

Series: *THY KINGDOM COME!* September 21, 2008

**THE GOOD NEWS INVASION
Mark 1:14-15**

I. INTRO

- A. Just after 8 a.m. on December 7, 1941, planes flew low over the mountains of Oahu, Hawaii. No one thought a whole lot about it—until the explosions and thick black smoke arose from the fleet moored in Pearl Harbor. And, all of a sudden, it became clear; it was an invasion—resulting in the bloodiest and most expensive conflict of all time—ending with the introduction of nuclear weapons.

-The moment most of us remember is the clear blue sky morning of September 11, 7 years ago—a gorgeous day, until the first plane hit the twin towers. It was an invasion of another kind—and it would change the face and feel of the world.

1. But occasionally, invasions are good. Gary Haugen, President of the International Justice Mission does invasions like that. His organization recently did an invasion of a Thai underground prostitution ring trafficking in 12 and 13 year old girls. I saw the footage. They just went into that hell-hole where the girls were being held and set them free and fed them, washed them, loved them and helped them heal and find new lives. That's a **good** invasion!
2. We live in a broken, fractured world that needs to have the invasions of good multiplied. We in Toronto think kids get shot in other cities. American cities. This past week, a teenager was shot on a basketball court. A train conductor in California is text-messaging friends—resulting in a horrendous train crash that kills 17.

-And that's just the tip of this mountain of heartache that gets lived out in every part of this planet. People who get robbed of basic human rights to food, freedom and education—because someone, somewhere wants more. Children are left defenseless—and hopeless. People starve and die from polluted water—every day—simply because they're born in the wrong place.

-Predators of every form take whatever they want from people at their mercy—sometimes including their lives. Drugs and alcohol rob people of their dignity—and the effects spread in concentric circles to everyone around them.

-And this sadness and unbearable weight of bloodshed, pain, disease, poverty, starvation, war, and devastation by natural disaster is just the external part of much deeper misery. The tragedy of feeling unwanted, unloved, unnoticed, dismissed, used and betrayed creates an ache that goes deeper than any words can describe.

3. The question people ask is, "If there's a Creator, if there's a God, if there's a point to life—why? **Why?** The Bible tells us that it wasn't always this way. It was the result of an unseen invasion of evil; a kingdom of darkness that took up residence here eons ago. And the strangest thing is—we **invited** it!

- B. But one day God said, “**Enough! ENOUGH!**” And the counter-invasion started. This secret invasion started in a place no one expected; a stable. A tiny baby in a manger. God’s invasion started with his Son—and it continues with us. And now we have to decide, “Will I be an active part of this invasion of the goodness and reconciling love and grace of God—the **solution** to all that’s wrong with this planet? Or, will I be part of the problem?” From where I sit—there’s no middle ground!

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE *KINGDOM*

- A. I’m going to be a little transparent here. There’s a lot about this *Kingdom* as Jesus called it that I’ve only begun to really understand—probably in the past 5 years. Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom—the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven—is **way** bigger—way more profound and comprehensive than I’d ever imagined.

1. Let me read what Jesus had to say at the very start of his ministry.
Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God’s Good News. “The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” (Mark 1:14-15 NLT)
 -Notice that Jesus’ preaching is called **God’s Good News**. As I mentioned last week, when Jesus and his followers used the phrase, **Good News**, they hijacked it from the proclamations of the Roman Empire. It was like Jesus is saying in a backhanded way, “Ain’t no Good News coming from Caesar—just more oppression and death. But **now?** Well, there’s a new King on the scene—and this good news for everyone—both God’s friends, **and** God’s enemies!”
2. Jesus message is summarized with these words,
“The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” (Mark 1: 15 NLT)
 -These words would’ve electrified his audience. “The time promised by God” referred to what the prophets had said about God’s intervention in the affairs of this world. The invasion they **expected** wouldn’t be subtle. Cataclysmic—apocalyptic would be more like it! God’s enemies would either submit or get nuked—and suddenly **Jerusalem** would be at the center of world power.
 -The ‘K’ work Jesus used--**Kingdom**—was dangerous to use in that culture. This word made Herod the Great so nervous, he slaughtered all the babies in the Bethlehem area at Jesus’ birth. When Rome caught wind of alternative kingdoms, the people who started them usually ended up on crosses. But Jesus openly talked about this Kingdom—and asked people to follow Him. Doing that would a little like talking about the bomb in your suitcase while you’re going through airport security. Not a real great idea.
3. What does Jesus **mean** when He says that the Kingdom of God is near? Well a kingdom is the effective range of someone’s will and purposes. For example, your car is your kingdom—to some extent. You turn the key—the engine starts—depending, of course, on how **old** your “kingdom” is. You can steer it where you want it to go. You step on the gas, the brake, turn on the windshield

wipers, honk at other drivers—of course, no one here actually **does** that. How many of you have **clean** kingdoms when it comes to the range of your effective will in your car?

-When I get in my car, the seat, the steering wheel and the mirrors are adjusted to my liking; the CD player is playing what I want—with the mixture of treble and bass because...it's **my** kingdom. **My** will gets done.

-When I get to the office—my computer keyboard is adjusted to my height; the pictures I like surround me. The books I need are on the shelf—and the files are arranged—or dis-arranged as I want them because... it's **my** kingdom.

-When I come home from work, supper is simmering on the stove, my favorite chair is ready—with my slippers, my favorite snack and the TV remote nearby because? ...I somehow walked into the wrong house!

4. Jesus didn't say the Kingdom of God was near because God had just now shown up. God is everywhere. God had been working through the Jewish people for 2000 years to make them a light to the Gentiles—to show His power and goodness. But even they only had access to Him through priests in a temple behind a massive curtain.

-And the kingdom of darkness still reigned here on this planet. But when God himself showed up here—all of a sudden **everyone** had access to God—not just a few. **Everyone** had the opportunity to be a part of the restoration of all things; **everyone** could have the power and forgiveness of heaven behind them. This was the beachhead; this was the invasion of darkness by light. For everyone separated and alienated from Him—God would offer His friendship for the asking.

-Suddenly people could come as they are—and be restored. As they were restored and brought back into a relationship with God—they would become part of God making **all** things right—and making **all** things new. **Up there** was coming **down here**. Everything on this planet that's upside down—was going to be turned **right** side up! The surprise was that God wanted a relationship—not a religion!

5. Let me tell what people **didn't** expect. They didn't expect Jesus. They didn't expect the person talking about the Kingdom to tell them that force doesn't work! That evil is overcome, not by armies—or by angels with flaming swords—but by good. They didn't expect someone to say that the meek would inherit the earth—and that the eye for eye rule is a dead end street—and that hatred is overcome, not by **better** hatred, or **holy** hatred—but by love.

-In short, people expected God's Kingdom to hit this planet like a nuclear warhead—where immoral people, oppressors—like the Romans—all get blasted into quivering masses of protoplasm with hair. They expected glittering armies—thrones—revenge—a King with superhuman strength and royal bearing. When Jesus, who looked **so** ordinary said, "The Kingdom's already here! Repent, change your mind about how you've been living—and come into

it”—it wasn’t like he had people running to him saying, “Me first!” People were skeptical.

B. What Jesus said, through his life, about this new Kingdom—this extension of God’s rule and leadership in human affairs is actually quite revealing.

1. Maybe the most obvious sign that, in Jesus, this new kingdom had arrived was how Jesus dealt with pain and disease. Whenever Jesus talked about the Kingdom—he healed people. Whether he touched them, rubbed mud on their eyes, or told them to walk--it didn’t matter--they were healed.
 - a. Probably the most dramatic sign that the old kingdom of darkness was being replaced was how Jesus dealt with the demonic. When he encountered a person possessed or tormented by evil spirits—Jesus threw them out with a word. Unlike the religious officials—the evil spirits always seemed to know exactly who they were dealing with. Evil **had** to flee!
 - b. Jesus made it clear that He had power over everything. Molecular structure was not a challenge for Jesus. He could multiply bread and fish as easy as we can cook it. He can speed up the process of winemaking—by turning water directly into wine without it having to go through the grapevines. But these weren’t magic tricks—done to make people “ooh and aah;”—they showed that God is interested in **all** of life—including hunger and thirst. He calmed storms—and made it clear that in this kingdom—we are not at the mercy of the elements.

-He is Lord of gravity; he is Lord in any tragedy—and He cares about **everything!** And when he rose from the dead—it became clear that He is master of the problem that plagues us and our world every single minute of every single day—entropy and death! And it’s **good** news that Jesus is Lord—not death!

-In all Jesus said and did, the message was clear; “**God** is the good King! He’s compassionate; gentle, loving—and extremely generous. He’s working from the inside out—right in the mess and chaos of everyday life. He’s bringing healing and meaning and health and sanity and balance. **Do you want to be a part of it? Will you be a part of His plan? Will you trust me on this?”**

2. Maybe the best news of all—this realm run by the God of the universe was open to **everyone!** To belong to God and what He’s going you didn’t have to be religious—or even morally upright. The King who made everything and everyone would accept people as they are.

-In fact, Jesus actually said, “This Kingdom is like a huge party a King threw for his son’s wedding. The people who got the engraved invitations had other plans—so the King’s messengers went out and invited **anyone who would come!** Jesus **really** stirred things up when he told the “desirable” people, that

the first would be last; that the prostitutes and tax collectors would make it into the kingdom before **they** did.

-And suddenly, everything got flipped. This time it was **right** side up! Jesus said at the beginning of the greatest message ever given, "Want to know who will be blessed? It's not who you think—the special, the talented, the desirable, those who usually run things--it's the poor. It's not the ones who yell and raise a ruckus—it's the meek and quiet. It's not the ones who kill their enemies; it's the persecuted. And it's not those who play it safe; it's those who stand up to injustice.

3. Here's the caveat. Common sense tells you that if God was doing to make a move like this—you know, start something so powerful in a world filled with pain and need and sorrow—He'd do it quickly. God is a **make it happen** Being! -But that's not what Jesus said. He compared this Kingdom to tiny seeds planted in dirt. If you've ever had a garden—you know that seeds don't look like agents of activity. But put them out of sight in the ground—and slowly but surely, they grow. When you look at a Sequoia—365 feet tall, 35 foot in diameter—the lesson is clear; don't underestimate the power of small things stuck in the dirt!

III. PART OF THE **PROBLEM**...PART OF THE **SOLUTION**

- A. In his book, **The Divine Conspiracy**, Dallas Willard uses an illustration that I found helpful in understanding Jesus' words, **The Kingdom of God is near**. Willard grew up in a part of rural southern Missouri when electricity, in his words, was only available in the form of lightning! In his last year of high school, the local electric company extended their lines to there area—and electric power became available to homes and farms.

-He said that electricity changed **everything!** All of a sudden the relationships they had with hot and cold, light and darkness, clean and dirty and cooking and preserving food were changed for the better! The message could be, "Repent—change your minds about your kerosene lamps and iceboxes and battery powered radios; the **kingdom of electricity** is at hand!" Apparently—most repented. But some didn't. -Think about this for a minute. Imagine your house without any electric power. Remember the blackout a few Augusts ago? On our street, there are no electric poles or wires. Only a gray box. I don't fully understand electricity—I'm not even sure where ours comes from. I just know it brings **power**—and we have a bunch of stuff in our house that, without that power—is useless. With the coming of the kingdom comes unimaginable power. We don't see it. We don't even understand it—or all it can do. But it's there—and it softens our hearts and gives us power to change; it brings light to our darkness; it helps us keep track of time—and hear the music of life. Now—does that **help?**

1. I thought about Jesus message to the world. "God is coming **here!** He's setting up this secret kingdom that will eventually undermine everything. It will transform your way of life! And it will ultimately make all things right, reconcile people to God and to each other. It will eliminate evil, addictions, injustice, disease, pain, sorrow! And it will bring you inner joy and meaning like **nothing**

you've ever experienced. Everything—**everything** God is up to is powerful—and really, **really** good!

-But you and I have to **choose** the Kingdom. We have to actively **choose**, in the power of God to be a part of the solution to pain and greed and broken promises and poverty. It's an **inner** choice of the heart, and it's an **active** choice of how we use our lives and all the resources we are blessed with. And there's no neutral position. If you **don't** become a part of the solution to the problems of this world—you actually become part of the problem.

2. One of the huge questions that always comes up is, "I don't see anything! To me, it looks like evil, oppression, disease, suffering, starvation is winning—and the "haves" are still running the world. The **secret** of the kingdom is that there is the beachhead part that has already started. People can still freely choose in this time—it's a time of grace and generosity. When Jesus comes back—that will complete everything—and darkness will be banished. And the time for choosing—for second chances will be over, too. So we live between the **already...and the not yet!**

-Jesus compared this kingdom to a hidden treasure some guy finds in a field. So, imagine—he's digging around, hits something hard—opens this box—and he sees this glint of gold on the inside. Problem. The field doesn't belong to him! So, he goes home, liquidates his assets—and **buys the field!** The treasure is worth **everything he has!** So he gladly trades up! The point? **You have to trade up!**

3. So, if this invasion of all that's good, backed by the power of God is such a treasure, why doesn't everyone believe? What doesn't everyone buy in? In fact, why is it that people who attend churches treat God's leadership like it's a hassle they have to endure instead of a treasure?

-I'll give you a couple of reasons—right out of Jesus simple message. Let's read it again:

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" (Mark 1:14-15 NLT)

The first part of Jesus' message was—"Repent!" Rethink your whole life! Re-evaluate **everything**. Rethink how you spend your money, how you handle your relationships, how you work, what you value, how you spend your time—everything!

-Let me ask some questions: How do you think it's going in our world. You know, with all our advances in technology and medicine and psychology? We've perfected marketing, financing, computers—we have just about any gadget people could ever think up—tiny wafer-thin devices that can hold 5000 songs.

-We've had thousands of years to figure out how to govern perfectly, make sure everyone gets fed and housed and educated. We've studied criminology, the family, philosophy, international relationships. We've researched pleasure, sex,

nutrition, depression. And know all this knowledge is available at the click of a mouse. How many of you think all this stuff is bringing us closer and closer to being the peaceful, well-fed, anxiety free, well-organized people of planet earth? Is it workin' for ya! It doesn't appear that way to me.

4. And that's why Jesus said, "You're going to have to rethink **everything!** **EVERYTHING!**" What you believe about money—and its relative importance to a good life. He said, "You're going to have to decide whether holding on to grudges and every wrong ever done to you—helps; or...you **could** actually forgive! You'll have to decide what you believe about the power of love—and whether power makes you important. You'll have to rethink what you believe about what matters and what doesn't—and where happiness and peace and grace and satisfaction and healing comes from.

-See, we sometimes think sin is this big messy list of things we shouldn't do. But, at the core, sin is about rebellion. Rebellion against what God says about us, about Himself—about life. Rebellion is thumbing your nose at God's way—God's leadership--as deficient and unworthy—and choosing your own way. Jesus said, "**Repent** of your sin..." Rethink your life--and **where you're going!**"

-To be honest, we want all the good things of the kingdom. We **want** a leader like God who will clean up the mess and make sure everyone has what they need. We want a world at peace—a world that's not trashed and polluted. We want to see people live in loving, forgiving relationships with each other—and with God. But rethink our own lives—and make radical changes...? Hmmm!

5. And there's another barrier. Jesus said, "**Believe the Good News!**" God is close in Jesus. If Jesus is God—then **everything** He says is absolutely true and right. Jesus often said, **Believe!** Live by faith. Trust me. Have faith in me! -And yet His ways seem to run so upside down from the way things work. Jesus tells us to live more simply—so we can help others in need. How many of you think **that** goes over well in our world?

-Jesus said to love—outrageously. To even love and forgive people who make our lives miserable. Last Tuesday night, a woman pulled into the parking lot at Staples and slammed into the back of Lori's van while she was inside the store. She didn't seem all that concerned about it—and told me over the phone the other night that, in parking lot accidents, everyone pays for their own damage. I struggled to **love** her—or even like her! But my natural feelings aren't Jesus' way.

-I mean—Jesus is...**hard** sometimes! To not retaliate; to actively take the initiative to do things **I** would want people to do for me. To forgive when I don't **feel** like it! To serve when I want to boss; to keep my promises when it's no longer convenient to do that!

-I could go on—but I want to ask—do people tend to **believe** the Good News. That God is here—that we have access to his leadership—to all He's up to through Jesus—and that this is the smart way to live?

-Jesus said, "Repent—rethink the way you're living—where it's getting you and others—and believe the Good News. There *is* a better way!

- B. There's an image Jesus often used to describe what He is looking for, at the core, in our hearts. And this may, more than anything, explain where we *really* struggle. The image is that of a child. You see it all through his teaching. Let me read what Jesus says:

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 18:1-4 NLT)

1. Now, it would be very easy for us to get a little huffy with the disciples and think, "Well I *never...!* How could they be so crass in their grab for power?" But think about what Jesus is saying here. How many governments ask kids for advice on strategy for government financing? How many hospitals, when they're facing a crisis say, "Let's bring in the kids"?

-Children are seen as *needing* to be taught and cared for. And *they* know they need outside help, too. They'll say things like, "Hey, I'm just a kid!" Jesus says, "If you want to really *get* what the kingdom is like—and operate in the realm of God's good leadership, you've got to start over." In fact, when Jesus was talking to a high level religious leader once, Jesus said, "Nicodemus—you've got to be born *over* again!"

-That's a pretty graphic image, isn't it? There you are, naked, screaming, red and wrinkled—and *totally* helpless! But it's the only way to be born, isn't it? And it's an unbelievable miracle—if you've ever seen it!

2. See, here's the deal. When you come into this Kingdom of Jesus—and put yourself under His leadership—there is this humbling thing about *repenting* of the way you've done life, done power, done money, done sexuality, done business and done family. And when people see themselves as important and powerful and significant—worth learning *from...?* It's almost impossible to give up that advantage.

-Jesus was once approached by a guy who had it all. Youth. Money. And Power. He's described as a *rich young ruler*. He's even moral—he tells Jesus that he's been keeping the commands of God ever since he can remember.

-Jesus loved him—then said, "Give it *all up!* Like sell everything—give it to the poor--then come and follow me." And the guy *walked away. Just WALKED AWAY!* Jesus said, "It's almost impossible for rich people to come into my kingdom, under my leadership!" Know why? He had to give up the edge he felt he had on most people. At most he wanted to make a *lateral* move—not move *down*. But it doesn't work that way with Jesus—and some people would apparently rather walk away.

-That's why Jesus would say that it's the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who get kicked around in life that the kingdom belongs to. They have a lot less to lose; they have a lot less invested in the power structures and institutions of this world system.

3. But you need to know that even though this Kingdom Jesus brought by his life and death seems hidden and small—and sometimes foolish—the scope of what is going on under the surface of life on this planet would blow us away if we could truly see the immensity of His plan. He's at work **everywhere**.
 -One small example. Remember how impenetrable the iron curtain of Communism was? Then in 1989—it suddenly and unexpectedly came crashing down—starting with Romania. And behind the movement in Romania—was a praying church. Candles behind the wall.

-God has his people **everywhere**. People of the Good News—that the king of **all** good is on the move! But because it's driven by love and grace, this movement sometimes gets trampled on. It sometimes seems embarrassingly weak. Naïve, even.

-But, just like Jesus hanging dead on a cross—appearance can be quite deceiving. So. Right now God is on the search for common people—like you and me—who will give up the way we've always done things, and do things **His** way. People who will follow His king and righteous leadership and live in His power. Jesus question for you and me is...Will you follow? Will you humble yourself like a little kid, lay aside the way you've always done things—and do things **God's** way. Will you be a part of the problem...or part of the solution?

IV. CLOSING

- A. When our son Matt was little, one of his favorite Disney movies was **James and The Giant Peach**. It was a story about this kid, James, who had this miserable existence—being worked like a dog by his two aunts. One day, a guy comes along with **Good News**. Things were about to change dramatically for him—and it would all happen because of a giant peach that James and a bunch of bugs would ride across the ocean to a whole new life. A **very** strange story. What I really like, though, is the song at the end, written by Randy Newman—simply called, **Good News**. Listen to the words:

Good news is blowin' in your window
 Good news is knockin' on your door
 Good news is comin' round the corner
 Good news is rollin' round your floor

Where can all my troubles be?
 Must be good news chasin' me
 Good enough to set everybody free
 Good news, good news, good news
 (Good news)

-Listen to a sound clip from it. It's one of those songs that makes even **me** want to dance—and I can't dance!

- B. See, here's the deal. We believe the Good News. We **receive** that Good News. And then we become infected. And we become part of the Good News invasion! We are carriers of the Good News virus. Over time, it affects us so deeply—that wherever we are—there's **something about our lives** that makes the fact that we're there—Good News! That, friends, is the life I desperately want!