



Theme: The Kingdom of Heaven.

Purpose: Explore the elementary principles of the Kingdom of Heaven through imagination and desire.

Introduction

SLIDE 1: Title Page

During this advent season, our sermon series has focused on “a light in the darkness”. A dark world, filled with hopelessness. The bright light of the Christ-child surrounded by that ugly darkness of sin. We’ve been naming different kinds of darkness, then facing it head on with the hope of the Gospel these past few weeks. So as we move from advent, with Christmas behind us, and the start of a new year on our doorstep, I want us to look forward.

The second coming of Christ, and the ushering in of His Kingdom, is ahead of us. Jesus’ first coming was just a shadow of what his second coming will be like. The lowly baby in a manger will be King Jesus riding on a white horse in power. A small manger lit by a star will instead be a brightness of glory that replaces the sun itself. We are looking forward to a light - the Light of Life - that destroys darkness. A light that the darkness cannot overcome or comprehend. And I want us to ask ourselves: “Do we look forward to this? Do we live with a hope and an expectation for Jesus’ second coming?” What I’m really asking is this: “Do we **want** God’s Kingdom?”

Remember our series, “The Way of the Kingdom”? Remember how we’re journeying through the book of Matthew together, walking with Jesus, hearing about an entirely different kingdom than the empires of this earth? Today, I want to take a topical look at the Kingdom of Heaven.

But I’m going to need some special help to do it.

*******Invite kids (and their parents) up to the carpets*******

Text

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”

Prayer

Matthew 18:1-4 “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Kids Q & A

- What's the Kingdom of Heaven? If you were going to draw a picture of Heaven, what would it look like?
- Who lives there?
- Where is it?
- Why should we even care about it?
- How do we practice for Heaven now?

SLIDES 2-15 (Slow Scroll Through Images of Heaven)

*******Have the kids re-join their parents; applause for their help!*******

ONE CLARIFICATION: TODAY, I'M USING “HEAVEN”, THE “KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”, “THE KINGDOM OF GOD”, AND “THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH” INTERCHANGEABLY. THERE ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EACH OF THESE, BUT FOR TODAY'S PURPOSE, I'M USING THEM AS SYNONYMS. OKAY?

I - Why Should I Care About the Kingdom of Heaven?

A.) Desire is important to God.

In the exercise we just did with the kids, how did imagining the Kingdom of Heaven make you feel? Do you notice any difference between that and the way this world makes you feel?

Does Following Jesus Really Involve Desire?

“I will forever be happy in the presence of God”, Psalm 16:11(paraphrase).

“Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever”, Westminster Shorter Catechism circa 1646.

- Proverbs 10:24
- Proverbs 11:23
- Proverbs 13:12
- Psalm 73:25
- Psalm 145:16, 19
- Hosea 6:6
- Matthew 9:13
- John 17:24
- Hebrews 11:8-1

Ultimate Desire and Heavenly Rewards

“Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being. - Matthew 6:19-21 (The Message)

B.) Imagination

Considering the Two Paths of Life (as if you were planning a trip): Matthew 7:13-14

- What will it be like when you get there?
- Who will be there?
- Who won’t be there?
- What does the country or land look like?
- What kind of things do people do in this place?
- What is the society and culture like there?
- What do people eat?
- How do people spend their time there?
- Do they have any religious or spiritual beliefs? If so, who do they worship?
- What can I do to prepare before I get there?

We can cultivate new desires, but only by pondering, imagining, considering, and learning about the Kingdom of God. The key to developing new neural pathways for new desires is:

1.) emotional response, and 2.) repetition.

Example: starting jiu jitsu, pushing through difficulty, experiencing pleasure (physically), improvement and mastery (mental), camaraderie (emotional), even prayer (spiritual).

RECAP:

So...What Do You Desire MOST?

II - What is the Kingdom of Heaven like?

What do you imagine when you think about heaven? What are the New Heavens and the New Earth like?

SLIDE 16: What is Heaven like?

- **Physical** (bodies, senses, food, activities, buildings, places, things)
 - Job 19:25-27
 - Psalm 17:15
 - Psalm 27:13
 - John 1:14
 - Colossians 2:9
 - Revelation 21:3
 - Revelation 22:4
- **Relational** (God, people, animals, nature)
- **Experiential** (adventures, making and creating, stories, songs, laughter, peace, security)

SLIDE 17: Revelation 21

Revelation 21 tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is:

- a “holy city” (v. 2) - “holy” denoting entirely different and perfect, compared to everything
- comes down to earth from heaven (v. 3)
- God will live there (v. 3)
- No more tears, death, grief, crying, or pain (v. 4)
- The city is a cube made of gold, precious jewels, and has 12 large gates (v. 11-14)
- The main street in the city is “pure gold, like glass” (v. 21)
- There’s no temple (v. 22)
- There’s no sun or moon because God is its light (v. 23)
- All of the nations will be represented there (v. 26)
- Nothing “unclean” will ever enter the city (v. 27)

SLIDE 18: Revelation 22

Revelation 22 fills this out by giving us the following descriptions:

- There’s a river flowing down the middle of the main street (v. 1-2)
- There’s trees lining both sides of the river that have a different fruit every month (v. 3)
- People in Heaven will see God’s face, worship him, and have a special name (v. 4)

III - Who Lives There?

Jesus, and the people who love Him. And even angels and animals too!

- Isaiah 11:6	- Matthew 25
- Isaiah 65:25	- Revelation 6:2-8
- Matthew 7:21-23	- Revelation 20:11-15

RECAP:

So...What is heaven like? Tangible. Relational. Experiential.

Who lives there? Jesus and the people who love Him.

IV - Where is the Kingdom of Heaven?

- Today, it’s in everyone with the Holy Spirit. (read John 15)
- When Jesus returns, EVERYWHERE! (Revelation 5:10, 11:15)

“Jesus’s resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord’s Prayer is about.”

V - When is the Kingdom of Heaven Coming?

- “No one knows....except the Father.” Matthew 24:36
- “Soon”. Revelation 22:20
 - So we live with **expectancy** and **immediacy**.

VI - How Do We Get Ready?

- **Faith in Jesus** is the only way we can start to do any of this. Otherwise, what we're about to talk about makes no sense at all. It looks and sounds foolish. Plus, it's impossible (look at the failure of humanity to create a utopia over and over again).
- **“The point of the resurrection...is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die...What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it...What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether (as the hymn so mistakenly puts it...). They are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom.”**
- Follow Jesus & Live Like Him
 - Practice these things NOW
 - Beatitudes (citizen's of Heaven)
 - 1 Corinthians 13 (the highest of all Christian virtues is LOVE)
 - Bear fruit of the spirit (evidence of eternal life in a believer)
 - Matthew 24:3-14

Conclusion

SLIDE 19: Soul of Desire Quote

“As we will see, everything we imagine we must do to practice for heaven by creating beauty in the ash heaps of our world, be they marriages or toxic waste dumps, begins with desire. **In this world of brokenness, that which is broken was not always so; it is merely the outgrowth of defiled desire. And for the world to be redeemed, God does not destroy desire; rather, he resurrects and renews it while using it to renew everything else, beginning with us.**” - Dr. Kurt Thompson, The Soul of Desire, p. 24

To finish, let me share this with you. The latter part of Romans 1(vv. 18-32) is Paul describing the fallenness of the world, an explanation of why things are so wrong. As an exercise in desire and imagination, let's listen to a different version of this passage. You won't find this in your bible, because it's the redeemed, reversed take, when we stand in the New Heavens and the New Earth:

“Therefore, God restored them in the desires of their hearts for purity, to the honoring of their bodies among themselves, because they gladly received the truth about God instead of lies and worshiped and served the Creator, who is blessed forever, rather than the creature. Amen. “For

this reason, God renews their desires and delights and passions. For the women glory in the masculinity of men, and the men likewise revel in the femininity of women, and husbands and wives are consumed with passion for each other, men and women honoring the marriage bed and receiving among themselves the due reward for their obedience.

“And since they see fit to acknowledge God, God reorients their renewed minds to do what ought to be done. They are filled with all manner of righteousness, goodness, contentment, benevolence. They are full of gratitude for other people’s gifts, brotherly love, peace, truth-telling, magnanimity. They are edifiers, encouragers, lovers of God, courteous, meek, humble, inventors of good, obedient to parents, wise, steadfast, compassionate, merciful. Because they know God’s decree that those who practice such things will receive eternal life, they not only do them but give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

Prayer