

“The King Proclaiming the Kingdom”

(Luke 4:38-44)

Introduction

➤ As we turn to the last part of the fourth chapter of Luke’s Gospel, we find Jesus’ popularity growing (seemingly) exponentially. Perhaps the pinnacle of Jesus’ popularity was on display when He performed the miracle of feeding “*about five thousand men*” (Lk.9:14) – likely, counting women and children, ten to twenty thousand people – with only “*five loaves [of bread] and two fish*” (Lk.9:13, 16).

Luke 4:14-15 ~ “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”

Luke 5:12-17 ~ “While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ ¹³And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴And he charged him to tell no one, but ‘go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’ ¹⁵But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.”

Mark 1:44-45 ~ “and said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’ ⁴⁵But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”

Matt 4:23-25 ~ “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”

Luke 6:17-19 ~ “And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.”

➤ In our passage this morning, Luke 4:38-44, Jesus is in the region of Galilee, and the city of Capernaum (vs.31), which became His ministry headquarters after the people of Nazareth tried to kill Him (Lk.4:29). Having left Nazareth, Jesus traveled (about 20-30 miles) to Capernaum, on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, and taught in the synagogue there (vs.31).

Luke 4:38-44 ~ “And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon’s house. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. ³⁹And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. ⁴⁰Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. ⁴²And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’ ⁴⁴And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.” (see Matt.8:14-17; Mk.1:29-39)

- As the (incarnate) Son of God, Jesus possessed all the divine power and authority to rule as the King of kings. Throughout His public ministry, Jesus demonstrated His sovereignty through the miracles He performed and proclaimed His sovereignty through the messages He preached. These verses provide us with three examples of Christ sovereignty over all things.

1. Christ's reign over the physical realm (vs.38-40)

- When Jesus "*left the synagogue*" (vs.38), He went directly to Peter and Andrew's home "*with James and John*" (vs.38; Mk.1:29). They had already seen Jesus perform miracles (Lk.4:14, 23), and now they asked Him to heal "*Simon's* [Peter's (Lk.6:14; Jn.1:42)] *mother-in-law*" (vs.38). Luke, the physician, alone recorded that she had "*a high fever*" (vs.38; *megas pyretos*, lit. large or great fever).

The implication here seems to be that she was gravely sick, not merely suffering from a cold or even a severe flu. This illness, mostly likely from an infection, certainly could have been life-threatening.

- Jesus graciously and compassionately agreed to heal her. Without fanfare. Without any medical or medicinal resources. Without any incantations or theatrics. Without any failed attempts. Jesus simply "*stood over her*" (vs.39), "*took her by the hand and lifted her up*" (Mk.1:31), "*and rebuked the fever*" (vs.39). As we have already seen, Jesus' divine "*rebuke*" (*epitimaō*; "*rebuked*", vs.39; to censure or admonish) was authoritative and non-negotiable.

Luke 4:34-36 ~ "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God." ³⁵But Jesus rebuked [*epitimaō*] him, saying, 'Be silent and come out of him!' And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm."

Luke 8:23-25 ~ "... a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴And they went and woke him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he awoke and rebuked [*epitimaō*] the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?'"

- At the divine command of Christ, Peter's mother-in-law was instantly and completely healed: "*it left her*" (vs.39; *aphiēmi*). The proof of this is seen in the fact that she "*immediately ... rose and began to serve them*" (vs.39) – she did not slowly get better, or start to be "on the mend" – she was as if she had never been sick at all (perhaps the best she's ever felt!).

Interestingly, the Greek word translated "*serve them*" (vs.39; *diakoneō*; "to serve" or "to wait upon") is the basis for our English word "deaconess" (which is an appointed title for godly women who are devoted to serving in the church; see Rom.16:1; 1Tim.3:8-13). Whether or not Peter's mother-in-law was officially designated as a "deaconess" of the church, she apparently was a humble and hospitable servant.

- She is an example of what every Christian should be – a servant. This is contrary to our human (sinful) nature. We would naturally rather be served by others than to serve others. Today (in our consumer-driven culture), when looking for a church, many people view the church as little (or nothing) more than a service organization. They choose a church based primarily on how they feel the church can serve them (and their family) and think very little about how they can serve in the church. Christians are commanded to serve one another – to serve and not merely be served.

Mark 10:42-45 ~ "And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

⁴³But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*], ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you must be slave [*doulos*] of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served [*diakoneō*] but to serve [*diakoneō*], and to give his life as a ransom for many."

1 Peter 4:10 ~ “As each has received a gift, use it to serve [*diakoneō*] one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”

- The synagogue service was over around noon, and afterward Jesus “*immediately*” (Mk.1:29) went to Peter’s and Andrew’s house where Jesus healed Peter’s ailing mother-in-law. That leaves the rest of the afternoon. While we do not know what they did that afternoon, we do know what happened when the evening came: “*Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them*” (vs.40).

Mark 1:32-34 ~ “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him”

Matt 8:16-17 ~ “That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.’” (see Is.53:4)

Matt 4:23-25 ~ “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”

- What a night! What an unforgettable night. The people were coming in droves to be healed by Jesus, and He – by the divine authority of just His word – healed them all! There was not an illness Jesus did not heal; not a disease He did not cure; not a disability that He did not mend; not a demon that He did not cast out – the blind, the lame, the paralytic; those with heart disease, those who had a stroke, those with Alzheimer’s, those with epilepsy, those with “cancer”, and more. No one was left unhealed!
- Physical pain and death resulted from the fall of Adam and Eve. As a consequence for their sin, God cursed creation which resulted in human suffering and sorrow (Gen.3:17; Rom.8:20-22). Healing the sick was not Jesus’ primary ministry, and it was only a temporary fix (all those He healed would eventually die). The reason Jesus healed the sick – of “*every disease and every affliction*” (Matt.4:23) – was to display His divine authority over the physical realm, including over the curse of sin. (Gal.3:10-13; Heb.2:17-18; 4:15). The fact that Jesus could (by divine fiat) heal the blind, the lame, the diseased, the dying – and even raise the dead – proved that He was the Messiah sent from God; that He was indeed the one and only Son of God and the one and only Savior from God.

Among other things, Christ’s reign over the physical realm demonstrated and proved His reign over the spiritual realm.

2. Christ’s reign over the spiritual realm (vs.41)

- Jesus also demonstrated His Kingly reign over the spiritual realm. As we saw last Sunday (Lk.4:31-37), demons were disturbed and terrified by the physical presence of the Son of God. The demons do not attempt to fight or possess Jesus. They do not even try to flee. They know who Jesus is – the incarnate Son of God – and they know they can do nothing to defeat Him. Among all the countless sick people being brought to Jesus, were also “*many*” (*polys*) who were possessed by demons.

Mark 1:32-34 ~ “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.”

Matt 8:16-17 ~ “That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.”

- As often was the case (if not always), in the presence of Jesus Christ the demons declared His divine character and nature: *“And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’”* (vs.41). The description of Jesus as *“the Son of God”* (vs.41; Lk.1:35; 3:38; 22:70) is a clear reference to His deity – that is, the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity (i.e., God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit). The demons knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Luke 4:34 ~ “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God.”

Mark 3:11-12 ~ “And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’”¹² And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.”

- What most of the religious leaders refused to believe, the demons knew to be true (Jms.2:19). But when the demons made such glorious declarations, Jesus immediately silenced them: *“But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ”* (vs.41). Jesus would not let them speak – [“*rebuked*” (*epitimaō*; 4:35, 39; 8:24)] – because it is vastly inappropriate for the coming of the Messiah to be announced by unclean demonic spirits. The proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God is a fitting declaration from heaven above (see Lk.3:22), but not from the depths of hell. It is abhorrently inappropriate for unholy demons to be the ones to announce the coming of “the Holy One of God.”

Even though the demons knew for sure who He was, Jesus would not let such sacred words come from such evil beings. It is clear that the demons not only knew who Jesus claimed to be, but that they also believe that He truly is the Son of God. Demons know, beyond a shadow-of-a-doubt, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah – “the Son of God” – and the Savior to all who believe, but Jesus commanded them not to speak, and so they did not.

1 John 4:15 ~ “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

1 John 5:10-12 ~ “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.”¹¹ And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

- It is a tragic irony that demons willfully declared Jesus as the Son of God (and they were commanded not to), and yet so many Christians are unwilling to affirm or declare Jesus as the Son of God (and they are commanded to do so). May we be faithful to proclaim the message that is too holy for demons to proclaim – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt.28:18-20; Mk.16:15; Acts 1:8).

3. Christ’s reign over the eternal realm (vs.42-44)

- The next *“day”* (vs.42) – that is, as soon as it was morning (*“very early in the morning, while it was still dark”*; Mk.1:35) – Jesus *“departed and went into a desolate place”* (vs.42). When it is used as a noun, the Greek word translated *“desolate”* (vs.42; *erēmos*) can refer to an actual desert or wilderness (as in Lk.4:1; *“in the wilderness”*). As an adjective, as it is in Luke 4:42, the Greek word translated *“desolate”* (*erēmos*; i.e., *“a desolate place”*) refers to a place that is barren or deserted.

Luke 5:15-16 ~ “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.”¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places [*erēmos* (adj.)] and pray.”

Luke 6:12 ~ “In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.” (see Lk.9:28)

Luke 9:12-13 [the feeding of the “*about five thousand men*” (Lk.9:14)] ~ “Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, ‘Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place [*erēmos* (adj.)].’ ¹³But he said to them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ ...”

Mark 1:35-37 ~ “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate [*erēmos*] place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷and they found him and said to him, ‘Everyone is looking for you.’”

- Jesus, continually mobbed by the crowds, was resolute in His commitment to pray. He often withdrew from the crowds, and from His apostles, so that He could find a secluded place to pray. We too must fight to find sacred times and places – “*desolate places*” to pray (undistracted and uninterrupted). It is safe to say that no one is truly too busy to pray, because no one is busier than Jesus was. And it is wrong to conclude that we do not need to pray as much as Jesus did.

Luke 18:1 ~ “... he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

Luke 22:40 ~ “And when he came to the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”

Rom 12:12 ~ “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

Col 4:2 ~ “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

- But Jesus did not escape the crowds for long: “*And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them*” (vs.42). This does not indicate that the people were devoted disciples of Christ. It is likely that they wanted Jesus to stay because of His ability to heal every disease and cast out every demon.
- As we have already seen in our study of Luke’s Gospel, and will continue to see, Jesus was not merely a miracle worker. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus did not simply go from town to town healing all those who were sick or infirmed. While He performed countless miracles – demonstrating His divine power (authority) over disease, disability, demons, and death – the main function of His public ministry was preaching and teaching.

In Luke 4:43-44 we read: “*but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’*” ⁴⁴*And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea*” (vs.43-44). Notice the language used here: “*preach the good news*” (vs.43; *euangelizō*) and “*he was preaching*” (vs.44; *kēryssō*) [note: “*teaching*” (*didaskō*; vs.31) and “*teaching*” (*didachē*; vs.32)].

Mark 1:38-39 ~ “And he said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach [*kēryssō*] there also, for that is why I came out.’” ³⁹And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching [*kēryssō*] in their synagogues and casting out demons.”

Matt 4:23 ~ “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching [*didaskō*] in their synagogues and proclaiming [*kēryssō*] the gospel [*euangelion*] of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.”

Luke 4:14-16 ~ “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵And he taught [*didaskō*] in their synagogues, being glorified by all. ¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.”

In fact, Jesus said that He was actually “*sent for this purpose*” (vs.43; *apostellō epi houtos*; lit. “I was sent for this” or “for this I was sent”). Jesus’ healing ministry was secondary to His preaching ministry.

Mark 1:38 ~ “And he said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.’”

Luke 4:17-21 ~ “And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’ [Is.61:1-2]. ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Luke 5:32 ~ “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 19:10 ~ “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

- The miracles Jesus performed served to verify Him as the Son of God, and authenticate His message from God. Miracles, by themselves, cannot save. Salvation comes from hearing and believing the Gospel. Those who reject the Gospel of Christ also reject the miracles of Christ (see Lk.16:31; Jn.12:10).

Rom 1:16 ~ “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Rom 10:16-17 ~ “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

John 10:31-33 ~ “The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³²Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ ³³The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’”

- Jesus said, *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose”* (vs.43). As we see in His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt.5-7), and the “Sermon on the Plain” (Lk.6:17-48), Jesus preached on many different biblical topics. In fact, we know that He preached/taught throughout the Scriptures (Lk.4:27, 44). But the central theme of Jesus’ preaching, and the theme of His apostles, was the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:1-2 ~ “And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.” (Matt.10:5-7)

Mark 1:14-15 ~ “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” (see Matt.3:2; 4:17)

- What is *“the kingdom of God”* (vs.43)? By simple definition, a “kingdom” is the territory over which a king reigns. In one sense, God’s kingdom would be all creation since He sovereignty reigns over all. But in the context of the Gospel, God’s kingdom specifically refers to realm of God’s light – that is, His truth and holiness – all that Satan’s kingdom of darkness opposes (see Lk.1:79; 11:33-36; 22:53; Jn.3:19).
- Satan is *“the ruler of this world”* (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11; see 2Cor.4:4). God has given temporary and limited reign over the people and happenings of this world.

John 17:14-16 ~ “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”

John 18:36 ~ “Jesus answered [Pilate], ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.’”

Matt 26:52-53 ~ “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” [note: a “legion” was typically 6,000 soldiers, so 72,000 angels]

Rev 19:11-16 ~ “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

- The “*kingdom of God*” (vs.43) is not this planet, nor is it anything physical. God’s kingdom is spiritual, and therefore eternal. Only those who are truly saved – by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – are a part of God’s (redeemed) kingdom.

And all those who are truly saved will inherit this eternal kingdom and will live as citizens (heirs) of God’s kingdom. Therefore, we must not fight for this world or for the things in this world. This world is not our home. We are in the world, but we are not to be of the world. We belong to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, and we are called to live according to that eternal reality.

Matt 6:33 ~ “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Luke 12:31 ~ “Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you”

Col 3:1-2 ~ “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Rom 11:36 ~ “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

James 4:4 ~ “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”

Col 1:13 ~ “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son”

- As Christians, while we still live in this dark world, we are citizens of the kingdom of God.

✓ Illust: In his wonderful book, *The Prayer of the Lord*, renown American pastor and theologian R.C. Sproul writes of an extraordinary encounter he had with one particular Romanian guard while traveling through the Hungarian border.

“In 1990, I was invited into Eastern Europe to do a series of lectures in three countries, first in Czechoslovakia, then in Hungary, and finally in Romania. As we were leaving Hungary, we were warned that the border guards in Romania were quite hostile to Americans and that we should be prepared to be hassled and possibly even arrested at the border. Sure enough, when our rickety train reached the border of Romania, two guards got on. They couldn’t speak English, but they pointed for our passports, then pointed to our luggage. They wanted us to bring our bags down from the luggage rack and open them up, and they were very brusque and rude. Then, suddenly, their boss appeared, a burly officer who spoke some broken English. He noticed that one of the women in our group had a paper bag in her lap, and there was something peeking out of it. The officer said: ‘What this? What in bag?’

Then he opened the bag and pulled out a Bible. I thought, ‘Uh-oh, now we’re in trouble.’ The officer began leafing through the Bible, looking over the pages very rapidly. Then he stopped and looked at me. I was holding my American passport, and he said, ‘You no American.’ And he looked at [my wife] Vesta and said, ‘You no American.’ He said the same thing to the others in our group. But then he smiled and said, ‘I am not Romanian.’ By now we were quite confused, but he pointed at the text, gave it to me, and said, ‘Read what it says.’ I looked at it and it said, ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’ (Phil.3:20a). The guard was a Christian. He turned to his subordinates and said: ‘Let these people alone. They’re ok. They’re Christians.’ As you can imagine, I said, ‘Thank you, Lord.’ This man understood something about the kingdom of God – that our first place of citizenship is in the kingdom of God” (p.49-50).

- That story beautifully illustrates a glorious truth – that for Christians this world is not our home. By God’s grace we now belong to a heavenly country. We are citizens of a celestial homeland. We belong to a holy city. And we will one day reside in our eternal home. Thus, spiritually speaking, we are *“aliens and strangers in this world”* (1Pet.2:11) who are *“longing for a better country – a heavenly one”* (Heb.11:16). This wonderful reality is stated perfectly in Philippians 3:20-21: *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”*

Conclusion

- It has been correctly stated that it is the task of the church to “make the invisible reign of Christ visible to the world.” We are called to proclaim the kingdom of God, and Jesus Christ as the King of kings. Do you know that the best this world can offer falls infinitely short of the glories of heaven? Do you realize that, for Christians, this life on earth is the worst that life will ever be? Does your life reflect the fact that you understand this great and glorious truth? This ought not to produce in us an apathy or complacency toward the people living on earth. Rather, it should stimulate in us the reminder that we are here on earth for an incredibly short time to fulfill our divine purpose – to accomplish our God-given mission of doing all we can do to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we always remember to live as honorable ambassadors and citizens of the kingdom of God.