

## Know That The Kingdom Is Near

Where did you get that from? As Christians who share our faith, that is a question someone might ask you. You say that people are sinners and evil from birth, and what do they say? Where did you get that from? You tell them that Jesus has taken away not just some of your sins, but all of them, and what do they say? Where did you get that from? It reminds us to be in God's word so that we can give an answer to those around us.

But this question isn't just a question that others ask us. It's also a question that you might find yourself asking Luther. When Luther was speaking about the words, "Your kingdom come" in the LORD'S Prayer, he said: "*How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.*"

God's kingdom is not laws and states. God's kingdom is God's word working on the hearts of us humans. But we ask the question of Luther: where did you get that from? And, as we read sections of God's word like these, this morning, we see so very clearly what Luther meant and that he was right.

In these words Jesus sends out 70 disciples to do evangelism work. He tells them to go from town to town and preach God's word. He even gives them their sermon theme. He tells them to say: "*The kingdom of God is near you.*"<sup>1</sup> And then what happened? Jesus told them exactly what would happen. There would be some who would accept them, receive them and rejoice in the words they would share. But there also would be a different group. There would be a group who rejected their message. Now, notice what Jesus tells them to do when this happens: "*But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.'*"<sup>2</sup>

Notice and see very clearly what was happening here. The kingdom of God was near. The Holy Spirit was active. God was getting his work done. How did they *know* this? They knew that the Kingdom was near because they saw opposition.

Jesus is teaching us a very important lesson. It is a lesson that many Christians have forgotten. When we are born we hate the Holy Spirit. We hate Jesus and the wisdom he teaches us. We go out and say: "you are a sinner." And we say: "Jesus has taken away your sin." And what is the result? They *hate* us.

What is going on here? What is going on in their hearts that they hate this Jesus that we treasure so much? For most unbelievers, God's word is a closed book to them. It is foolishness to them. They don't care about what the bible says simply because they don't get it. But, then there is another group too. There is a group who has heard the voice of God. They have heard God speaking to them through his word. But, when the Holy Spirit presses on their hearts, they push back. The idea that we don't just mistakes, but that we are really, truly evil when we are born—who wants to hear *that*? Jesus did all the work. He took away our sins. He doesn't let us earn our salvation by working for him or choosing him—who wants to hear *that*? These are the thoughts that push the Holy Spirit away.

And what does Jesus say to us? *Now* you know that the kingdom is near them. When they push us away when we share our faith, *then* is when we know God's work is being done. How so? Jesus tells us: "*He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me*"<sup>3</sup>

How do you know that God's kingdom is near? We know it's near because of the opposition we face. That is what our Savior tells us. How sad and sinful it is then when we conclude the opposite. We talk to our relatives or to our friends about Jesus and they push us away. And what is our conclusion? We conclude that God's kingdom isn't here. We wonder what went wrong. We shared *good* news and they reacted like we were feeding them poison. Or, we are tempted to give up on his word. We tell ourselves: If people do not like to hear *all* of God's word, then we won't talk about the stuff that is truly offensive. We won't talk about baptism. We won't talk about the LORD'S Supper. We won't say that every breath and syllable of God's word is true and perfect. We won't say that because,

<sup>1</sup>(Luke 10:9 NIV)

<sup>2</sup>(Luke 10:10-12 NIV)

<sup>3</sup>(Luke 10:16 NIV)

people get angry with us. When, instead, we should boldly speak the truth because it is the only thing that will bring God's kingdom to them.

We face all these temptations. And, we see so clearly that there have been so many times we have given into these temptations. We should have seen the opposition and rejoiced that we have the privilege of suffering for the name of Christ. And, instead, we are tempted to abandon God's word and blame our Savior. When we see these sins, then we can rejoice in the words which follow: *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*<sup>4</sup>

Jesus told them that again, and again, and again, Jesus kept seeing Satan fall.<sup>5</sup> You can just imagine Jesus talking to the 70. You can just picture him saying: "Peter, when you told them that they were sinners on a one-way road to hell and got angry with you, I saw Satan fall. Philip, when you told them so sincerely and clearly that I am the Christ and they laughed at you, I saw Satan fall. Stephen, when you tried to show them from the Old Testament that I was there, leading and guiding history and they refused to hear you—I saw Satan fall. Matthias, when you said that I came to take away all the sins of all the people and that widow, weighted down by the Pharisees cried with joy, I saw Satan fall."

Satan fell every time they shared God's word. And every time they shared God's word, God's kingdom came to them. These words are sweet, beautiful words. For, we know that God's kingdom is near not just because of the opposition we see. No, in a better, fuller way we know the kingdom of God is near us because of what Jesus sees. Just as he spoke to them, he speaks to us. Jesus says to you: "O my child, when you confessed your sin to me and did not cover it up, I saw Satan fall. When you opened up your bible and read God's word, I saw Satan fall. When you came to church and tasted the forgiveness in the LORD's Supper, I saw Satan fall. When you spoke to your relative about sin and they hated you, I saw Satan fall. When you spoke about me the sin I took away and they laughed at you, I saw Satan fall."

And so, my brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God is near you and in you. How do we know this? We know this in part because of the opposition we face. But, most of all we know that we have the kingdom because Jesus sees it.

When we see this, how can we not? How can we not sing words like we find in our final hymn<sup>6</sup>:

O Christ, who sent the Twelve on roads they'd never trod  
To serve, to *suffer*, teach, proclaim The nearer reign of God:  
Send us on ways where faith Transcends timidity,  
Where love informs and hope sustains Both life and ministry.

How can we not sing these words? How can we not rejoice in this truth? Our names are written in heaven. They are not cut into earthly stone that weathers away and people forget. Our names are written in the book of life and given to us through water and word. And finally, how can we not share? Let us always pray for opportunities and courage to share God's kingdom with the world. Amen.

<sup>4</sup>(Luke 10:18–20 NIV)

<sup>5</sup>Ἐθεώρουν τὸν σατανᾶν ὡς ἀστραπήν ἐν τῷ ἔρεινῳ πεσόντα.

<sup>6</sup>CWS 770:3