

December 28, 2025
Pursuing the Kingdom: Introduction
Matthew 6:33
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...We spent all last year in the Minor Prophets considering God's message for His people to repent and turn back to Him, all the while promising the arrival of a Savior, a King from the line of David, His promised Messiah. This brought us to the Advent season and to Christmas, where we celebrated that the King has come and sang songs like "Joy to the World, the Lord is come, let earth receive her king."

And if the King has come, then like any true King, he has to have a kingdom. But what does that even mean? How would you define God's kingdom? What does it look like? How does it operate? How might we know that God's kingdom is advancing in the daily grind our lives, or even in the church's life and mission as it operates in its given community?

Few would deny that God's kingdom is a key theme in the Gospels, specifically in the Gospel of Matthew, but the average person might have a hard time articulating just how God's kingdom works itself out in ordinary life, whether that be a on personal level or more corporately in the life and ministry of the church. These are some of the ideas we're going to consider as we enter into our new theme for the coming year, "Pursuing the Kingdom," as we make our way through the entire Gospel of Matthew, an adventure that will take us all the way into next year, with a few breaks in between.

Our theme is based off of Matt. 6:33 "But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." And while each Gospel includes references to the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, it is the emphasized theme in Matthew's Gospel. More than any other Gospel, Matthew references the kingdom 53 times and in connection with it's authority another 11 times.

Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as King can be seen from the beginning to the end of his Gospel. In Matthew 1:1, Jesus' genealogy begins with him as the "son of David, the son of Abraham," and then his genealogy is traced back through Joseph to the line of King David. In Matthew 2, the wise men come seeking the "one born 'King of the Jews.'" (2:2)

And this theme is completed at the end of Matthew's Gospel in 28:18 when Jesus affirms, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus came announcing the kingdom of heaven and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Much of the content of Jesus' preaching and teaching, as well as his ministry, is shaped by the theme of the kingdom and his authority as King.

Before we go any further, its important that we define the kingdom. What do we mean by "the Kingdom of God?" The Kingdom of God is the arrival and growing influence of God's holy reign, demonstrated through Jesus' life, teachings and the community that follows him, presenting a profound spiritual reality and a future hope. Or put more simply the place where God rules or reigns.

So, when Jesus says that the kingdom is "at hand," what he means is that his rule or reign has "come near," the miracle of Christmas "God with us," that we can see what God's kingdom looks like in the life and ministry in the one whom God sent.

What's more, a response is expected when the king comes to reign. That is, we should turn away from their old way of life to embrace the reign and rule of the king. We call this repentance. By now, after last year, this message should sound familiar to us. This is the culmination of the message of the Minor Prophets, repent, turn back to God by following after His appointed King.

I think it helps to think about the kingdom of God in the same we think about the seasons. (spring, summer, fall, and winter) Right now we're just starting winter, but in a few short months the snow will melt and we will welcome in spring. And we all know what it's like when the first day of spring arrives on Mar. 21 and there is still snow on the ground. Spring is here, it has been inaugurated according to the calendar, but it is yet to be fully consummated. We must still wait for the sunshine and warmer days and for the birds to sing and the flowers to bloom. In short, spring has come, it has arrived, and yet it is still coming. So it is with the kingdom of God, it has been inaugurated, but it has yet to be consummated. It has come, but it is also still to come.

And so, we live in this tension of the already and not yet. The Kingdom is already here, inaugurated at Jesus' first coming, but not fully realized until Jesus comes again and fully establishes His kingdom on the earth.

What we need to consider is, "what does that kingdom look like in this "inaugurated," "already" phase in which the church has lived for the last 2,000 years or so. And how are we do live in such a kingdom? Matthew gives us a window into what that kingdom looks like, and shows us five aspects of its presence in the ministry of Jesus, all of which we will go into more detail as we go along.

First and foremost, the kingdom advances through the proclamation of the Gospel. From the earliest pages of Matthew's gospel, we find the message "Repent for the Kingdom of God has come near." Both John the Baptist (3:2) and Jesus (4:17).

"The kingdom of God is at hand" means God's reign and power are imminently available, signaled by the arrival of Jesus, the King, calling people to repent and believe the good news of the gospel message to align with this new reality, bridging the gap between the present world and God's future rule on Earth. It's not just a future event, but a present spiritual reality and a call to immediate transformation.

The word here means its "drawing near," its "close," or "on the cusp," meaning God's saving rule is breaking into the world through Jesus. The King's presence makes the Kingdom near. His person embodies the message and the available power of God's reign. It's a demand for a radical change of both our minds and our life, turning from sin to trust God's way and the gospel.

In essence, when Jesus said "the Kingdom of God is near," He was announcing that the promised time for God's active, transformative rule was here, embodied in Him, and people needed to get ready by changing their lives to live under His reign, not some distant future promise.

Secondly, the kingdom advances not only with the proclamation of the Gospel, but with a challenge to follow him make Jesus the center of your life, the call to discipleship. It's a call to put every aspect of your life in His hands. In His sovereignty, God has purposed to used His people to accomplish His task of advancing His Kingdom. How awesome to think

that Almighty God chooses to use us to bring about His plan and purpose in the world. We see this in the call of the disciples in Matt. 10.

Matthew 10 details Jesus's call to the twelve disciples, giving them authority to preach the Kingdom, heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead, while warning them of persecution and instructing them to rely solely on God. Jesus emphasized that the disciple's life was to mirror his.

This call to discipleship is a call to embody Christ's mission, power, and compassion, leaving behind worldly comforts for a life of service and witness. It's a call that doesn't always happen in church. It goes beyond church walls and into the workplace, whether that be on fishing boats or an office cubicle.

The call to become a disciple is not so much an event, but a call into a life-long journey in which Jesus takes the lead. This is a step of faith into the unknown. Jesus says 'Follow me!' We might ask, 'where?', but we do not necessarily get an answer. Jesus says, 'Follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men.' Responding requires faith.

And Jesus makes himself the object of the call: "Follow me," he says. Only as we follow Jesus can we fully know him, and in and through him, experience the Kingdom of God. The learning and the knowing is as much in the journey as in the event of deciding to follow him. And whenever and wherever people join that journey of discipleship, the kingdom is advancing.

Thirdly, the Kingdom advances through the authoritative teaching of the King. We find this interesting phrase in Matt 7:28-29 following Jesus' Sermon of the Mount in Matt. 5-7. "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."

Matthew's wording puts the emphasis squarely on Jesus, rather than on the what he is teaching. He teaches with authority. In Jesus' day, the scribes and the Pharisees drew their authority from the Law and the traditions of the elders. But Jesus teaches with what we call "primary authority."

So, in the Sermon on the Mount, he says 'You know it was written, but I say to you...' Or consider Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Jn 10), 'I have authority to lay down my life and take it up again ...' Jesus teaches with authority. And it is not a borrowed authority. Jesus teaches with his own authority. It is an authority that shapes and changes lives. When God's kingdom advances, it does so through authoritative biblical teaching.

What this means is that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. You can't simply throw out stuff that you don't like. To do so is to re-make God in your own image and likeness. In short, such an act would be the height of idolatry.

This brings us to our next point, God's kingdom advances through the supernatural acts of God in the world, what we would call miracles. All throughout the gospels, Jesus performs miracles to validate the Gospel message. Now, some people see this and assume that the kingdom ought to be consummated right now in every area of life.

So, for example, when someone prays for healing, it must happen, otherwise they don't have enough faith. Such is the thought of those who preach the false "health and wealth" gospel. This is a misunderstanding of Scripture and sets people up for disappointment and devastation. On the other hand, some people act as if the kingdom is

yet to be inaugurated and therefore have no faith that God might heal in the present. This would be an equally grievous mistake.

In our time living in the tension between the already and not yet, God may choose to heal now. But we have no guarantee that he will. We must live in the tension of scripture where, in James 5 believers are called to pray with faith that God desires to heal, while at the same time, Paul teaches us in 2 Cor. 12 that God's grace is sufficient for those who love him, even if he doesn't bring healing in this life as with Paul's thorn in the flesh.

Such is life in the already-not-yet kingdom. Yes, Jesus reigns, but we nevertheless await the full consummation of that reign where sin, evil, and death will be defeated once and for all.

So for us in the here and now, faith simultaneously believes that God desires healing and can heal (James 5), and that even if he doesn't, his grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12). We must live in the reality of this tension because to veer to either side leads one to despair (I don't have enough faith) or hopelessness (God is powerless to help me), neither of which is true.

Finally, God's advancing kingdom faces opposition. Sometimes it is inadvertent and sometimes deliberate. Sometimes it happens from within and sometimes from without. We will see all kinds of opposition as we make our way through the Book of Matthew.

Opposition to the Kingdom of God in Matthew comes from religious leaders accusing Jesus of demonic power, the people's unbelief and focus on worldly things, and ultimately the violent rejection leading to Jesus' crucifixion, with themes emphasizing spiritual struggle, hypocrisy, and the kingdom's forceful advance despite resistance, often marked by spiritual blindness.

Opposition to God's advancing kingdom arises in many other spheres of life. But whatever the opposition, we must remember that "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

The kingdom of God is not something entirely invisible out there, but that it is actually something we can see at work in the everydayness of our lives. It might not look spectacular. It is faithfulness in the ordinariness of life. And that is good news because most of life is, well, ordinary.

We need to be a people shaped by the gospel. We need to take opportunities to share in one another's lives so that our neighbors might see the kingdom advancing personally within us, and also through us.

"The Gospel of the Kingdom" is about Jesus' compelling vision for his people and their allegiance to him as King. Jesus' gospel message about the kingdom confronts our sins, allegiances, and vision for life. Too often as Christians, we spend too much time complaining about the decay and rot in our world than we do living and speaking as citizens of the Kingdom. We need to be a people who are pursuing the Kingdom of God and preparing the way for Jesus to come again and fully establish his eternal kingdom. Let's Pray.

Benediction: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen. (2 Cor. 13:14)