

The Kingdom of God Acts 1:1 – 3

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”

Dietrich was a pastor and theologian who came to prominence during the rise of Hitler and Nazi Germany. He was part of the Confessing Church that stood against the blatantly anti-Christ stance of Nazi Party. When war erupted in Europe and seeing horrors that Hitler was committing, Dietrich was involved in an assassination plot. Although a committed pacifist, Bonhoeffer wrote:

“If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver.”

The plot failed, Bonhoeffer was imprisoned and as the Allied force retook Europe was martyred by hanging.

As he was led to his death his final words were:

“This is the end, but for me the beginning of life.”

Then there is Robert. Robert's father was white and mother was black and his father died when he was 10 and so for a long time he lived in parallel worlds.

Although shy he grew up it so noticed that he was musically gifted. He won talent contests and formed a band with his friends. Robert's songs protested against the poverty and deprivation he experienced in Kingston. He became a Rastafarian and his songs had a natural spirituality to them and Robert and his band the Wailers became immensely popular around the world.

And of course Robert is... Bob Marley.

Bob Marley died from a skin cancer that was found in his toes but then spread to the rest of his body.

His story has been recently told in the movie "One Love".

What the film and many tellings of Bob Marley's story omit, is that before he died he was baptised as a Christian.

According to his mother Bob Marley's final words before dying was "Jesus take me."

And so here in our passage this morning are the last words of Jesus. Not before his death but before he was to depart to be enthroned next to his Father in heaven.

So we are told in the text that over forty days before he meets with the disciples, where talks with them and shares his final words and talks about something in particular.

Now my question for you is this:

"If you knew you were going to be around for another forty days, what would you talk about?"

So Jesus had forty days and what did he talk about?

He talked about the **kingdom of God**.

We know it was a key theme in Jesus teaching ministry.

He began his public ministry by preaching:

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"¹

The Gospels contain 76 different kingdom sayings.

And we know that it was so important Jesus spent 40 speaking about the kingdom of God.

So the Lord had 40 days.

We have 20 – 30 minutes, so it is a topic we keep coming back to.

So the question is, ***what is the kingdom of God?***

¹ Mark 1:15

When you read around and do the research, you discover there are a number of views on the Kingdom of God:

- 1) Some will say the kingdom of God is *Otherworldly* – It's Heavenly – It's in the future and not yet.

In this view, people say they are realists about sin's destructive consequences and are sceptical that much good can come from God's good creation. The kingdom of God is not here and it's not yet. and Jesus came therefore to provide a way out.

God's kingdom – his good and beautiful rule and reign – is absolute therefore He has created a better place free from all of sin's consequences. So through Jesus is able to take us away to this better place called the kingdom of God.

The churches role is tell others that Jesus is the way to this better place and to help people become acceptable for the day of judgement. The church operates as a holding place until that day.

The best issue though is what? What about now, today and even tomorrow?

- 2) Other will say, it's about us making the world a better place.

In Jesus, God showed what's needed to be done and we've been left with the job to do it.

God is not going to intervene. The world will improve only as humans embrace and implement God's vision.

Through human effort the world will slowly and steadily become a better place; the kingdom of God will progressively come into place.

What we've discovered though, is that even as there have been technological has advanced and there have been scientific breakthroughs, these same breakthroughs and advances have been twisted in ways that harm and destroy humanity and God's good creation.

Why? Because fundamentally this view human nature is not changed.

Where I am up to is this: when Jesus is talking about the kingdom he is talking about himself.

The kingdom has a king and Jesus is saying he is the king in the kingdom.

He is the world's true King and one day the kingdom will one day established over all the earth

So the kingdom *is not currently* geographical but one day will be.

The world, it stumbles from one crisis to another and it desperately needs a new ruler and one day Jesus rule will be complete.

In Zechariah 14:9 we are told:

“The LORD will be king over all the earth.

On that day there will be one LORD—his name alone will be worshiped.”

So the kingdom is coming.

That does not mean that world careening out of control.

As king Jesus is sovereign.

I mean, when I think back over the decades the fall of the Berlin Wall comes to mind. No predicted how that the wall that stood as a symbol communist oppression for nearly 30 years would fall overnight, and the dismantling of the Soviet Union quickly followed.

We may be able to point to events in War World II the preserved the world from being overrun by the Nazi regime that at one point seemed impossible.

Jesus is sovereign in how he rules over world events, meaning he will have the say-so.

So if it isn't currently geographical, where is it?

As King, Jesus rules and he reigns, and he establishes His rule in lives and hearts of people.

The people of the kingdom are those who have bowed their hearts and bent their knees to King Jesus.

It's a radical change in direction, affection and course correction centred on King Jesus.

God rules through King Jesus, and King Jesus' citizens live under him.

The kingdom project has always been the people of God ordering their life together in accordance with God's ultimate will for creation as an example for the rest of the world.

Among Christians is where the kingdom is to be most visible.

And as I've before, as the one who sovereign, who is supreme, Jesus gives orders. He gives commands. He gives directions. He is prescriptive.

And what do Kiwi's do?

We hit the roof! and in the some churches, Christians go out the door and hit the road.

The message our culture communicates to us is this: it's all about radical self-autonomy.

Radical self-autonomy about excessive self-regard and self-rule, choosing self over God; becoming a law unto ourselves.

It's all about being true to yourself and following your dreams.

My life is my own.

I mean, who are you to tell me what to do???

So we can live self-referencing lives or we can live Jesus-centric lives.

Here's the thing: when Jesus gives orders and commands he doesn't do so as a power hungry megalomaniac, but someone who desires your good and my good and the good of the whole world.

When he gives a command, it's for your good.

When he gives orders, it's for the sake of a lost world.

And as King, Jesus wants to bring His good and loving rule into the whole of your life.

The whole of your life matters to God.

There was lawyer who took Jesus' words seriously and gave up a lucrative law practice to spend his life helping poor people obtain decent housing.

One day, his wealthy brother confronted him by saying, "Look at what you're doing with your life." The brother went on to say, "Don't get me wrong. I believe in being a Christian, up to a point."

To be sovereign means that King Jesus has the final say-so.

He also has final say-so over your death.

Like Bonhoeffer and Bob and billions more, you can have confidence the death has been overruled by the one who has risen from the dead.

And Jesus as king has final say-so over your pardon.

So people feel so condemned by their sin.

The first is this: who has the final say on the sports field? The referee or the umpire.

In the U.K. who has the final say in going to war? Not parliament, not the Prime Minister but actually the Queen.

Who has the final say in your home? You may want to consult on this one 😊.

And I think there are many people - people who love Jesus – who's live have been impacted in such a heart-breaking way. And it's like that time, that event, that season, is having the last say over their lives. Whatever it is, it defines you.

Here's the thing: Jesus, as King can have the final say over your life – he can overrule, and he can speak a new word and give you a new season and have the final say over your life.