Epiphany 3B 2021 Is God’s kingdom still here?

Jesus burst onto the scene of Galilee by proclaiming the gospel. He boldly announced that everything that God had promised about the salvation of the world was now fulfilled. He also said that the kingdom of God is now here.

Those are some heavy and wonderful claims! The bible is about Him, points to Him and every promise of God is fulfilled in His coming. Can this be true if the bible is understood to be all about me, fulfilled in me and should be interpreted through my eyes?

This sort of biblical interpretation reads into the bible what one wants to hear. It makes you feel good about yourself and falsely offers whatever your heart desires. Reading into the sacred text can never lead to God’s Truth. God must give the eyes to see Jesus in every text of the bible. That is the opposite of the devil’s half-truth that by disobedience, the eyes will be opened.

Christ never put himself into the text. He is the Word of God made into flesh. In His coming into human flesh, the promises of God are fulfilled.

The second claim of Christ is that the kingdom of God is here. That too is a bold claim. How does Jesus understand the kingdom of God?

He cannot understand the kingdom of God coming in the form of an earthly political kingdom. For he did not lead a rebellion against the government nor push for a military coup or bloodless revolution.

In what way did Jesus bring God’s kingdom? He could not have meant it in the way of creation, in that all that God made belongs to His domain and falls under His rule. He did not come to save the planet from pollution, nor is He worried about carbon in the atmosphere. All of creation will burn. Christians engage in good stewardship of creation because God has re-created them in baptism not because they seek to create utopia.

How could there be a kingdom that is more important to God, than saving the planet? The thought of it is so counter-cultural and might be held to be blasphemous by the eco-zealots.

God’s kingdom is ultimately and eternally concerned about His rule over people through His Word. Can we be certain of it? Hear Jesus explain how His kingdom is here.

“Repent and believe the gospel.”

That’s a strange way to usher in God’s eternal kingdom. God is above all the nations. He who made the universe will also destroy it. He brings in a new rule of faith. His kingdom does not come from a revolution, or from our efforts.

Well that is confusing considering that Jesus tells us to repent and then to believe. Are not the moods of those verbs to repent and believe, imperative? Is Jesus not ordering us to repent and then to place our trust in Him? Is this not something I must do? And if I am commanded to do it then I am the one who ushers in God’s kingdom.

What is the nature of repentance? Is it a work of man or a gift of God. We can look at the Ninevites who heard Jonah preach a devastating sermon on God’s destruction of their city that would surely come in 40 days.

Nineveh was the oldest and largest city of ancient Assyria. The Assyrians were known for their brutality in conquering their enemies. They were famous for displaying the severed heads of their foes on pikes. They deported entire conquered nations and ended their cultures. They worshipped the goddess Ishtar and held in homage thousands of lesser deities.

After hearing God’s rebuke, they believed God, called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them, meaning the king and his entire court, to the least of them, every peasant. Was this because of anything they decided to do, or was it a result of hearing God’s law preached to them?

Can anyone wake up and decide that today will be the day that they will undertake to create a broken heart? Or is a broken heart the result of some tragedy or unrealized dream?

When God says that our hearts have no natural love for Him but only hostility, then only He can give us true contrition and sorrow also called repentance. It is nothing other than an honest agreement that God’s moral law has condemned us all.

Every Christian upon hearing the law’s condemnation than spiritually and metaphorically puts on sackcloth. It is the same a burlap. It is rough on the skin and hurts to wear, quite the opposite of smooth royal satin. It is a reminder of our sinful flesh.

Besides an honest confession of sin, repentance is also lived out in dust and resides on the ash heap. It is the dump where garbage is burned. It is agreeing that everyone who eats of the forbidden fruit in Eden shall surely die. Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes. Ash Wednesday’s refrain is “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Our mortal death is what our sin has brought. It is the payday of sin. Can this be possible for us who are trying our best, have done a lot of good in this world and try to live moral, upstanding lives? Have you seen how many around us live godless, loveless, and immoral lives? Surely God must take our good intentions and good values and fine accomplishments into consideration!

The soul that sins shall die.

When God saw the reaction of the Ninevites to God’s impending destruction, then God held off from destroying them. After all, He gave them faith that God would be merciful. Psalm 113 (v7) says: [God] *raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.”*

Sometimes it looks like the good things of this world are overwhelmed by the bad. Sometimes it looks like the harder we try to follow God’s word, the more we suffer in this world. Sometimes it looks like there is no way out of the pit that our sins and lawless deeds have dug for us.

Jesus says to you: My words will never pass away. My kingdom is not of this world. You will rule all the nations at my side. You are my beloved bride and I share all that is mine with you, my beloved!

So why would you delay to repent and believe that God has forgiven you? Why would you think it is too good to be true when Jesus has brought you into His eternal kingdom? God delights in showing mercy and kindness to the poor and those broken down by his law. His kingdom is wherever his gospel is proclaimed and the good Holy Spirit gives faith to say: Yes, it is true, by God’s grace, I too, am a member of God’s royal family.

God has spoken. Who can doubt that His kingdom is here?