

The Story Series
Week 24: No Ordinary Man
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We are continuing on today in our discussion about God's great game plan here on earth to save us. We are using a tool called *The Story*. It's a chronological retelling of the Bible, from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation. This is week 24 of 30 weeks, so we are making great progress.

In the last few weeks, we've covered Jesus' birth and baptism. We experienced Jesus overcoming the temptations of the devil, and then performing some miraculous deeds. This Jesus is no ordinary man. That's our topic today. No ordinary man.

Jesus is quite peculiar. He is this foreigner who entered our world and spoke a strange language about the kingdom of God. Jesus says, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!"

The kingdom of God is one of Jesus' favorite topics. He loves talking about it. Sixty times in the gospels Jesus talks about this kingdom of God. If Jesus talks about it that much, maybe we ought to ask, "What is this kingdom of God all about?"

If you think about it, we don't talk much about kingdoms these days. We're not too fond of monarchies, of an absolute rule. We're all about democracy, where everyone gets a vote. Someone having absolute authority over every detail of our lives – that just doesn't sound too appealing, does it?

Perhaps this is why Jesus talks so much about the kingdom, because we naturally fight the idea that there is only one true King who has ultimate authority over our lives. That's what the Bible teaches. Already back in the Old Testament, the prophets envision a time when God will establish a kingdom here on earth. The prophets spoke of an earthly king, the Messiah, who would come and rule the hearts of all people. Through the prophets, God said, "They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way."

From the very beginning, God's people set their hope on a coming King. And according to the New Testament, their hopes are realized in the person of Jesus, who enters the world and says, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News."

To answer the question, "What is God up to in the New Testament *Story*?" we must include the concept of kingdom. God is in the business of creating a kingdom. To fully understand Jesus, we have to understand the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is so often misunderstood. When most Christians think of God's kingdom, a physical place or location comes to mind. But in the Greek, the kingdom of God denotes an action, or the

phenomenon of God at work. It would be better translated as “reign of God” rather than kingdom of God.

In other words, the kingdom or reign of God breaks forth anywhere and anytime God’s people live according to the will of God. When we live by God’s commands, God’s kingdom comes. As we pray in the Lord’s Prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.”

When the crucified thief on Calvary pleads with Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus replies, “Today (literally “at this moment”) you are with me in Paradise.” In other words, by the thief entrusting his life into the saving arms of Jesus, he experiences the in-breaking of God’s kingdom, at that very moment.

And so it is with us. When we stand before God in this place and confess our sins, the kingdom of God breaks forth, and at that very moment forgiveness is graciously declared over our lives. When we gather around the Lord’s Table and receive Christ’s body and blood, the kingdom breaks forth, and life and salvation trump the sin and death of our lives. Our journey here on earth becomes a kind of dress rehearsal for the coming heavenly kingdom that the Bible speaks of at Christ’s second coming.

The kingdom of God is so multi-faceted that Jesus chooses to tell parable after parable to help us catch glimpses of the way God is at work in the world.

A farmer went out to plant some seed, Jesus says. As he scatters the seed, the seed lands on all kinds of surfaces: the rock-hard footpath, shallow soil, rocky soil, thorny soil, and fertile soil. It just so happens that some of those seeds start to sprout and grow. Some people, Jesus says, allow the seed or the teaching of God’s Word to penetrate their lives and they begin to bear fruit. Their lives begin to mirror the good and gracious nature of God.

Such a life becomes a vessel by which God’s kingdom breaks forth into the world, and many lives – 30, 60, even a hundred people – are touched by the grace of God in real, powerful ways. The kingdom comes near. God’s will is done. God’s plan to live life with us is realized.

And yet other people, even though the seed of God’s Word is placed upon their heart, they don’t allow it to penetrate their lives. They don’t have time to nurture something new in their lives because they are so consumed with their own agendas. Consequently, God’s Word bears no fruit. An opportunity for God’s kingdom to break forth into the world goes unrealized.

If we take this parable that Jesus tells as a mathematical equation, then three out of four people ignore the idea of a kingdom. Either they are oblivious to what God is up to, or they have no desire to be a part of what God is doing here on earth. Either way, God’s heart is grieved. Remember, God’s greatest desire is to have a relationship with us. God’s Grand Vision is to win our hearts back. God’s game plan is to become so real to us that we just

can't help but scatter the seeds of God's grace and love into other people's lives, in hopes that all people might come to know the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you've heard the story of the two boys, one eight-years-old and the other 10. They were misbehaving so much that their mother sent them to the pastor, because everybody knows that the pastor can fix anything. And the pastor thought to himself, "I think I'll remind these boys that God is everywhere, so they need to behave because they are always in the presence of God."

And so this pastor calls the ten-year-old into his office, leaving the eight year old out in the waiting area. The pastor said, "Son, do you know where God is?" The boy's eyes widened and a look of panic set in to his face. The boy had no response. So the pastor said, "I'll ask again, 'Do you know where God is?'" The boy still didn't say anything. So the pastor asked a third time, "Do you know where God is?" At that, the boy jumped up, ran out of the office, grabbed his little brother by the arm and said, "Boy, are we in trouble! Let's get out of here!" "What's wrong?" the little brother asks. And the big brother says, "God is missing, and they think we did it!"

The great announcement of the kingdom is: God is not missing. God's kingdom is right here, among us, working through us, transforming and equipping us. As I was preparing my report to the congregation for the annual meeting, it became quite obvious that God's kingdom has indeed come near. In a time when the financial situation of our world is so uncertain, God continued to generously provide for us, so that we could generously provide for the work of the kingdom in our community.

Over \$252,000 was given to the mission and ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church last year – a record high, in a time when the world is experiencing a financial crisis. When it comes to the kingdom of God, it matters not how well the markets are doing on Wall Street. The only thing that matters is how willing God's people are to entrust their lives, their time, and their riches into God's hands for the sake of the kingdom. Even in times of scarcity, God is able to do miracles through His people who surrender their lives over to Him. "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else," Jesus says, "and everything you need will be given to you."

God has richly blest us by allowing us to be participants with him in his kingdom – a kingdom that is forever breaking forth into the world. You see, we don't have to take God out into the world, because God is already out there. God is already at work in the world. God sent Jesus into the world in order that the world might be saved, in order that people would recognize how God's presence and power are at work in their daily lives.

That's our calling. To help people recognize the present-day power and influence of God at work in this world; to help people recognize that because of God's great love for us, Jesus Christ was sent to redeem and save us.

The kingdom of God has indeed come near. How blessed we are to be a part of it! God's presence and power are manifest in the very person of Jesus. Jesus says, "I have been given

all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Jesus is our King. He is the one in control. And God’s kingdom continues to expand and thrive as we seek to live according to the ways of Jesus our King.

In Christ alone do we put our trust. Christ alone do we serve.

So what on earth is God up to? God is creating a kingdom, one where Jesus is King. And those who acknowledge Jesus as their King are welcomed into this kingdom, to become co-workers with King Jesus. God has this great network of kingdom people all over the world, for the sake of redeeming and saving each and every last person. The church is the training facility for God’s kingdom, a place where kingdom people hang out together to be encouraged and equipped to go out into the world to help others sense how the love of God in Christ is forever and always breaking forth into this world.

How blest we are to be chosen by God to be a part of this, to live within the kingdom of God, to be invited to dine at the King’s Table, to be given the peace of mind, knowing that we are being protected and provide for by One who is great and worthy and true to his Word.

The kingdom of God has indeed come near. Thanks be to God! Amen.