ commitment. It was in conjunction with their commitment.

And if we want to see God do a good work in our day, in our lives, in our city, it is going to require our commitment! And here’s the thing, it’s not a commitment to work for our own good

(we all do that anyway), it's a commitment to work for the good of the kingdom and the good of others! Let me give you a powerful example from when the Israelites were trying to enter the promised land: Do you know that there were two-and-a-half tribes of Israel who were happy with the land they were dwelling in outside the promised land? They had lived there for a while, and they were established and content. But Joshua spoke a word to them and said, "The Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land. Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, ready for battle, must cross over ahead of your fellow Israelites. You are to help them until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land." Joshua 1:13-15. Do you see what he said to them? "It's great that God has already brought you to a place of peace and it's great that you are settled and happy. But there are nine-and-a-half other tribes that haven't received their inheritance yet, and before you settle down and put up your feet to relax, you need to work to make sure your brothers and sisters come into their inheritance, too.

And listen to what it says in Numbers 32:23

"Build cities for your women and children, and pens for your flocks, but do what you have promised" (32:24). Did you see that? Take care of your families, by all means build houses and provide for them... **But do what you have promised.** Which means to help your brothers and sisters come into their inheritance. Do you want to know how important this is?! Look at the previous verse: "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out." That's intense.

As a church, we can't be okay with saying, "We are enjoying our kingdom. Look at all the ways God has already blessed us. We are happy and content." We have to say, "Whatever the price, no matter the cost, we are going to give ourselves to advance God's kingdom, we are going to fight for other people to receive the same blessings and inheritance God has given us. Here's the thing: it's not *just selfish* not to, it's *sinful*! Did you see the word the Bible used in that passage? **Your sins will find you out.** If God has blessed you, if he has saved you and placed his Spirit inside of you and done a good work in you, it is a sin not to leverage your influence, your relationship, your resources, and your time to advance God's kingdom and serve other people.

We have things we need to fight for in this city and in this church. We have people we need to fight for in this city and in this church. We need every single person mobilized and engaged in the mission of advancing the kingdom. We need people to disciple students, to lead a life groups and help connect and disciple adults. We need couples who have been married for a while to mentor couples who are just getting married. We need people sign up for an hour a day to pray. We need people to mentor students in at-risk situations. We need people to sign up to work with one of the dozen incredible ministry partners we have who are doing incredible work all around town. We need people who understand that **it's not time to invest into our own kingdoms, it's time to invest into God's kingdom!** I have a friend here at The Creek who God has taken on a journey in that regard, I'd love for you to hear his story. (**View the video recording of this sermon to see Jake Stamper's testimonial video.**)

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Screwtape Letters*, imagines the sorts of conversations that happen between senior demons who have been ruining people's lives for a long time, and a young, apprentice demon who has just started doing it. The young demon writes to his uncle and says: I'm working really hard to ruin this guy's life and make him impotent for the cause of Christ...I'm trying to get him to murder someone, or at least to commit adultery. And the experienced demon says, I commend you for your zeal, it's great to get someone to murder or commit adultery, but you can just as easily ruin someone's life and neutralize them for the cause of Christ by getting them to love playing cards too much.

Now, C.S. Lewis wasn't against playing cards. I have it on good authority he was actually a really good euchre player. But anything, even a good thing, that takes your focus and your time and your energy away from Christ and his kingdom, even as simple and innocent as cards, can render us impotent for the cause of Christ.

I don't know what these cards might represent in your life: your love for sports, Netflix, the gym, social media, playing the stock market, your favorite hobbies.... Cards aren't bad, and they have their place, but if we want to see the kingdom come in Indianapolis as it is in heaven, we are going to have to set the cards down and pick up a basin and a towel. On the last night of Jesus' life, he went to his disciples, washed their feet (which was the task reserved for the lowest ranking slave in the house) and rolled up his sleeves and served them. Then he said, "Now that I, your lord and master have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet." Jesus wasn't saying we need to go into the pedicure business, he was saying we have to do whatever it takes to serve people, love people, and point people to Jesus. That is how the kingdom of God is going to come!