

Expand Heaven Here

It's About the Kingdom of Heaven

All through his ministry, Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of Heaven. Again and again he told us it's time to, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." In 2011, we're going to go explore what Jesus meant when he spoke about this kingdom:

It Has to Be Seen

The Kingdom has to be perceived. If you try to get a sharp definition and a clear scholarly understanding, you don't get very far. Jesus said only those who walk by faith can see it. It's like when the prophet Elisha and his servant were facing the entire Aramean army. The servant could not understand Elisha's optimism. When Elisha prayed, the servant saw that God's heavenly army was indeed bigger than the Aramean's. (See 2 Kings 6).

It Is Supernatural

We tend to think that ultimate reality is what we can see, touch and taste. We're taught that if you can test it and repeat it, then it must be true. But before there was time or material, there was another reality. It was a supernatural, heavenly reality. The things that came to be when God spoke are nothing more than the word of God, secondhand. Spiritual things may not be material, but they are substantial, and they can be perceived. One day, this earth will melt away, and we will all more clearly see the supernatural reality.

It Is Relational

One of the mysteries of God that he is revealing to us is that he is three in one. God has always been three, and he has always been relational. Perhaps the reason God created the universe and humanity, was to share the goodness of his relationship with us. The ultimate heavenly kingdom is based on relationship. When we have healthy relationships with those around us, we are reflecting the nature of the heavenly kingdom

It's Not About Trying to Get to Heaven

This theme is an encouragement to be about the business of heaven coming to earth. It's a wake-up call for those who are passively waiting for heaven. It's a new understanding that our lives are supposed to contribute to the idea of "*on earth as it is in heaven*." We are invited to participate in the purposes of God as he more fully establishes his kingdom here through us.

It's About Matthew 10:7-8

"As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give." (NIV)

It's About the Spheres

This Kingdom of Heaven is entering all areas of our societies. The culture of heaven is being imprinted on all the cultures of the earth. As we explore the theme we'll consider how heaven is expressed in:

- Family
- Education
- Media
- Celebration
- Economy
- Government
- Religion

It's About the Character of God

When we consider what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, we quickly realize we need to understand what God is like. Of course, all of us have limited understanding of this unlimited Being. Yet, God is revealing himself to us. If we pay any attention at all we'll discover what he is like and how he operates.

Expand Heaven Here

“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.’”

—Matthew 10:7-8 (NIV)

Our goal in 2011 is to challenge our views on the kingdom of heaven. Many times, we believe that going to heaven is the end goal for all Christians. But why should we wait when we are clearly commanded to live heaven out on earth now? Shouldn't we live to expand God's kingdom that is already here on earth?

As You Go

Our theme verse starts out with the word “go” which is an action word. Nothing will get done if you don't obey. When God commands or tells us to do something, we have to step out in a partnership with God. We should not sit back, and expect God to do all the work. He has chosen you to advance His kingdom. An example of this would be Israel in Joshua

3:15-16. This is the story of when the Israelites were at a river bank, and on the other side was the Promise Land. God told them to go and to take the land and to put their feet in the water. He told them He would part the water for them. In this example, it took going, stepping out, and obeying. God met them along the way, performing miracles because of their obedience. Our God is an active, alive, and a moving God, who wants to work through us. But first, we have to go to where He is telling us to go.

Preach This Message: The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Near:

The second point in the theme verse is, “The kingdom of heaven is near.” This means, it's not far away or out of reach. It's here and now. In the book of Matthew, Jesus mentions the “kingdom of heaven” 31 times. He describes the kingdom as acts of charity; feeding the poor, healing the sick, driving out demons, etc. A key element that is found in all of these verses is a sense of community, and of giving of yourself and your resources. We can bring heaven to earth right now!

Heal The Sick, Raise The Dead, Cleanse Those Who Have Leprosy, Drive Out Demons.

The Kingdom of Heaven is marked by health and restoration. These miracles are evidence of God's compassion to us, and they give authority to the message.

Matthew 28:18 :19 says, “I have given you authority in all of heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...”

In verse 18, Jesus says, He gives us the same authority that He has been given. What is this authority? This authority is to bind and loosen things on earth and the heavenly realms. (Matt. 18:18)

This authority has no limit! You can say to the mountain move from here to there, and (by faith)it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Matt.17:20). As we can see, we have this authority to these things through faith: healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, along with other miracles.

In verse 19, it talks about going to the nations and disciplining in the ways of Christ. This is how we continue to expand heaven on earth by making disciples of the nations. Which is also mentioned in our theme verse.

Why should we preach? Why should we disciple? Why should we go? Because we can clearly see in the Bible, these things are on God's heart. 2 Peter 3:9b says, “God does not wish for any one to perish.” We also see this in 1 Timothy 2:3-7 which says, “God desires for all to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of truth.” We see this too in Matthew 18:12, the good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find the one that is missing.

Expand Heaven Here: Theme Verse

Being ready to go, preaching, and performing miracles is expanding heaven on earth. Every person who accepts Christ, people who are living lives devoted to Christ, those who are doing justice, those who are laying down their lives for others, those who are feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and offering forgiveness. How can you expand the kingdom here on earth?

Freely You Have Received, Freely Give.

As believers, we have received many things. One that we must share with others is the joy of our salvation. We are no longer bound by sin and death, but have eternal life because of what Jesus has done for us.

Romans 3:24 says, “Salvation is a free gift,” there is nothing we can do to try to earn salvation, it is a gift God has freely given to us. So, because we have been given so much, much is required. (Luke 12:48)

And it’s not only salvation we’ve received. We also have the unconditional amazing love of God. We’ve freely received it, and it’s nothing we’ve earned or deserved. But because God has given us this free gift of his love, we must freely give this love to others. We can do this by loving other people in the same way Christ loves us. And we can do this by sharing his love freely with other people

God doesn’t want us to sit back and be quiet about this gift, but to declare this to everyone, including the nations. Jesus had compassion to give what He had and also to heal. What are other things you can freely give to others? Maybe your time, money, clothes, food, or your presence—Think about it.

On Earth As It Is In Heaven

In this prayer, Jesus instructs us how to pray. “For God’s kingdom and His will to come and be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

This is a huge point, God tells us to pray for His will and His kingdom to come, and not ours. Even Jesus did this. Remember when he prayed and asked God if there were any other way for Him to die? “Take this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42).

It is really cool to read the part where he says, “On earth as it is in heaven” What is heaven like? And how can we make it like that here on earth? Because that’s what Jesus instructed us to pray for!

Further Influences

As we prayed and brainstormed together, there seemed to be several streams flowing. Among them are:

Seeking and Finding

The kingdom has to be *sought* after. It *can* and will be found, and because of this, all these things will be given to you. He has *promised* us his kingdom, we haven’t been asked to seek and achieve something that isn’t obtainable. See Matt. 6:33.

New Things and Transitions

We sensed that God intends new things in the lives of our participants in 2011, and that many were to transition to greater maturity.

Motion

Movement and motion came up—like there are momentous things going on in the heavenlies; and that God wants to move us, change us, and put us into motion.

Other Scriptures

These scriptures came out in our prayer times: Joshua 1:9-11; Psalm 139:7; Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 43:18-19; Jeremiah 1:5-10; Jeremiah 29:11-14; Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Possible Visual Influences

- Layers
- Contrast between grunge and clean
- Calligraphy; calligrafitti
- Architectural elements