

## ***“Seeing Is Believing”***

*Luke 9:18-27 • Isaiah 61:1-4*

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Two weeks ago you could say we had our hearing checked as we looked at the Parable of the Sower. Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” He challenged us to not only hear but to listen. Today it’s time to have our eyes checked. How’s your vision? One day an elderly man was driving home on the freeway when his wife called frantically on his cell phone. She said, “Please be careful. I just saw on the news that there’s some lunatic driving the wrong way on the freeway.” The man said, “One? There’s hundreds of them!”

A couple of women who have been friends for years were having coffee one day. One of them points to a couple of elderly ladies sitting across the coffee shop from them and says, “that will be us in ten years.” Her friend says, “that’s a mirror.” For many of us, our eyesight deteriorates over the years. We find we need glasses or contacts in order to read. We need more light.

One day Jesus tells his closest disciples, “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” Jesus tells them that their vision is going to get better. But not the way we think.

The first question we need to ask is, What is the Kingdom of God? What did Jesus mean? What do we mean when we pray, “thy kingdom come?” Maybe you think the Kingdom of God is Jesus’ way of talking about heaven. That’s been a common way of understanding it for a long time and heaven is certainly part of the Kingdom of God. Or maybe you think of it as Jesus returning at the end of time to make everything right. The coming Kingdom of God would be the subject of the book of Revelation. Again, that’s part of the Kingdom of God but it’s not the whole picture.

If it makes you feel better, Jesus’ closest disciples were kind of fuzzy on what Jesus meant, too. And yet it’s what Jesus talked about most. In Mark 1, the first thing Jesus says after his time of temptation in the wilderness was complete was, “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe

in the gospel.” Then in Acts 1:5, just before Jesus ascends to heaven, we read, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about *the kingdom of God*.” So what is it?

One way to define a kingdom is that place where what I say goes. Dallas Willard said that your kingdom is the “range of your effective will.” God’s Kingdom is wherever his will is being done. In the Lord’s Prayer we are praying that God’s will would be done here on earth, just like it is in heaven. You’re praying that *you* would do God’s will. The gospel accounts of the life of Jesus are a picture of what it looks like when God’s will is done. They show us what the Kingdom of God is like. Jesus brought the Kingdom of God with him. He is the king.

One day Jesus travelled to his hometown of Nazareth. He naturally went to worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath and they asked him to read the Scriptures and preach. Jesus opened the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and began to read today’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 61: “the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor.”

This is what the Kingdom of God looks like. The poor have good news. People who are imprisoned by their sin are set free. Those who mourn are comforted. Jesus then said, “today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The Kingdom of God had come to that place. But they couldn’t see it. They wanted to kill him. The Kingdom of God is always visible but often hard to see. You could say it’s hiding in plain view.

Jesus said, “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” He’s not saying that some of his disciples will live until something big happens. He’s not saying that the Kingdom is coming and some of them will live long enough

to see it. What Jesus is saying is that they will finally *perceive* the Kingdom. It's already there and at some point they will be able to see it.

Really, all of the ninth chapter of Luke is about Jesus demonstrating the Kingdom and the disciples not seeing it. The chapter starts with Jesus sending the twelve disciples out. He "gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to *proclaim the kingdom of God* and to heal." After they return with amazing stories of how God worked, Jesus then feeds the 5000 with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Later Jesus heals a boy with an unclean spirit.

After feeding the 5000 Jesus asks the twelve, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answers for the group when he says, "The Christ of God." It seems like they get it. They understand who Jesus is and what the Kingdom of God is about. Not so fast.

About a week later Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on the mountain and he is transfigured. His glory is revealed to them. And Peter responds with a dumb comment about putting up tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He misses the point. They all do. After repeated demonstrations and explanations of the Kingdom of God, those closest to Jesus start arguing about which one of them is the greatest. They try to stop someone from preaching about Jesus because he wasn't in their group. They wanted to call fire down from heaven to destroy a town that didn't receive them.

After all they had seen, they still couldn't "see" the Kingdom of God. They saw it but it wasn't what they expected. Like us, they thought of kingdoms as being primarily about strength and power and might. They thought of the Kingdom of God would overthrow the kingdom of Caesar.

But the Kingdom of God turns everything upside down. In Luke 9:48 Jesus says, "He who is least among you all is the one who is great." Verse 24: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." And in verse 22, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be

killed." The Kingdom of God is about God's power being made perfect in weakness. The Kingdom of God is where people who have little value in the world's eyes have eternal value to God. The Kingdom of God is heaven on earth.

Listen carefully now. The Kingdom of God is right here right now. It's available to each one of you. Wherever the work of Jesus is happening, there is the Kingdom of God. When a woman goes to the Pregnancy Center and sees her baby's heartbeat on the ultrasound and decides to let that child live, there is the Kingdom of God. When a high school kid at Young Life camp hears the good news of Jesus and decides to give her life to him, there is the Kingdom of God. When a child finally learns to read because someone cared enough to go into the inner city to love the way Jesus loves, there is the Kingdom of God.

One of the most common tools for evangelism is to ask the question, "If you died tonight do you know for certain that God would let you into heaven?" More than anyone else in the last 30 years or so, Dallas Willard helped us understand the Kingdom of God. One of the things he said was, "The appropriate question then is, 'If you *don't* die tonight what are you going to do tomorrow?' and the answer should be, 'I'm going to trust Jesus with all of my life, with everything, and that will allow you to live in the Kingdom of God.'"

The Kingdom of God is available to each one of us right now. We don't have to wait. In fact, God is calling you to bring His Kingdom to people in your life. My prayer for you is that today you would *see* the Kingdom of God and that it would change your life.

*Amen.*