Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Matthew Chapter Two – Week 50

The Kingdom of God is breaking in

Day 343. The Kingdom

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 3:2).

Last week we talked about repentance. Now, the next question from John's proclamation: what could he have meant by "the kingdom of heaven is near?"

Looking at the 'three kingdoms of heaven' cosmology (day 262 and 269), it is very near – it surrounds us, even embeds within us.

Very good! In what other way may it be "near"?

….

I don't know.

When you see a beautiful sunset, what do you think of?

The magnificent colours, the trees and the birds flying in silhouette, the stillness of the evening – just a wondrous sense of awe of God and what He has created for me.

Those are wonderful thoughts.

Thank you.

Now, if you were blind, would that make the sunset any less spectacular?

Not for anyone who could see it, no – but I wouldn't know anything about it.

Exactly. Such it is with the kingdom of heaven.

It's there, but we're "blind" to it?

Yup. John the Baptist could have said, "Change your sight, and see God's Kingdom." Or, change your ways, and live in God's kingdom." The essence of his proclamation is this:

- If you live righteously, you will encounter God. If you don't, you won't.

What does it mean to "live righteously?" After you've answered this question, review Matthew 22:37-40, John 13:34-35, and Micah 6:8 to see if they change your answer in any way.

Share your answer with those you trust.

Day 344: God is here

"The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Matthew is quoting Isaiah 40:3 and saying that Isaiah's prophecy applies to John. If we start reading at Isaiah 40:3, we find, "The splendour of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it at the same time. (40:5) … "Here is your God!" (40:9).

Matthew is making a momentous claim. Up to now, he has been telling us "something hugely important is happening, and I need to tell you about it!" And now, in quoting Isaiah, Matthew is stating, "the splendour of God will be revealed to all people … **here is your God.**

Not only is the the Kingdom of God "near" … to those who are willing to see, God is "here."

God Incarnate had arrived.

Matthew tells us that John's purpose was to announce God Incarnate to the people of Israel. What would your reaction be if someone came to you and told you about God Incarnate? What is preventing you from fully seeing and embracing the Kingdom of God like you view (and presumably, enjoy) a sunset? God is with you right now. How is your life with Him?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 345: Matthew 3:6-12

John was baptizing (dunking or immersing) people in the river Jordan as they confessed their sins (where they had missed the mark of God's holiness). In the Jewish tradition of the time baptism (called "mikveh") could be used for conversion to Judaism, ritual purification, or preparation for special occasions such as the Sabbath or holy days. John was using it as a sign of God forgiving them (washing them clean) from where they had missed the mark of God's holiness (i.e., sinned), so that they may comprehend the Kingdom of God and have a rightful place in it.

Then the religious leaders of the day arrived. Pharisees were a lay sect which strove to live according to the laws of God, and encouraged others to, as a way of embracing God's kingdom on earth. The Sadducees were a priestly aristocracy – they ran the temple in Jerusalem, governing the systems of sacrifices by which people made themselves right with God. Both had political power in Israel.

Why was John so furious with them? He accuses them of being snakes, of needing to change their ways and produce proof they had changed, for their eternal salvation was in danger. His accusations imply that the Pharisees and Sadducees were living far from the ways of God.

Why, ironically, may the religious leaders be susceptible to missing the intent of God's ways for His people? How about religious believers generally? How may we guard against this?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 346: The baptism of Jesus

Jesus traveled from Galilee to where John was at the River Jordan, about a 4-day journey. He presents himself to be baptised, and John first objects, then reluctantly does so. Jesus presents Himself now as one washed clean and having a rightful place in the Kingdom of God.

And then something rather surprising happens. John discerns the Spirit of God descend on Jesus, and hears a voice saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The baptism of Jesus is a further seal of His identity. It also gives insight into the mind of God. Jesus has (as far as we are aware), not "done" anything – yet God the Father is well pleased with Him. It is like Gideon hiding in fear at the wine press, and the Angel of God greets him with "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior!" (Judges 6:12) – when to outward appearances he was anything but.

God sees us as we truly are – as He created us. This may not be as others see us, but is to our true identity. How does God see you?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 347: Temptation

After the affirmation of who he is, Jesus heads off to the desert, to fast and pray – and faces temptation – the question of if He will do something He should not. Jesus faced the same life circumstances any of us do: anxiety, uncertainty, temptation, anger, happiness, pain, sorrow. Any emotion we encounter, Jesus has encountered it – and we have the blessing now of being joined with Him, so He also encounters what we do, with us. He knows what we go through.

Think back all that has happened to you this past week. Picture Jesus with you, going through it with you. Knowing that He understands how you felt, talk with Him in your mind about your frustrations, your fears, your joys, all that has occurred. Let Him put His hand around you and share His love with you, His healing love.

Record your conversation with Jesus.

Day 348: Stones to bread

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:3-4).

"Command these stones to become bread."

What does that mean?

I'm glad you asked! You could interpret this to mean, "give yourself everything you need for survival." But if you can do that, why stop there? You could therefore interpret this to mean, "give yourself everything." Unlimited wealth.

Everyone would like to be wealthy.

What do you mean by wealthy?

I guess it changes according to the age you live in. I think everyone would like enough to eat, security, comfort, warmth, peace. And, maybe a little more than what your neighbour has – or at the least, no less.

So, Jesus has gone into the desert – He is hungry, tired, sore. And He gets the thought, "I'm hungry. Why don't I just turn these stones into bread and eat them? No one will ever know .. except Me, Father, and any spiritual beings who happen to be watching …"

Someone is always watching?

God is always aware of everything – including every thought you have, every action you do.

Why did Jesus turn this temptation down, when He supposedly could have fulfilled it?

It would be cheating?

Even more fundamental – Jesus recognized that wealth is not the foundation of life. The foundation of life is the Word of God – and that is what we should pursue. Jesus was willing to sacrifice all, even wealth, to live in the Word of God. That was his priority.

How can you live in the Word of God?

Share your thoughts with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 349: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.