

**Texts: Genesis 1:1-2:3**

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> August 2019 (morning)**

**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

For one minute, I wonder if you would turn to your neighbour and discuss what you think the answer **to this question is**: ‘what was the subject most taught about by Jesus?’ You’ve got 1 minute discuss – over to you!

(PAUSE)

One analysis of this question **suggested that ‘love’** came #43, **forgiveness** #32, **money** #4, **Father God** #2 – and top of the list, the most taught about subject by Jesus was **‘the kingdom of God’**! Yet, how often do we talk about the kingdom of God? Or, when did it last feature in your decision-making when you went to the shops?

**It makes me wonder** – is the kingdom of God quite low importance for us? Is personal preference, cultural norms or the survival of our denomination more important than the kingdom of God? Or when we come to decision making, what do we base it upon?

For example, last week we received 70 feedback forms regarding the summer services. The responses will be typed up, discussed within Session and eventually inform what we do next summer. Please do get one in. But let's be honest – there are broadly two groups: one supports the format we had this year, the other prefers to re-establish the Summer Sunday School. There are competing values here – how is Session to make a decision? It may be, though not guaranteed, that a kingdom-focused analysis and discussion might help us discern what is the best way forward, even if it doesn't suit everyone.

**And so today we begin a new teaching series**, which will run for 8 weeks in total, and it will focus on the kingdom of God. **Each week will draw upon** a different portion of Scripture, starting in Genesis and ending up in Revelation, and it is my hope that it will not only sharpen our kingdom-focus, but that we might also see the kingdom of God as a binding theme throughout the Scriptures, from beginning to end, although each part will add a distinctive contribution to our understanding.

Additionally, the series should also help us to see how the Scriptures hold together, that although there are 66 books written by 40 authors over the course of 2000 years, that in fact, the Bible really is one book, with one main author, telling one core story throughout. So, let's get into today's passage.

The phrase **'the kingdom of God'** is never actually used in the Old Testament – it uniquely begins with Jesus in each of the New Testament gospels – and yet, the idea and the reality of the kingdom of God is found everywhere in the Old Testament as well. **Take for example Psalm 47:**

**'Clap your hands, all you nations;**

**shout to God with cries of joy.**

**For the Lord Most High is awesome,**

**the great King over all the earth.'** (v1-2)

Clearly the Psalmist understands God as King, and this was upheld by the people of God across the millennia. But they got this from their theology, from what they understood of God, from the revelation God had given of Himself: that He is was King and as King He has a kingdom.

**And that understanding of God as King has its roots all the way back **into Genesis 1** – ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...And God said, “Let there be light...”’ (v1,3)**

**These words reveal that God alone is sovereign and eternal; He alone existed before all else and it was by His powerful word, by His kingly command, that our universe came into being – and so God is therefore the rightful ruler and King over all creation.**

****I wonder if that shocks you at all**, or makes you a little bit uncomfortable? It might not, but it really should, and when it was first being taught about 4000 years ago, it was a truly shocking claim – because this teaching clashed with the religions and perspectives of the day.**

**In contrast to the other Ancient Near Eastern religions of the time, Genesis 1 is a shockingly controversial rejection of their claim about how the universe came into being. There were several creation myths around at the time, particularly in nearby Babylonia, but they claimed that creation may have come about after a conflict between good and evil beings, or that it came by procreation of such divine beings, or that all creation was somehow eternal.**

**But against all that, Genesis claims the Lord, Yahweh, does not produce or bring forth, He creates from nothing, for He alone is almighty and eternal – He has no equal, He alone is King of all creation. And this very teaching would have jarred with the thinking of the day, it would have shocked then, even angered some, just as it does today.**

**For in our day, we have twin pressures** from our surrounding culture – there is on the one hand, that pressure from an increasingly forceful atheism, which seeks to limit the sphere of faith. And on the other hand, there is pressure to say that all religions are equal, that all paths lead to God, that no one faith is more true than another. But neither is wise, accurate or good for society.

For there is plenty of evidence from history that when a society removes religious freedom and pursues a purely atheistic culture that it is then on route to becoming an unhealthy society: examples could include Stalin's Russia, or Mao's China.

And as for an approach which says all religions are equally true...well that just doesn't make sense. You can't have one saying all matter is eternal, whilst another doesn't;



**or one which says God cared enough for His creation to enter into it, whilst another would be horrified at such a claim. These are not differences we can, or should, gloss over – it cannot be both/and, it truly is one or the other. And in our culture, in our day, that can make us feel quite uncomfortable, it almost sounds unloving.**

**But claiming, as Genesis does, that there is one eternal King and He has no equal, is not arrogance or intolerance, for logic and reason demand that the different claims be weighed, they can't all be equally true, and to allow the claim of Genesis to be given up so as to appease our post-modern mindset is actually to the detriment of others, for then they won't bother to explore the Christian faith, why should they when everything is relative or equal? But to hold on to the claim, that they then might find Jesus...**

**as their Saviour, well that's the most loving thing we can do for anyone. It is only when we hold on to the claim that there is one eternal King, do we then begin to lay a foundation for a faith that is robust and offers genuine hope to our broken world.**

**Because in this world, which God created in love and upon which He established His Kingdom, the Lord also created all life, and the pinnacle of His creation was mankind – you and I. We read in **Genesis 1:****

**'So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.'** (v27)

**Only humanity is described in this manner, only humanity is created in the image of God, and so men and women...**

are set apart from the rest of creation, giving each one great dignity, for we bear the image of God within us.

And God places His image-bearers, this mankind, in a garden, telling them to be fruitful and increase in number, to fill the earth and enjoy the produce of the land. God gives them also a mandate, a purpose, and only one boundary, given for their good, **it's in Genesis chp2:**

‘And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”’ (v16-17)

And so, in the place He has given, the people God has made, can continue to enjoy His blessing as they fulfil His mandate and remain with His rule. This understanding of **what is portrayed here in Genesis** gives us a pattern of the kingdom of God and...

it has been summarised **by Graeme Goldsworthy as:** ‘the kingdom of God...is God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule and enjoying God’s blessing.’

This is a phrase we’ll keep returning to during the series because in different parts of the Scriptures, different elements of this phrase are emphasised, or are seen to be out of place or marred. But the pattern of the kingdom is laid down here in Genesis 1 and 2: ‘the kingdom of God...is God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule and enjoying God’s blessing.’

In these chapters, at the beginning of the story, we can see three important points of application. **Firstly, we were created with a purpose, for we read:** ‘God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in

**number; fill the earth and subdue it.” (Gen. 1:28) and then in chapter 2 we read: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.’ (Gen. 2:15)**

**As the image bearers of the King we are given the royal purpose of stewarding creation – we’ve to take care of it, rather than abuse it – and so much matters to God for it is part of His kingdom, God is not only concerned with our souls; He is also concerned with our bodies and the whole material creation. **And so, it is right to speak** with our children, indeed all of us, and raise the issue of how our products and how our lifestyle affect the material world. We understand ourselves to be part of God’s people – are we living under His rule by heeding our call to steward creation well? If we are not, how could we steward better?**

**Secondly, these chapters also highlight** that we were created not only with a purpose but with a need for community. We read in Genesis 2: 'But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God...made a woman...and he brought her to the man.' (Gen. 2:20-22)

Until Eve was made, Adam had no companionship with another like himself, and earlier in v18 **the Lord God said**, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' We are made with a need for community – just as no man is an island, neither are God's people – Genesis 1 and 2 make it clear that even within the perfection at the beginning of creation, God's people, within God's kingdom, need one another, and they were given to one another as part of the blessing of God. We have a need for community, we need each other...

**and so, it is also right to emphasis the opportunity the Guild affords you and I, but we could also add in Friendship Plus, the coffee morning or the Fellowship Groups. Why not give one of these a try as they restart in the next month?**

**But can I also raise an issue I've become more aware of recently after some team meetings and pastoral visits? You're probably aware, but we are quite a big church, and it's easy to get lost, and it's easy to be overlooked. And it's easy to forget that some in our older generations have far fewer friends than they did a few years ago, or even this time last year, and they can start to feel isolated and undervalued. They too have a need of community. So, can we be on the lookout, not only for new people, but also for those that might be getting lost in the crowd?...**

**For they too are God's people and they matter in God's kingdom.**

**Lastly, in God's kingdom, God's people are to enjoy God's blessing by living under God's rule, but that is not only about living according to God's laws and ways; living under God's rule is also about enjoying God Himself and enjoying His rest. We read in Genesis 2:**

**'By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.' (Gen. 2:2)**

**This is the climax of creation, that day upon which God rested, for His work was complete. We do not then hear of an eighth day, nor do we return to the first day, for we are meant to see that the seventh day continues,...**



**and so God's rest continues – not that God is sitting with His feet up, for He sustains our very creation, but He has rested from creating, and so the seventh day continues. Within that rest, creation, and especially humanity, is meant to live. We are meant to live in God's rest, to share in it, enjoying the perfect creation, and enjoying relationship with God. To live under the rule of God, is to live within His rest and to enjoy God Himself.**

**I wonder, do you enjoy God?** Maybe you don't enjoy God because you don't know God yet, you don't know Him as your friend and heavenly Father, nor as your good King. And that may be because you haven't put your faith in Him yet, and if that's you, I'd encourage you to go listen to last week's message which you can get on the website or via CD.

**Yet, there could be any number of reasons you are not enjoying God, and if that's you, if there is distance, can I encourage you to tell someone, and if you can, tell someone whose faith encourages you.**

**A number of years ago, I got into a bit of a rut in my faith; I wasn't reading the Bible, I wasn't praying. But then in one church service I felt challenged by my minister and I decided to go speak with my good friend Ollie, whose faith is a real encouragement to me. We started to meet up, to talk about faith, to talk about life, and over the course of time my faith came alive again, and I started to enjoy God once more.**

**Friends, you were created to enjoy God and His rest, to live under His rule, alongside His people,...**

**sharing in His blessing – for this is what Genesis reveals about what it means to be part of the Kingdom of God, this is the pattern of the Kingdom.**

**I pray that as we journey through** this series together, may we become more kingdom-minded, leaning into our purpose, helping to meet our need for community, and growing in our enjoyment of God.

**May it be so. Amen.**