

## *The Kingdom of God*

### *Luke 8:1-3*

Amos was anything but a pet prophet for the powerful. He was neither educated nor erudite. But God called him from the sheep pastures south at Tekoa of Bethlehem to voice His fierce judgement against a wicked, wayward people.

Israelites had become enthralled and enamored with pagan idols. Painted prostitutes and stone sculptures, the smell of incense and the chanting of richly robed pagan priests had numbed their spiritual sensitivity. So they probably laughed when Amos told them about the Lord's most terrible judgement of all.

*"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord." Amos 8:11*

In Galilee, quiet country people lived in the very heart of that prediction. But not because of God's anger. They did not worship idols. No, simple circumstances blotted out God's light.

The hills of Galilee were freckled with farm towns and sleepy little villages, laced together by a spider web of footpaths and donkey trails. It was the place country people called home.

Judaism's finest teachers were at the temple. But Jerusalem was far to the south in Judea. And there were great synagogues with gifted rabbis in cities like Chorazin and Capernaum. So they could worship there. But those cities were at least two days off.

Of course, a few of the farm towns in Galilee were large enough to small stone synagogues. And a rabbi read from the Law and the Prophets each week at Sabbath services.

But his sermons were dust dry. All he talked about were conflicting opinions of ancient scribes. So the people were more confused when they left than they were when they came.

Worse yet, Old Testament scriptures were hand copied scrolls. And they were so scarce and expensive, shepherds and shopkeepers, housewives and day laborers in small communities could not afford them. So they lived without the light and life of God's Word.

Jesus preached in all the bustling port cities that crowded around the Sea of Galilee. He even preached in Jerusalem and cities throughout Judea.

But God's Son loved the country people just as much as He did those in the city. So our Savior did not limit His ministry to crowded cities and busy marketplaces.

*Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. Verse 1*

Christ did not care if crowds were small. So He paused at dusty country crossroads. And sometimes only few farmers or a handful of housewives stopped to listen.

But His message was always the same. The Kingdom of God!

### *Definition*

In three bare bones verses, Luke summarized long months of the Master's ministry. Jesus walked over hills and down into dells, past wheat fields and hillside vineyards just to bring God's Word to those country people.

Still, it almost seems a waste of time. After all, our Savior had but a few short years to preach and teach. Why waste time with such small crowds?

The reason is a truth that still shines today. Those uneducated country people had a right to hear. And what they had a right to hear about was the Kingdom of God.

The Gospels tell us that was always our Savior's message. Sometimes He told parables. And always for the same reason: to explain and illustrate what the Kingdom of God is like.

And when Jesus sent His twelve disciples out by pairs, their message was the same as His.

*He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. Luke 9:2*

After Christ returned to Heaven, His appointed messengers preached the very same message. In fact, Luke wrote that was Paul's message when he was under house arrest at Rome.

*And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. Acts 28:30-31*

The Kingdom of God is still the message our Master wants us to understand. And for good reason.

The Kingdom of God refers to any person or place where people live in a personal relationship with Him. It includes all those who both cherish and strive to do His perfect will.

The glittering halls of Heaven are the epitome of God's Kingdom. There, holy angels hurry to do anything and everything the Creator desires.

One day Jesus will return to this earth. Then He will rule from a throne in Jerusalem. And all this world will be included in the Kingdom of God.

But that is yet to come. Right now, this world is in open rebellion to the rule of God. So His Kingdom is not comprised of cities and states. Instead, He rules and reigns over individual hearts.

*...the kingdom of God is within you. Luke 17:21 (NIV)*

Jesus told Pontius Pilate that the Kingdom of God was His personal kingdom. And He was and is and ever shall be its King.

*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36 (ESV)*

Our Savior also said that men can only become subjects in God's eternal Kingdom by choice.

*Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all. Luke 18:17*

That is what Jesus preached in those farm villages. He told people that God loved them and wanted to be their one and only King. He wanted to rule over their hearts, to protect and empower them, to bless them, build them up, and enrich their lives.

Still, there is one problem. Entering God's Kingdom does indeed come by repentance and faith. But we are so sinful, we are both unwilling and unable to live by God's standards.

That is why Jesus came. He did not merely come to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He also came to purchase it.

And by His shed blood we can be citizens of God's Kingdom.

## *Deliverance*

Jesus was not alone when He walked down those dusty roads from one Galilean village to another. His disciples were with Him. And so were some godly women.

*The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Verses 1-2*

Those women came from all walks of life. Some lived in small towns. One was the wife of a high official in Herod Antipas' court.

But they all had one thing in common. When they heard the Savior say God wanted to gather them into His arms and make them both His children and heirs, they believed Him.

And when they chose to place personal trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord, wonderful things happened. Some of them were plagued by savage demons. Others lived with pain and problems that turned their noondays into midnights.

But when they trusted Jesus with a faith as simple as that of a small child, Christ's power flowed into their lives. And they were forever set free.

John the Baptist preached the message first. He said that entering God's Kingdom demands that we repent: that we radically change our thinking.

*Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:1*

If we are to be included in God's Kingdom, we must love everything we once loathed. And we must disdain everything that was once our delight. That is essential because the very essence of God's Kingdom is living in the center of His perfect will.

That is why Jesus gave us what we have come to call the Sermon on the Mount. He was teaching us about the ethics and standards living in the Kingdom of God demands.

However, we do not have the ability to change our thinking. Diseased by sin, we are incapable of any attitudes, aims or actions but darkness and death, not light and life. So all God demands of us is that we sincerely want to repent.

If we do that and place personal trust in Jesus, He will enable us to make every change we need to make. He will chase every shred of the devil's darkness and free us from the chains of every sinful addiction and attitude.

That is what happened to a woman named Mary Jesus met in the little lakeside village of Magdala.

*Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Verse 2*

Mary was an extreme case. Satan had enslaved her with seven of his dark demons. But when she trusted in Christ, He finally, fully and forever delivered her.

Mary's story is enshrined in the scriptures for a good reason. It teaches us that no matter how deep and dark or how entrenched sin might be in our lives, trusting in Jesus will bring us freedom.

And that really is Good News. We do not have to struggle and strive to defeat the power of sin and Satan in our lives.

We can live in the freedom and forgiveness, the light and the love of the Kingdom of our God and Savior.

Jesus Christ!

## *Dedication*

Jesus was also accompanied by twelve men He personally and individually appointed for a high and holy purpose.

*He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him... Mark 3:14*

That was why the Twelve were with Jesus as He walked down country lanes from one village to another. He wanted them to be with Him.

Those twelve men did not participate in the Master's ministry as they traveled walked the footpaths that wove the hills of Galilee. They just listened to what He said and watched what He did.

Before long, they would be doing what Jesus did. Then the demoniacs and the derelicts, the suffering and the sinners who came to Jesus would be coming to them. And when that day came, they would know just what to do. They had watched Jesus.

Then and now, becoming part of God's Kingdom demands that we eagerly and avidly imitate Christ as our Commander and King. That is on reason why we study God's Word.

We read the Gospel accounts for the same reason the Twelve followed Jesus. In the stories of our Savior's life, we see how He responded to criticism and how He treated suffering people. We learn how our Lord lived, so we can imitate Him.

One day soon, the Savior will have work for us to do, just as He did for His Twelve disciples. But if we have not studied how He acted and reacted to each and every situation that arose, we cannot imitate Him. And victory is always out of reach if we do not.

The women who followed Jesus did not do so out of some misguided attraction or mere affection. They did not walk along with Him just to be with Him, either.

They followed Jesus because He had done so much for them. And because He had helped them, they wanted to help Him.

*...some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. Verses 2-3*

A considerable company of men and women walked the footpaths of Galilee. And they all had to eat.

So those women did what they could. They offered Jesus what they had. Some of them had money. So they brought it to the Savior who loved them and begged Him to use it however He chose.

Others had no money. Still, they did what they could. They cooked food, shopped for supplies and washed clothes.

On Mount Horeb, Moses talked with God. And the Lord told the old shepherd He had appointed him to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt: a powerful nation with vast resources and a savage army.

That worried Moses. There were no witnesses when God spoke to Him. So why would the Israelites believe the Lord had appeared to him? And what could a simple shepherd do to convince both them and Pharaoh that all of God's power flowed through him.

God did not rebuke Moses for his fear. Instead, He answered those fears with a simple question.

*Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'"*

*The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?"*

*And he said, "A staff." Exodus 4:1-2*

That simple shepherd's staff became the instrument of God's power for Moses. When he stood at the edge of the Red Sea, he raised that same staff and the waters parted. And when the people needed water, he struck a dry rock with it, and a river gushed out.

God used what Moses had. All the old shepherd had to do was give it his Lord.

God's question to Moses is also His question to you and me. What is in your hand? What do you have?

God never demands anything of us other than what He has already given us. True, we may not have much: a little ability or a few dollars.

But that is what He will choose to use to glorify the blessed name of His Son. Nothing more and nothing less than what we have.

Of course, Jesus did not have to accept the money those women offered Him. He was and is and ever shall be the Lord of all the universe. The earth and the fullness thereof are His.

He has no needs. So He does not have to work through the poor and pitiful things we have. But just as He chose to use what women brought Him in Galilee, so He is willing to use what we have.

God used Moses' staff to do great and marvelous things. And He can use what we have in ways that are every bit as powerful.

Just as He did with the women who followed Him in Galilee, Jesus will accept anything we offer Him. But we must freely give it to Him. So the question remains.  
What is in your hand?