

ABBEY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
WORSHIP SERVICE 10.30 AM 8th September 2024
Led by Bridget Gurney with Rev Dr Julia Binney Preaching
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Autumn Series: The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark

Theme: The Secret of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11,12)

Call to worship:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob.

Whose hope is in the Lord their God.

He made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them.

The Lord will reign forever, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Hymn MP 1072:

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm,
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
Here, in the love of Christ, I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross, as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied,
For every sin, on Him, was laid;
Here, in the death of Christ, I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world, by darkness, slain,
Then bursting forth in glorious day,
Up from the grave, He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of Hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ, I'll stand!

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A Prayer of Praise:

We praise you for your greatness, your majesty, your might and power. You are the creator of all good things. You created this beautiful world. Above all else, you sent your only son, who gave up his life, that we might have life.

We praise you Lord

You are full of majesty, compassion, justice and mercy.
There is no god like you for power and greatness.

We praise and adore you. Amen

A Prayer of Confession:

We have marred this beautiful world of yours Father. We know we have gone wrong. Our thoughts are not worthy of you. Our actions are not worthy of you, and when we talk, we don't always say what we ought to say. O Father, forgive us, cleanse and refresh us. Your word says if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So we come now confessing all that is wrong in our lives.

Father, forgive us. Amen

A Prayer of Thanksgiving:

We give you thanks for cleansing us, for giving us eternal life, and for caring and loving us. For all that is good in this life, we give you thanks, and worship at your feet.

We thank you Lord. 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 Hide and seek

(An offering will be taken during the next song, and after the song the children will leave for their own groups)

Hymn MP 302:

I want to walk with Jesus Christ
All the days I live of this life on earth;
To give to Him complete control
Of body and of soul.

*Follow Him, follow Him, yield your life to Him,
He has conquered death, He is King of kings;
Accept the joy which He gives to those
Who yield their lives to Him.*

I want to learn to speak to Him,
To pray to Him, confess my sin;
To open my life and let Him in,
For joy will then be mine:

I want to learn to speak of Him,
My life must show that He lives in me;
My deeds, my thoughts, my words must speak
All of His love for me:

I want to learn to read His word,
For this is how I know the way
To live my life as pleases Him,
In holiness and joy:

O Holy Spirit of the Lord,
Enter now into this heart of mine;
Take full control of my selfish will,
And make me wholly Thine:

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Prayer of Dedication

Bible Reading 1: Mark 4:1-20

Bible Reading 2: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

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.

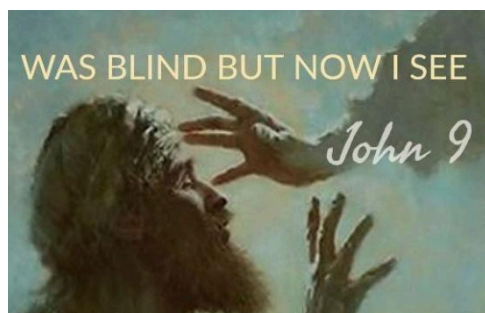
For the words you give me,
They are life indeed;
Living bread from heaven,
Now my spirit feed.

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.

EMILY M. CRAWFORD (1864-1927)

Sermon: Kingdom of God 2: The Secret of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11,12)



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. Mark was deeply concerned to communicate exactly who Jesus was, what he came to do, what he taught... and how all that remained vitally important for the people of his day. For Mark the Kingdom (or reign) of God is not some airy-fairy concept awaiting us sometime in the distant future but something to be lived out practically here and now.

Jesus came to preach the Kingdom: 'The time promised by God has come at last!' he announced' (Mark 1:14,15a NLT). He declared it publicly all around Galilee: 'The Kingdom [or rule/reign] of God is near! Repent and believe the Good News' (v.15b). His message is that we are to turn away from our old ways of thinking and living, away from the old priorities of the old order and turn and embrace God's rule and reign and the new things of the new order. Surely this must mean living God-centred, open and honest lives. Proverbs 12:22 'The Lord detests lying lips but delights in those who are truthful'; Colossians 3:9 'Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.' God looks for transparency and integrity from us. Matthew 5:37 'Let your yes be yes and your no, no.' So why does Jesus talk about '**The Secret of the Kingdom**' (4:11)? Why is it a secret? Several times in Mark's Gospel Jesus tries to silence those who want to tell who he is or what he can do. Is he wanting us to keep it hidden? Yet in Mark 4:22 Jesus says, 'For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light.' Confused?

The new era of God's rule came and was established in Jesus. With his coming the long promised advent of the kingdom of God had arrived. After his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Matthew 28:18). Jesus is the King of the Kingdom, even though his rule and reign is yet to come in all its fulness at the end of the age. The promise of Scripture is that one day, 'at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:10,11). But God's kingdom *is* here! All this means and all that Jesus was, did, is still doing and is yet to do is mindboggling and of paramount, cosmic importance about truth, reality, the future, creation and the eternal destiny of every soul on earth. But so many people seem totally oblivious to God, to Jesus and his kingdom. Is this because it is a secret? If so what does this say about God's kingdom and what can

we learn from it as we seek to live the way of God's new order? There are three questions for us to think about here.

1. Why can't people see the truth about Jesus and his kingdom?

If the kingdom is a secret, it is an open secret. It might appear hidden but hidden in plain sight. It is clear, plain and obvious for all to see. So why don't people see it? One reason might be because people are deluded. Sin has robbed them of the ability to see. The Gospels record a number of times Jesus healed blind people. For example, Jesus healing the blind man at Bethsaida is a pivotal moment in Mark's gospel (8:22-26). Physical sight symbolised spiritual sight. After Jesus healed the man born blind, the pharisees cross-questioned the man. He answered them, 'One thing I know. I was blind but now I see' (John 9:23). After the Apostle Paul met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he was blind until Ananias laid hands on him and prayed for him to restore his sight (Acts 9:1-12). Immediately 'something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again' (Acts 9:18). This was symbolic of his calling. Paul, as he became known, in his testimony to King Agrippa, spoke about his calling from Jesus, 'to open the eyes of the Gentiles and turn them from darkness to light' (Acts 26:18). Jesus came to bring us the light of the knowledge of God: 'the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it' (John 1:5).

People cannot see the truth about Jesus or the reality of God's kingdom rule. According to Paul, this is because the gospel is 'veiled' and people's minds are blinded by 'the god of this age' (2 Corinthians 4:3,4). Paul uses this phrase to mean the satan, the devil, the enemy of God and his people. It is not that the gospel is hidden behind a veil that people can't find but it is the enemy who stops people from seeing the healing, life-giving light of the gospel. As the Message interprets these verses: 'If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get.' It is the satan that deludes people. Jesus describes the devil as 'a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44). The devil blinds the minds of people by filling their minds with trivial things, unfounded anxieties and worries based on lies, with other things like work, wrong relationships, pride and so-called intellectual difficulties and questions about the faith to undermine faith.

Whilst the devil is a defeated foe, he is still active (Hebrews 2:14,15). Another title for the satan is 'the prince of this world.' Jesus speaking in the Upper Room to his disciples the night before the crucifixion refers to his imminent departure, 'I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me' (John 14:30,31). The satan had no hold on Jesus because he was sinless. Not so with the rest of us.

People don't not see God's kingdom not only because they are blinded by the devil but because they don't want to see. And this is where sin comes in again. People are not prepared to give Jesus and his teaching the serious attention he deserves. The god of this age could also be interpreted as the materialistic worldly philosophies and weird spiritual stuff of fantasy that people seem to prefer these days rather than the truth. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father but by me' (John 14:6). But, as John writes, people seem to prefer darkness to light: 'Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead because their deeds were evil' (John 3:19) and they fear exposure.

2. Does God make his kingdom hard to find?

Not only does the devil make it hard to lay hold of the truth of the gospel, it is as if God does too. Jesus' reference to the secret of the kingdom is in the context of his explanation about the Parable of the Sower to his intimate followers. Jesus said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables' (v.11 ESV). He then puzzlingly says that the secret of the reign of God has been given to these twelve but for those on the outside, everything comes in parables in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven' (vs.11,12). You would have thought that parables would make things clearer by bringing ideas and concepts to every life situations. But, no. Mark has Jesus declare that their purpose is to hide the truth. This is because the parables were designed to shake things up abit, to prompt a radical shift in our thinking, to shock us out of our spiritual complacency, so that we open our eyes to spiritual reality and we start to see properly. Jesus' teaching was aimed at sorting out those who were really seeking God, who were genuine about giving him serious attention. It is only to those that God gives revelation. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as being 'like

treasure hidden in a field' (13:44). In other words, we've got to dig for it. Jesus said, 'ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened' (Matthew 7:7). So we keep on asking, we keep on seeking, we keep on knocking and we don't give up until we've got it. God promises that, 'you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart' (Jeremiah 29:13).

3. Can the secrets of the kingdom be known?

The Kingdom of God is full of secrets which only those who keep going on with God discover. 'You are permitted to know some truths about the Kingdom of God that are hidden to those outside the Kingdom' (v.11 TLB). Becoming a citizen of the kingdom is only the start of discovering the secrets of the kingdom. When we come into a personal relationship with Jesus he reveals these secrets to us, such as Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower to his disciples in Mark 4:14-20. Discovering the secrets of the kingdom is an ongoing process which leads to spiritual growth and maturity. Matthew in his account of this conversation about the secrets of the kingdom implies the existence of kingdom values and concepts: 'The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them' (Matthew 13:11,12). The primary principle of the kingdom is growth. This is a basic law of the kingdom, if we keep going on with God, not staying the shallows or sticking with the simple ABC of the gospel but delve deeper into the things of God and his kingdom rule, the more abundance we will receive, the more we will learn, grow and be blessed. However, if we just settle, thus far and no further, stick with what we think we know in a seemingly safe comfortable place, we will inevitably start to cool off. We could even begin to lose what we had already gained. Like driving a car up a hill on an icy day, if we don't keep going we will slide backwards. In the Christian life there is no staying still, treading water. We are either going backwards or going forwards.

Jesus came to usher in the kingdom of God and reveal 'the mystery that had been kept hidden for ages and generations' (Colossians 1:26). The true knowledge of God which was formerly hidden or obscure has now been revealed in Jesus. The secret of the kingdom of God is an open secret. The mystery of God no longer hidden but right bang in the bright spot light of Jesus. God said 'let light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6). The secret of God's kingdom is that there is always more to discover; more glory, more light, more power, more peace, more joy, more love, more of Jesus.

Hymn MP 889:

More about Jesus would I know;
More of His grace to others show,
More of His saving fulness see,
More of His love, who died for me.

*More, more about Jesus,
More, more about Jesus;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love, who died for me.*

More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God, my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.

More about Jesus in His Word,
Holding communion with my Lord;
Hearing His voice in every line,
Making each faithful saying mine.

More about Jesus, on His throne,
Riches in glory all His own;
More of His kingdom's sure increase;
More of His coming, Prince of peace.

E. E. HEWITT (1851-1920)

Prayers of Intercession: Maureen Dickens

Our Father in Heaven, we come before you now with our prayers for the world and those around us.

For the world Lord, we would ask that the leaders of all Nations would come together and work to bring reconciliation and an end to all wars and the injustices found in all parts of society, that bring trauma and endless hurt to all who are affected by these actions. We bring to you the result of the election in Germany and pray that sense and sensibility would come through and all parties would work for the good of the country. We remember our own newly elected government and that they would be open to listening to the people and understanding their fears.

Thank you, Father, that through the Para Olympics we see disabilities in a different light and are humbled by their abilities to shine and the friendships formed through adversity. For your creation, Lord, we ask that you guide the agencies and charities working to create harmony between humanity and the natural world, bringing hope for future generations.

We pray for children and students starting school, college or university and that they and their teachers may know your peace and calm in their new environment and that learning new skills can be made exciting and fun.

For our church Lord, we pray for unity, a community which is in place for one another, thinking of Abbey iCaf starting a new session on Wednesday, also the bible study and Abbey Renew on Wednesday mornings. Teach us Lord, that in putting our trust in you in all things we can do your work and follow your word bringing the reality of Jesus to everyone.

These prayers we lift to you in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn BP&W 356:

One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new,
Keep me travelling along with you:

*And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me.

As I travel through the bad and good,

Keep me travelling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
You'll be telling me the way, I know:

Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you:

You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me travelling along with you.

SYDNEY CARTER (1915 - 2004)

Blessing:

As you walk alongside God the Father on this earth, may he keep you, and bless you in all you think, do and say.

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

Today we are having a Church Meeting after the service. Everyone is welcome to this meeting but only Church Members can vote.

There is a fair trade stall today after the service.

This week:

- **Wednesday 11th September – Abbey iCaf begins a new term**

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

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