

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 12 February 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Gospel of the Kingdom**

### **Matthew 4:23-25**

When I was growing up, there was a ministry that my parents did regularly, as an outreach of our church. About once or twice per month, on Sunday afternoons, my family, and our good friends, the Thompson family, would go to a nursing home in the Ashland area, to bring the Gospel to the elderly folks, and to show them Christ's love. (We went to two different nursing homes in rotation.) We would first go to the people's rooms to greet them, and to invite them to our church service in the community area; and if anyone wanted to go, we would wheel him there, with the help of the nurses. After everyone was seated, my sister would play congregational hymns on the piano; and my dad and Mr. Thompson would take turns in leading the singing. Next, my family, or the Thompsons, or both of us, would sing a special song in four-part harmony; and then, either my dad, or Mr. Thompson, would preach a message. After the message, we would give an invitation; and sometimes, people raised their hands to indicate that they weren't sure that they were saved, and that they wanted to talk to someone about it. Once in a while, someone would receive Christ as Saviour during that invitation time! In the sunset of their lives, these precious souls were snatched from the flames; and that made all our efforts worth it! We would then spend some time talking with the folks, and would do our best to bring cheer into their lonely lives. It was always a joy to see people's faces lighting up as we talked with them, and shared Christ with them. (They were especially cheered up by talking with us kids. Seeing our smiling little faces made them light up like Christmas trees!) More than anything else, though, it was a joy to see people get saved!

However, there was something that we couldn't do for them: we couldn't heal their physical illnesses. As I got older, and was able to understand the realities of life better, it made me increasingly sad to see these elderly folks in their frail condition, and to hear some of them calling out to a mom, or dad, or sister or brother, or an old friend, who was long dead. We couldn't heal their sicknesses, or make dim or blinded eyes to see, or make their minds sharp and discerning again.

However, I have a Friend—a Friend who walked this earth 2,000 years ago—who could have healed *every one of them*. By the time my Friend walked out of that nursing home, there would have been no residents at all, because they all would have walked out with Him, in perfect health (unless, of course, there were some who *didn't* wish for my Friend to heal them)! The Friend of whom I speak is Jesus of Nazareth. Not only did Jesus heal people's bodies, but He healed their minds, and their souls. Through the Gospel that He preached, souls were saved for eternity, and lives were radically transformed. This morning, we will focus on the preaching and healing ministry of the King of Israel. The title of this message is *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

**Read Matthew 4:23-25.**

#### **I. Jesus' Gospel ministry (v. 23)**

As we saw last week, Jesus was now living in the town of Capernaum, because the people of His own hometown of Nazareth had rejected Him. Capernaum was now Jesus' permanent "home base"; and the Scriptures seem to indicate that the house of Simon Peter was His "headquarters." Oftentimes in the Gospels we read about Jesus' preaching, or healing people, within the walls of Peter's house. To this day, there is, in Capernaum, the ruins of a first-century house, with many Christian symbols and inscriptions on the walls. It was obviously

used as a Christian meeting place well into the 300's. Peter's name is even written on the walls in some places, alongside many Scriptures and prayers. This probably was the actual house of Peter—the place where the Lord Jesus spent so many precious hours! Peter loved his Master; and he gave up not only his livelihood, but his *whole life*, to follow Him. Peter considered it the greatest privilege imaginable to have the King of Kings living in his house! Thus, from the house of Peter, Jesus launched out into **“all Galilee.”** In one city after another, Jesus went into the synagogues with His disciples, and taught and preached to the people. And what did He preach? Matthew says that He preached **“the gospel of the kingdom.”**

Now, most people in this country have heard the word “Gospel”; but few people have any idea what it means. The word “Gospel” literally means “good news.” And what *is* the “good news”? It is the message of **salvation from sin through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!** This is how the Apostle Paul defined the Gospel.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.**

The Gospel is the message that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day; and it is the only message that can save us from sin, death, and hell. As Jesus hung on the cross, He took all our sins upon Himself, and paid for them in full. By His shed blood, He has paid the ransom for our sins; and by His resurrection from the dead, He has conquered death on our behalf. When a sinner repents of his sin in his heart, and believes that *Jesus* has earned his salvation *for him*, that sinner is *saved*, and becomes a child of God! *This* is the Gospel message—the message of salvation!

Yet, this raises a question: what, exactly, is the **“gospel of the kingdom”** that Jesus preached? Where does the “kingdom” part come into the Gospel? Is it the same as the Gospel of salvation, which we read about in **1 Corinthians 15**? Or is it some *other* kind of gospel? No, it is the same Gospel. It's the same message! The **“gospel of the kingdom”** that Jesus preached *is* the Gospel of salvation that the Apostles preached.

From the earliest days of Jesus' ministry, Jesus kept declaring that He would soon die for our sins, and rise again. That is the Gospel message! Remember when Jesus was in Jerusalem during the first Passover of His ministry, and the Jews came up to Him, and demanded that He give them some sign to prove that He had authority to drive out the money changers from the Temple? What was His answer to them? He said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** They thought that He was talking about *Herod's* temple, which had been under construction for 46 years; but Jesus was talking about the Temple of His body. He was saying that in the not-distant future, He would die, be buried, and rise again in three days. As Jesus' ministry continued, He spoke of His coming death and resurrection more and more, until, in the last year of His ministry, it became the main focus of His preaching. He told them explicitly and repeatedly, that He **“must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”**

Now, make no mistake about it: as Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, He *did* give information about the Kingdom itself (the “infrastructure,” so to speak). He gave fascinating glimpses of what the future 1,000-year Kingdom on earth will be like, and of how it will function. He promised His followers that they will reign with Him in this Kingdom, and that they will have actual cities to rule over, in accordance with how faithfully they served God in this life. He promised His Apostles that they will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. At one point, when Jesus was on a mountain with Peter, James, and John, He even allowed them to see a *vision* of the Kingdom age. As they awakened from sleep, they

saw the Lord Jesus, and Moses, and Elijah in their glorified bodies, wearing white robes which shone with a brilliance like the sun; and they heard these three men speaking with each other, as though they were old friends! Six days prior to this, Jesus had promised His disciples that some of them would not taste of death until they had seen the Son of Man in His Kingdom; and now, here they were, seeing it right before their eyes. In a sense, they were like “time travelers!” They literally were seeing and participating in an actual scene from the future Kingdom age! Yet, what were Jesus, Moses, and Elijah *talking about*? Were they talking about the beauties and glories of the Kingdom? No. They were talking about Jesus’ death in Jerusalem for our sins (an event which, during the Kingdom age, will be far in the past)! Think of that, my friends! The Kingdom will be a time of painless life and untold beauty—a time of unparalleled peace, prosperity, and righteousness, all over the world, as Jesus reigns from His throne in Jerusalem. Yet, what will be the constant *theme* throughout those 1,000 years? What will be on the lips of Jesus’ servants for a whole millennium? It will be “the old, old story of Jesus and His love”! It will be the story of how Jesus went to the cross of Calvary, and shed His blood for sinners, and rose again! We’ll never tire of talking about it.

Do you see why the Gospel of salvation is the same as the Gospel of the Kingdom? **You can’t separate the message of salvation from the message of the kingdom.** To enter into the Kingdom, you *must be saved* by placing your faith in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. That is why Jesus was constantly preaching about *how to get into* the Kingdom! His focus wasn’t on the *infrastructure* of the Kingdom: His focus was on the *spiritual requirement to enter* the Kingdom, and on the *spiritual character* of the citizens of the Kingdom.

What *is* the spiritual requirement to enter the Kingdom? Jesus said it plainly: “***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.***” My friend, if you want to enter into Jesus’ glorious Kingdom, then you must **repent** in your heart (turn to God from sin), and place your complete **faith** in Him, and in His sacrifice for you on the cross. This means that you must *humble* yourself before God. Jesus said that we must become like little children. Little children don’t think themselves too wise to believe Jesus’ words. They don’t raise a thousand intellectual objections, as adults do. When they hear “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” it sinks into their hearts. When they hear Jesus say, “***Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,***” they simply take Him at His word! My friend, this is what *you* need. To enter the Kingdom, you must humble yourself like a child, believe on Jesus, and be converted!

**Read Matthew 18:1-4.**

**Read John 3:1-16.**

As Jesus spoke with Nicodemus on that night 2,000 years ago, He told him that in order to see the Kingdom of God, he must be “born again.” Now, the “Kingdom of God” is not the same thing as the “Kingdom of Heaven.” What’s the difference? On the one hand, the “**Kingdom of God**” is *spiritual and invisible*. It is the realm of all who are born again (those who are saved, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit). Whenever a sinner repents of his sin and believes on Jesus, he is *immediately* indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, the **Kingdom of Heaven** is the 1,000-year Kingdom that Jesus will establish on *earth* one day, when He returns to earth from Heaven; and this kingdom will be physical, and visible. The **Kingdom of God** has been around since the day when the Holy Spirit first entered Jesus’ followers 2,000 years ago; and its citizens are all who believe on Jesus, all over the world. This kingdom cannot be seen or observed with the eyes: it is invisible. In contrast, the **Kingdom of Heaven** will be here *on this earth*, in the future; and it

will be visible and physical. Yet, there is a point of overlap between these two kingdoms. You see, after Jesus returns to earth after the seven-year Tribulation period, He will judge the nations; and He will separate the sheep from the goats (the saved from the unsaved). All who rejected Him, and followed the Antichrist during the Tribulation period, will be cast into hell. The only ones who will remain on this earth after the Judgment of the nations are those who are saved; and *every one of them* will be indwelt by the Spirit of God! *Every one of them* will belong to that invisible Kingdom of God—the realm of those who are “born again.” Yet, they will *also* belong to the Kingdom of Heaven—that 1,000-year Kingdom, which will be established here on earth by the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Millennial Kingdom age begins, *everyone* on the face of the earth will be a member of the spiritual Kingdom of God *and* the physical Kingdom of Heaven; and they will all enter into the joy of their Lord!

My friend, if you would be a member of the Kingdom of God, *and* enter into the Kingdom of Heaven one day, then you *must* meet the spiritual requirement. Jesus says that only the *righteous* will enter the Kingdom. You must have a righteousness that only *Christ* can give you. You may think yourself to be a “good person”; but God says that your righteousness is like filthy rags. He cannot accept *your* righteousness, because it falls infinitely short of His standard of holiness. That is why you need *Jesus*, and *His* righteousness. When you place your faith in Jesus, He puts *His* perfect righteousness onto your account, as though it were yours; and God the Father accepts you on this basis. Christ then moves into your heart, and begins to change you from the inside out. He “converts” you. He makes you a new creation. He gives you the power to be *actually* righteous—to do the things that truly please God.

My friends, this is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. In **Matthew 5-7** (which we will begin to study next week), Jesus tells us what the *spiritual character* of the citizens of the Kingdom is like. The sermon on the Mount isn’t a list of rules that you must follow in order to *earn* your way into the Kingdom. (That would be impossible. *No one* can earn his way into the Kingdom!) The Sermon on the Mount is simply a list of the spiritual qualities that belong to those who have been saved by God’s grace. It is a portrait of those who are *already* members of the Kingdom.

You may remember that in last week’s message, we read about the time when Jesus was in His hometown of Nazareth, and he read from the book of **Isaiah** during the Sabbath day service. After He had read the Scripture, He closed the book, and declared that *He* was the fulfilment of that messianic prophecy. However, there is something very important that Jesus said about *the people* to whom He had come to preach the Gospel. Let’s see what it is.

### **Read Luke 4:16-19.**

To *whom* did Jesus come to preach the Gospel? “**To the poor”!** Is Jesus talking about those who are *monetarily* poor? No. He’s talking about another kind of poverty. When Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount, His very first words were: “**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** This is the kind of poverty that Jesus is talking about—*spiritual poverty*. Those who will enter the Kingdom are those who are “poor in spirit”—those who have humbled themselves before God, and have admitted that they are spiritually bankrupt, and in need of Jesus’ righteousness. Those who admit their spiritual poverty, and receive Jesus as Messiah, Saviour, and Lord, have their broken hearts healed. They are delivered from the captivity of the devil, and from the prison house of sin; and their blinded eyes are opened to the Light of life. They enter into a new life, which is characterised by righteousness. Why? Because the righteous Lord is now seated on the throne of their hearts.

Now, as I say, we will be delving into the Sermon on the Mount next Sunday. As we study through **Matthew 5-7** in the coming months, we will learn about the spiritual characteristics of those who are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. However, I will forewarn you, brethren: the Sermon on the Mount *will* challenge and convict you! It *will* make you feel uncomfortable. Why? Because oftentimes, we don't *live* as citizens of the Kingdom should live. That is why we desperately need the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is all about Spirit-controlled living; and many Christians have never really learned how to submit themselves to the Spirit of God on a daily basis. Consequently, their lives don't bear much fruit for God. Many Christians live in perpetual spiritual defeat. They try, in their own power, to live for God; but they are quickly discouraged by their powerlessness, and become miserable and depressed. Though they go to church, and try to read their Bibles, they have little joy in their hearts, or in their homes. They are controlled by their emotions, feelings, and selfish desires, instead of being controlled by the Holy Spirit; and their fleshly attitude negatively affects everyone around them. The "**fruit of the Spirit**"—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness," and "**temperance**"—is rarely experienced in their lives. They are controlled by anger, bitterness, self-pity, self-righteousness, lust, fear, anxiety, a critical spirit, unthankfulness, a bitter tongue, covetousness, envy, illicit desire for pleasure, impure sexual thoughts, depression, pride, unforgiveness, rage, negativism, self-consumption, self-indulgence, feelings of rejection, lust for power and control, rebellion, laziness, materialism, resentment, indifference to others' needs, and many other fleshly attitudes. Jesus' words will expose these lusts, and will hit us right where we live. In fact, some of you might think that the pastor somehow found out about some spiritual struggle in your life, and that he is preaching directly at *you*! I will tell you beforehand that this is *not* the case. In fact, these messages will be just as convicting to *me* as they will be to you. My friends, *don't miss these messages*. Satan doesn't want you to have victory. He *wants* you to be defeated. Don't listen to that old Serpent! Listen to the Spirit of God, as He speaks through His Word.

## II. Jesus' healing ministry (vv. 24-25)

**(Read verses 23-25 again.)** As Jesus travelled throughout Galilee, He not only preached, but He healed multitudes of people. His fame was so great, that it went throughout all Israel, from north to south, and throughout "**all Syria**." Great multitudes of both Jews *and* Gentiles were coming to Him from both inside *and* outside the land of Israel, to hear Him preach, and to be healed. By the way, this was merely a small foretaste of what will happen in the future. During the 1,000-year Kingdom, there will be sinless, immortal, resurrected saints walking on earth alongside believers who are still in their mortal bodies (those who survived through the Tribulation); and the survivors of the Tribulation will have children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. These people will still have sinful natures, and will still be in their mortal bodies (for the time being); thus, there *will* still be disease, and handicaps. However, Jesus will heal every person who comes to Him. In **Isaiah 35**, Isaiah prophesied about the glory of the Kingdom age. He foretold that the curse will be removed from the ground, and that the deserts will no longer be deserts, but will flow with water, and will blossom, and bring forth abundance of food. Yet, in the middle of this passage about the Kingdom age, Isaiah says, "**Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.**" During the Kingdom, Jesus will be preaching and healing people, just as He did 2,000 years ago—except that this time, there will be people coming to Him from every corner of the globe!

But, let's return to Jesus' first coming. You'll notice, here in **verse 24**, that there were two distinct kinds of illnesses that Jesus healed. Jesus healed physical illnesses; but He also healed

infirmities of the mind and body, which were the direct result of *demonic* possession. That phrase **“possessed with devils”** is translated from the word *daimonízomenous*, which literally means “demonised,” or “under the power of a demon.” The word **“lunatick”** can also sometimes be related to demonic activity. It is translated from the word *selēniázomenous*, which literally means “moon-struck.” It refers to someone who is controlled by the moon, rather than by reason. This word specifically refers to someone who shakes uncontrollably. Now, I just want to take a moment to explain what the Bible says about this subject. Obviously, not everyone who shakes uncontrollably is possessed by demons. Epilepsy is an inherited neurological problem; and many godly people (including one of our own missionaries) suffer from epilepsy. However, as you read through the Gospels, you find that there were some people who shook uncontrollably not because they had a natural handicap, but because a demon had actually taken control of their bodies. Let’s look at one example.

**Read Matthew 17:14-21.**

In our modern Western world, belief in the supernatural is scoffed at; and consequently, many people who really *are* under the control of demons are treated as though they merely had some unexplained illness. Oftentimes, there *are* legitimate health issues which temporarily cause people to act irrationally, or to lose control of themselves, until some nutrient in their body is balanced, or until some illness is conquered. Some have *permanent* handicaps, which are genetic. However, this doesn’t change the fact that many people who are being treated for “mental health” really are demonically oppressed, or possessed. As our society is becoming increasingly fascinated with the occult, many people are opening themselves to the demonic realm, and are finding out that the devil plays for keeps. He wants people’s *souls* for eternity! So it was in Jesus’ day. Satan’s demons had taken many people captive at their will. Remember what Isaiah prophesied about the land of Galilee? He said, **“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”** Jesus lived in a time of great spiritual apostasy; and as the result, *many* people were demonised (such as the maniac of Gadara). However, Jesus knew exactly what each person’s need was. He knew when people were suffering from a disease for no fault of their own; and He also knew when people were suffering because of devils, which had been invited into their lives through sorcery, drugs, or immorality. He also knew when *God Himself* had struck people with sickness, for His own purpose.

I’d like to take a few moments to explain what the Bible says in regard to sickness. It is important for us to understand what God says on this matter, because we are surrounded by hurting people, who are seeking answers to these questions. The first thing we need to understand is that we live in a fallen world. People often ask, “If God is such a loving God, why is there sickness and suffering in the world?” Christians should be able to answer that question straightaway. *Sickness in general* is the direct result of the Fall of mankind into sin. God did not create the world with sickness and death. In the beginning, everything was perfect. There was no death or sickness of any kind. It was after our father Adam disobeyed God and ate the fruit, and brought sin upon himself and his descendants, that sickness and death entered into the human race. We live in a fallen world. It’s just as simple as that.

With that said, however, there are several more things we also need to understand. First, sicknesses *can* sometimes be the result of people’s own sinful choices. For example, someone who drinks alcohol for years, and dies of psoriasis of the liver, has brought that particular curse upon himself. Sin is its own scourge! Someone who takes drugs, and dies of an overdose, has brought death upon himself; and no one can blame God for it. The Bible says that **“the way of transgressors is hard.”**

Another thing we need to understand about sicknesses and maladies is that they sometimes *do* come directly from God, for the purpose of punishing people for their sin. God struck King Nebuchadnezzar with a rare mental illness which caused him to think and act like a beast for seven years, until God graciously healed his mind. This was a punishment for his pride and arrogance. The paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda was, apparently, struck with his 38-year handicap as punishment for some sin. After Jesus healed him, He told him, “***Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee.***” Oftentimes God uses illnesses to break lost people’s self-will, so that they will see their need to be saved. He also uses illness to *chasten* sinning believers, so that they will get right with Him again.

Oftentimes, God uses sickness to *purge and prune* godly believers. Jesus said, “***Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.***” Though a believer may be walking closely with the Lord, God may still allow him to go through great physical suffering, in order to purify him. What better example is there of this than **Job**? He was a very godly believer: yet, God allowed him to go through terrible suffering, so that he might be purified like gold in the furnace. Sometimes God allows godly believers to suffer so that they might be able to comfort others who are going through similar afflictions. (As a Crohn’s Disease sufferer, I can attest to this! God has often used me to comfort others.) Sometimes God allows His children to suffer from chronic illness in order to keep them humble and reliant upon Himself! God, in His sovereignty, may allow a godly believer to remain sick just to show His amazing grace through his trial. The Apostle Paul is a good example of this.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.**

As this passage reveals, God sometimes removes the hedge of protection that He normally keeps around His children, and actually allows *Satan or his demons* to attack a believer’s body. (That’s what He did with Job, as well.) At other times, physical affliction comes directly from *God’s* hand. **However, one thing is for certain: *nothing happens by accident!*** Anytime a person is sick (whether he be a believer or an unbeliever), God wants to get glory out of that situation! An unbeliever may *become* a believer because of a sickness in his life; and people may turn to the Lord because of a sickness in a *believer’s* life, as well. Sometimes (if it be God’s will) God brings glory to Himself by miraculously *healing* someone.

### **Read John 9:1-3 / 11:1-4, 38-45.**

As Jesus travelled about Galilee, He healed multitudes of hurting people; and He did so out of love and compassion. However, we must never forget the ultimate reason why Jesus healed people. The ultimate reason that Jesus healed people was that they might *believe* that He is the Messiah, and place their trust in Him, and be saved. When a nobleman came to Jesus and desperately asked Jesus to come to his city and heal his dying son, Jesus told him, “***Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.***” This almost sounded cold and unfeeling; yet, Jesus knew that this man didn’t truly believe on Him as Messiah. He put his finger right on this man’s spiritual need, even though it probably hurt. The result is that the man saw his unbelief for what it was, and placed his faith in Jesus, and was saved for all eternity! **John 20:30-31** says, “***And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.***”

**Conclusion:** As we close this morning, I would ask, “Have *you* believed on the Son of God? Are you saved?” You don’t need to experience a miracle of healing in order to believe, because the record of

Jesus' healing ministry, as written in the Bible, is more than powerful enough to pierce your unbelieving heart. Jesus isn't obligated to heal you of a physical ailment; but He is ready and willing to save your soul for all eternity, if you will let Him! If you will believe, with your heart, that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again to save your soul, and if you will repent of your sin, and turn your life over to Him, He will save you, and fill your heart with joy. Christian, do *you* have much peace and joy this morning? If you are not living in full surrender to Him, get right with Him today, so that your joy might be full!