

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
WORSHIP SERVICE WITH COMMUNION
10.30 AM 15TH SEPTEMBER 2024
Jill Bird leading & Rev Julia Binney preaching
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Reading



Abbey Baptist Church,

New Series: The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark - Today the Growing kingdom

Call to worship

Dig deeper – The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all that he had and bought that field. Matt 13.44

Lord thank you this morning that you know us so well
Some are so worried about the future and need your peace
Some feel far from you and need you to come near
Some feel you have let them down and need to hear your plans
Some feel they have failed and need to hear your forgiveness
Thank you this morning that you want to come near to all of us
Come Lord Jesus. Come Lord Jesus

God I look to You I won't be overwhelmed Give me vision To see things like You do
God I look to You, You're where my help comes from
Give me wisdom, You know just what to do
Hallelujah our God reigns, Hallelujah our God reigns
Forever all my days, Hallelujah

HYMN BP&W 74:

You are the king of glory, You are the Prince of Peace;
You are the Lord of heaven and earth, You're the Sun of righteousness.
Angels bow down before You, Worship and adore, for
You have the words of eternal life, You are Jesus Christ the Lord.
Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to the King of kings!
Glory in the highest heaven, For Jesus the Messiah reigns.

Heavenly Father, yours is the kingdom:
A kingdom of love, justice and peace.
Lord Jesus Christ, yours is the power:
The power to heal and forgive
Holy Spirit, yours is the glory:
The glory to restore and renew us.

Thank you that today we can bring our lives afresh to you
Thank you that today you welcome us into your presence with love and forgiveness
Take us deeper into you Father, Son and Holy Spirit Amen
The Lord's Prayer: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Family Time: Who's got pot plants

(There will be an offering taken during the following song, and after the song the children will leave us for their own groups)

Song MP 151

For I'm Building A People Of Power
And I'm Making A People Of Praise
That Will Move Through This Land By My Spirit
And Will Glorify My Precious Name

Build Your Church, Lord Make Us Strong, Lord
Join Our Hearts, Lord, Through Your Son
Make Us One, Lord In Your Body
In The Kingdom Of Your Son

BIBLE READING 1: MARK 4. 26-34

BIBLE READING 2: 1 Corinthians 3.5-11

Song: Hymn BPW 105:

Speak, Lord, in the stillness, Speak your word to me;
Help me now to listen, In expectancy.

Speak, O gracious Master, In this quiet hour;
Let me see your face, Lord, Feel your touch of power.

For the words you give me, They are life indeed;
Living bread from heaven, Now my spirit feed.

Speak, your servant listens, I await your word;
Let me know your presence Let your voice be heard!

Fill me with the knowledge Of your glorious will;
All your own good pleasure In my life fulfil.

Sermon: Kingdom of God 3: The Growth of the Kingdom (Mark 4:26-34)

Today we continue with our series on **The Kingdom of God**, looking at Mark's interpretation of Jesus' New Order. The 'new order' or



‘new way of believing, being and doing’ is at the heart of everything Jesus was and did. For Mark the Kingdom (or reign) of God is not some vague, airy-fairy concept awaiting us sometime in the distant future but something of the here and now, to be lived out practically earthed and grounded in everyday life.

This is because as God’s church, God’s gathered people, we are an advert for God’s kingdom, the visible presence of God’s transformed community and empowered reality on earth living out Kingdom truths, values and priorities. In and through our lives individually and together as a community of faith, we are to display what it means to live under God’s kingdom rule. The world looks at the church, rightly, because they should be able to see Jesus through us, with us, in us, and find him through us. This is our privilege but also our responsibility and our obligation.

As we have already seen in this series on the Kingdom of God from Mark's gospel, the Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’ teaching and ministry. It is primarily what he came to tell us about. It is also the main theme of the New Testament church. Whatever our political allegiance, there is only one allegiance that matters. As Christian people it is total, unwavering, wholehearted allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom. When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, he was talking about an utterly different way of relating to human society, politically, economically and socially. He was talking about a new world order. Mark’s Gospel can be seen as a political as well as a spiritual document. Jesus laid out his plans for this new world and they can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7). He preached a subversion of the old order, undermining worldly values and political power structures.

Right at the start of Jesus’ ministry, Mark tells us that Jesus ‘ went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news’ (1:14,15). The Message version of the Bible interprets these verses as ‘Time's up! God's Kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the message.’ In other words, stop messing about! Get into Kingdom stuff. Now is the time - turn around, go God's way! As the Kingdom of God is so important in Jesus’ teaching and ministry, and that of the New Testament church, we need to learn as much about it as we can. This is why each week we are looking at a different facet of what Mark is trying to communicate about the Kingdom of God in his Gospel. This week we are thinking about the Growth of the Kingdom by looking at Jesus’ parables about seed (Mark 4:26-32).

1. Jesus’ Use of Parables

Jesus is the master of this kind of teaching technique. There are about 60 separate parables in the gospels. Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. They look and sound like simple stories of everyday life and work about normal people in normal situations. But they are not simple; they are incredibly profound. Jesus tells a little story and it sucks us in. We think we've got it but then the truth goes off in our heads like a bomb exploding and hits us between the eyes. It penetrates our hard, indifferent hearts and spiritually complacent souls. Parables are designed to pull the rug from under us. The Bible has this effect: ‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’ (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible judges us and exposes our innermost thoughts and desires and we are left exposed to the reality of our spiritual condition before God. Jesus’ parables have this effect on us and we should welcome it because it helps us to grow spiritually.

2. The Principle of Growth in the Kingdom of God

This is something we really need to know about the Kingdom of God. We need to get this into our systems, let the truth of it sink deep into our souls. The foundational, defining principle of the Kingdom of God is growth, increase... no ifs or buts or maybes. In the Parable of the Growing Seed (vs.26-29), the truth that hits us between the eyes is the mysterious, miraculous power of the seed itself. As with a seed in nature, the gospel message contains its own power. We need to remember this. As the Apostle Paul put it, ‘the gospel is still the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes’ (Romans 1:16). The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, God with us here and now, is constantly at work. What Jesus is saying here is that when the farmer sows the seed, the growth remains a miracle. To be a good

gardener you need to plant the seeds carefully, water them, feed them, but this key transformation happens mysteriously, underground, beyond our observation or control. A dry tiny seed goes into the soil, time passes without any observable changes and then suddenly a small green plant emerges. This is true in the natural realm, so it is with the reign of God and with faith. Growth takes place because the Holy Spirit is continually at work sowing, watering, nurturing the seed of the word of God planted in human hearts, bringing it to fruition. We play our part, but God does it. As Paul explains, 'the Lord has assigned to each their task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow' (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). God's Kingdom is advancing. It will come on earth as it is in heaven because the gospel contains the power, intrinsic within it, to change lives, to transform communities, to renew this world. It has power in and of itself. Hidden transformations are happening all over the world. We may look at the world and see no observable changes. In fact we may think things are getting worse. But the reign of God is growing, like new small green plants coming up from the earth, it will emerge. It might start small, but God's kingdom reign grows into something significant, for the good of all, like a mustard tree growing into a huge plant providing shady branches for the birds to rest (v.32).

How do we know this? The resurrection of Jesus proves it! God's Kingdom is actively invading and defeating the Kingdom of the Satan, the realm of evil, and the principalities and powers behind the world's power structures and institutions (Ephesians 6:12). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, death is defeated, the door to heaven is open, eternal life available for all who believe, the blessings of the Kingdom poured out, the old world order turned upside down and transformed. The Kingdom came with Jesus. It was inaugurated through his death and resurrection and the new world order, the reign of God, will be ushered in in all its glorious fullness at the end of the age. This is what is going to happen: 'one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Philippians 2:10,11). The Kingdom of God is growing... no ifs or buts or maybes.

3. The Principle of Growth in Individual Hearts and Lives

Even if faith only starts in a person's heart the size of a mustard seed (v.30), the smallest known thing at the time, it will grow because God gives the increase: 'First the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear' – until the harvest (vs 28,29). The foundational, defining principle of growth in the Kingdom of God is in individual hearts and lives. Jesus said, 'the Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21). The Kingdom of God is where the King is (Jesus); the Kingdom is where the King reigns. As with a seed growing unseen in the ground, so it is with spiritual growth. We don't always know or see it happening. Spiritual growth takes place because the Holy Spirit is constantly at work.

However, we need to go with God, deliberately and intentionally putting ourselves in his hands in order to realise our potential in him, to work with God in our lives not against him. That way we develop from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity and 'grow in grace and the knowledge of God' (2 Peter 3:18). It is so sad to see a child whose growth has been limited or distorted. How sad it is when people get stuck as spiritual children rather than grow up into all they are meant to be in Christ. As children of the Kingdom, we are called to mature in our relationship with God and become more like Jesus in our thoughts, words and actions. John Main, a Benedictine monk, defined the Kingdom of God as 'simply God's power enthroned in our hearts.' Is Jesus, the King of the Kingdom, enthroned in your heart? If he is, God's Kingdom will grow in you and through you because God gives the increase.

God's kingdom changes us and the world around us. It is as we practically live out the teaching of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, as individuals as a church, every day in the power of the Holy Spirit that communities, society and the world is slowly but surely being transformed. The advance and growth of the Kingdom is one heart, one soul, one person, one life at a time. In order to see this transformation, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, struggle is part of the story. The new world order entails co-operation, trust, service and redemptive suffering. The Kingdom of God is expanding but there are inevitable growth pains. But as with labour pains, the joy of new birth outshines and far surpasses the struggle. The birth of the reign of God in hearts and lives far surpasses anything the old order can offer.

There were three tulip bulbs named 'No,' 'Maybe' and 'Yes.' They lived at the bottom of a bulb tin content to be round and fat, clothed in their silky, brown garments. When autumn came they fell to discussing the destiny of tulip bulbs. 'No' said, 'I shall stay in my snug corner of the bin. That there is any other life for tulip bulbs I deny. Besides I'm satisfied with things as they are.' And he rolled over to the corner to sleep the winter away. 'Maybe' said, 'I am not satisfied with things as they are. I feel that there is a better life than the life I now have. I feel something inside me which I must achieve and I believe that I can achieve it.' So he squeezed himself and squeezed himself and ended up in a fit of frustration. Then 'Yes' said, 'I have been told that we can do nothing for ourselves but that the Lord will fulfil our destiny if we put ourselves in his power.' So one day a hand reached down into the bin groping for tulip bulbs. 'Yes' gave himself to the hand and was buried in the earth throughout the long winter months. Meanwhile 'No' and 'Maybe' shrivelled away to uselessness at the bottom of the tin. When spring came 'Yes' burst forth with all the richness and loveliness of new life. Remember the Kingdom of God is within us. May we not be 'No's' or 'Maybes' but resounding 'Yes's' and put our lives into God's hands and burst out into new and glorious Kingdom life!

Song

1. Come set Your rule and reign In our hearts again
Increase in us we pray, unveil why we're made
Come set our hearts ablaze with hope, like wildfire in our very souls
Holy Spirit, come invade us now
We are Your Church and we need Your power In us

2. We seek Your kingdom first, We hunger and we thirst
Refuse to waste our lives ,For You're our joy and prize
To see the captive hearts released, The hurt, the sick, the poor at peace
We lay down our lives for Heaven's cause
We are Your church and we pray revive This earth

Chorus

Build Your kingdom here Let the darkness fear
Show Your mighty hand, Heal our streets and land
Set Your church on fire Win this nation back
Change the atmosphere, Build Your kingdom here We pray

3. Unleash Your kingdom's power, Reaching the near and far
No force of hell can stop Your beauty changing hearts
You made us for much more than this
Awake the kingdom seed in us, Fill us with the strength and love of Christ
We are Your church and we are the hope on earth

Chorus -repeat

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

COMMUNION Words of Invitation:

Here is the table of the Lord,
We are gathered to his supper, a foretaste of God's eternal kingdom.
Come and eat in his Kingdom Come and drink in his kingdom
Come and be filled with the very presence of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

INSTITUTION:

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, **"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."**
In the same way after supper he took the cup saying, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood."**

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Jesus, you are the bread of life. Whoever comes to you will never hunger, and whoever believes in you will never thirst... Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that you give for the life of the world is your flesh. *(from John 6:35, 51)*

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

Jesus, you are the fountain of life. This cup is the new covenant in your blood poured out for us for the forgiveness of sins. We rejoice that through your death we may enter now into your new and eternal Kingdom

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

In sharing bread and wine, you have strengthened us, Lord Jesus. May we go from here in the joy and hope of living for you in your Kingdom each and every day. Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: GWEN

Our Father God we come before you today to pray for our brothers and sisters all over the world. We acknowledge your love and concern for everyone you have created and how you must grieve for all the suffering we cause each other. We know that devastating conflicts are causing severe hunger and starvation for millions of people. We continue to pray for those in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and many other places. We pray for organisations working to deliver emergency food, and remember the work of Christian Aid amongst others.

Our prayers today include all who suffer from any kind of disability, whether it be physical or mental. Help us to be inclusive in everything we do so that no one will feel left out or different. We know that we are all valued by you .

Father God we lift to you the many people who are struggling financially. We pray for those who are helping them that they might be guided, and especially we pray for our government. We know that many people are concerned about the overcrowding in our prisons and the early release of some prisoners. We know that this can impact our social services so we pray that they might have wisdom in how to use the available resources.

We are more aware today of the mental problems that many of our young people are suffering from. Father we ask for your love to surround them that they will feel loved and wanted and not feel the need to carry knives to protect themselves.

As we think about others in need we also think about our own needs to grow in our relationship with you Father. May your kingdom grow as we draw closer to you and extend your love to others around us. We long to know your presence in our lives and experience you more deeply.

All these prayers we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen

Hymn MP 1282:

Hear the call of the kingdom, Lift your eyes to the King;
Let His song rise within you As a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy, Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the Kingdom To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven, The humility of Christ;

Walking justly before Him, Loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through us.

*King of Heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

Hear the call of the Kingdom To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion In the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness And a hope yet to come:
Let the nations put their trust in us.

Blessing

May the riches of God's word take us deeper into the Kingdom
May the light of God's presence lift our hearts with praise
May the refreshing living water of the Holy Spirit flow through us to the world
In the name of Jesus Christ our LORD Amen

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Date for your Diary:

- **Friday 20th September – Prayer Meeting in the Upper Room – 10.30 – 11.30. All welcome**

Every Tuesday evening 8- 8.30 pm on zoom church prayer meeting – see church Whats App group for link or Meeting ID: 862 1518 8882 Passcode: 657161

Sunday September 29th there will be a newcomers lunch after the service. If you are new – say joined the church in the last 6 months we would like to share lunch with you, get to know you and tell you a little more about the church and answer any questions. We will also send out invites!

Reading churches will focus on prayer for 10 days from Oct 3rd to oct 12th – leaflets to guide your prayers are in the church. Let's take this opportunity to pray more. We will encourage Connect groups to gather to pray or prayer walk and there is a daily opportunity to join short cross Reading zoom prayer groups. Also a worship and prayer evening in Abbey on Friday Oct 4th from 7-9pm where we will be joined by other churches.

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the following QR code below to pay:

QR Code for Offering:

