

Jesus and the Kingdom of God Study Questions
Winter & Lent Sermon Series
“Jesus & The Kingdom of God.”

January 29, 2012

Title: Beyond Words: Signs & Wonders

Text: Matthew 4:23-25 (Luke 10:1-9)

Opening: When did Jesus first shine his light into your life? What helped you to see him and the love he has for you for the first time?

Discussion:

1. What does Jesus go on to do throughout Galilee? Of the various aspects of his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, which do you most need from him right now? Why? Which would you most like to join him in, in order to advance his kingdom?
2. In verses 23-25 Matthew gives a summary of Jesus' initial public ministry. Describe the people who came looking for Jesus?
3. How did the people “all over Syria” (v. 24) respond to the news of Jesus' ministry? Would people in Sonoma County respond the same way? Why, or why not?
4. Put yourself in the shoes of one of the groups of people that were brought to him: all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed. What would be running through your mind as you heard news about Jesus or as you were brought to him?
5. With large crowds following Jesus it would have been easy for him to give into the kind of temptations that he had earlier withstood from Satan. What do you believe continued to sustain him against such temptation and enabled him to fulfill God's mission?
6. Imagine the excitement of the first disciples as they watched Jesus healing and teaching among the crowds. What impact do you believe that Jesus' healing ministry would have on your faith? What impact do you believe witnessing a healing in Jesus' name would have on your faith today?
7. Does God still heal in this way today? Why, or why not? What personal experiences or theological perspectives influence your answer?

Application: What is one thing you would like Jesus to heal in your life? How can your group pray for you related to this need for healing?

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February 5, 2012

Title: Who’s In? Entering the Kingdom

Text: Matthew 21:28-32

Returning from Bethany to Jerusalem on the Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus and the disciples entered into the temple wherein which Jesus begins to teach. However, the chief priests and the elders came to him and challenged his authority (Mat. 21:23). Jesus then gave a series of three parables that pronounced judgment on the leaders for not accepting Jesus’ invitation to the kingdom of God (21:28-32, 33-46; 22:1-14). This is then followed by four encounters in which the religious leaders vainly tried to entrap Jesus, while he used their words to bring further judgment upon them and to reveal his messianic identity (22:15-46).

1. Why do you think Jesus begins the parable with a question? (v. 28)
2. Who does the first son represent? (v. 28; cf. v. 23)
3. What are some of the things the vineyard might represent? (v. 28). Compare this passage with Isaiah 5:1-7 and Mat. 21:33 and 39-43. In this context what does it mean? (v. 31)
4. When you first heard the gospel was your response like the first son (i.e. "I will not.")? What made you change your mind? (v. 29)
5. Who does the second son represent? (v. 30). How does this point relate to Jesus cursing the fig tree in verse 19? Also see 7:19.
6. How often do you find yourself saying "I will go, Lord" but never in fact go? (v. 30)
7. With the understanding that the tax collectors were considered to be traitors and often extortionists and that both the tax collectors and the prostitutes were considered to be ritually unclean, what is surprising about Jesus' remarks in verses 31-32?
8. Read the above account in verses 23-27. How is Jesus answering his own question? (v. 32)
9. Compare this passage with Mat. 7:21-23. While we should not be overly fearful in regards to the assurance of our own salvation (Heb 10:19-22), still these passages warn us that it is possible to say "Lord, Lord" or "I will go, Lord" and never know him or enter into his kingdom. Take this moment to check your own heart and ask yourself whether you do know Jesus and whether you have entered into his kingdom.
10. Finally, take a moment to give thanks to God for bringing you into his kingdom and for his great grace and forgiveness!

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February 12, 2012

Title: Great Expectations: The Hope of Israel

Text: Acts 1:1-6 (Luke 23:50-51)

Introduction: The "first book" (1:1) Luke is referring to is the Gospel of Luke which together with Acts constitutes one larger work that was written on two separate scrolls and addressed to the same person or persons (i.e. Theophilus means "lover of God" and can signify a person with this actual name or a symbolic name for any Christian convert). The actual preface to Luke-Acts is Luke 1:1-4, while Acts 1:1-8 serves as a transitional summary of both books. Here in Acts, Luke is now interested in providing for his reader(s) "an orderly account" of what Jesus continues "to do and teach" (Acts 1:1) through the ministry of the apostles so that his reader(s) may have "certainty concerning the things [they] have been taught" (Lk. 1:3-4).

1. Considering that the term "Lord" (Gk. Kyrios) usually refers to Jesus, look up some of the following verses and ask yourself whether or not "The Continued Acts of Jesus Christ" might be a better title: 1:24; 2:33, 47; 9:5, 10, 34; 13:2, 11 and 16:14.
2. Read Lk 24:48-53. What was one of the commands that Jesus gave the apostles? (Ac 1:2)
3. What are some of the other biblical stories and events that include "forty days"? (1:3)
4. What do you think the kingdom of God refers to? (v. 3)
5. Much of Jesus' ministry involved the preaching of "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk. 4:43). Consider Acts 1:3; 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31. In what ways is Acts a continuation of Jesus' proclamation about the kingdom of God? Why do you think Luke begins and ends his book with mentions of "the kingdom of God"?
6. Do you find it surprising that Jesus ordered his disciples to go and stay in Jerusalem? (1:4; cf. Lk. 24:49). If so, why? Do you think you would have stayed there?
7. Compare Acts 1:5 with Luke 3:16. What other difference does Jesus' baptism entail? Now compare Luke 9:54, 12:49 & 17:29 with Acts 1:8 and 2:4 (cf. Ex. 3:2; 13:21; 19:18; 40:38; Is. 4:5; Ez. 1:4). What do you make of the different connotations of this image?
8. Where did they "come together" at? (v. 6; cf. v. 12) (Note: If you have access to a Bible atlas, Bible dictionary or the Internet you may want to look at Luke 24:50 and reconcile it with Acts 1:6 and 12 by using one of these resources.)
9. Compare v. 6 with Luke 23:50-51. What did Jesus' followers expect to happen with the coming of the Messiah? What was Jesus' response to the disciples? (vv. 7-8)
10. How does Jesus' response warn us against speculation as to his return? What should we as Christians be focused on?

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February 19, 2012

Title: “Opposition to God’s Rule.”

Text: Matthew 12:22-29

Opening: Jesus is surrounded by pressures on all sides. His own followers don’t fully understand what he is doing. There are constant demands for healing and opposition is growing. How do you respond to pressure from such things as workload or criticism? How would you like to respond?

Discussion:

1. How did the people respond to Jesus’ healing of the demon-possessed man who was blind and mute? How did the Pharisees, Jesus’ opponents, respond to him?
2. How did Jesus counter the charge that he is in league with demonic forces and confound the logic of the Pharisees when they said that it was by Beelzebub (the prince of demons) that he was able to drive out demons?
3. What evidence does Jesus give that the kingdom of God had come upon them?
4. What is Jesus trying to communicate in his analogy about the strongman (v. 29)?
5. What does it mean to commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Why is this the only sin that will not be forgiven?

Note: “The warning in vs. 31-32 has often worried devout readers. If you are worried about committing this sin, it’s a good sign that you haven’t! Still it remains serious in terms of the decision we reach about Jesus. He warns against looking at the work of the Spirit and declaring that it must be the devil’s doing. If you do that, it’s not just that you *won’t* be forgiven; you *can’t* be forgiven, because you have cut off the very channel along which forgiveness would come. Once you declare that the only remaining bottle of water is poisoned, you condemn yourself to dying of thirst.” ~N.T. Wright, *Matthew*.

6. If a tree is recognized by its fruit, what kind of fruit do you see your life bearing right now? What does that say about your priorities? About your growing edges?
7. In the last paragraph, Jesus sets up a contrast in order to illustrate how we can tell between good and evil. How do our words witness to the condition of our hearts?

Application: If we truly believed that our words have the power that this passage says that they do, how might it impact what we say and do? Take time to silently confess and ask God’s forgiveness for ways you have used words carelessly and/or consider who you may need to ask forgiveness from for the ways your words may have hurt them.