

The Kingdom of God, Ultimate Concern (Mark 1:9-15, Genesis 9:8-17)

Today's scripture lesson, Mark 1:9-15, shows us two great pictures of the Baptism and the Temptation of the Lord. The Baptism of Jesus shows us that Jesus identifies himself with sinners, which in due course will take him to the cross. Also, the temptation of Jesus indicates that Jesus defeats the kingdom of Satan. The temptation is strenuous and long, some forty days of agony, which implies that our temptation in the world is unavoidable and will also be long and persistent.

And this picture sounds the magnificent music of the Kingdom of God that the Lord, the King of kings, will reign over. The Kingdom of God is the theme of the entire Bible. Therefore, "The Kingdom of God" is the ultimate concern.

One day Nicodemus, a "Pharisee," a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus secretly at night. Jesus read his mind before he asked his question and said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." That is the answer to why we should be baptized. Christian Baptism is not only a sign of washing away of sins, but also the sign of being born again.

Baptism is a sign of rebirth and of being born into a new mind which can see the Kingdom of God. The difference between those who can see and those who cannot see the Kingdom of God is being born again. Eyes that can see the Kingdom of God are not eyes of the flesh but eyes of spirit, faith can open the mind to the eyes of spirit.

What is the sight of the mind? Our concern is the sight of mind. What we are concerned about reflects what it is we love. The Chinese character for "concern" means "sight in the mind." In other words, spiritual vision lies in the words of Jesus. Have you ever had a spiritual vision test? What your concern is, that is where your mind is. If your concern is limited to this world, no matter what faith you have, you are blind in spirit. Jesus said clearly and directly, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Where your treasure is there exactly is where your concern lies.

The word kingdom, "**basileia**," in Greek means either reign or realm. Kingdom of God throughout Scripture represents reality, future expectation and hope. When Jesus came into Galilee, he preached the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom was truly at hand. The Kingdom of God has come close to human beings in the person of Jesus, and in his person it actually confronts us.

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom in which the Lord is enthroned as King forever. In Jesus' actions God's rule has invaded this world. God's rule became present with humanity. "The Kingdom of God is in you" the Lord said. The Kingdom of God in its essence is the reign of God, the personal relationship between the sovereign God and the individual. In the person of Jesus human beings are confronted by the Kingdom of God in its nearness. The only response is repentance and faith. You and I am in the reign of the King, our Lord. Whoever believes in Him are the people of the Kingdom of God. Sovereign God will reign over all of us.

The Kingdom of God, Ultimate Concern
Mark 1:9-15, Genesis 9:8-17

I had a wonderful vacation last week with Sun and my daughter Esther. Thank you for allowing me to have a vacation. This vacation was scheduled a couple of months ago by Esther so that we would not interrupt the Lenten season with our trip. And, she scheduled this vacation for her parents' birthday gifts, and my two daughters paid all the cost for our vacation to Cancun, Mexico. Thanks be to God for such good daughters!

Last Sunday we attended a Catholic church nearby the hotel where we were staying. In Cancun, there was no protestant church, and so we had to find a Catholic church. We missed the time of the English Mass at 9:00 a.m., so we had to attend the Spanish Service 10:30 a.m. If it were held in Latin, I could at least pick up a little bit to understand the Mass, but the whole service was held in Spanish, so I couldn't understand it at all. And even during the Sacrament of communion during the service, we were not allowed to participate since we were not Catholic. We were all excluded by language and liturgy during the whole Mass. It was my first experience where I was a total outsider in Christian worship, even though I was a member of the clergy.

One evening we went to a Mexican restaurant. I ordered a Fajita dish, and meanwhile I had to go to the restroom to wash my hands. Yet, I didn't know which restroom I could enter. There were two doors, indicating the word for men and women in Spanish: a long word and short word. The short word looked like "Adam." so I thought it must be the men's room. I rushed into the room and stood at the sink when I found a woman standing beside me and pointing with her finger to other side. I told her I'm sorry. After returning back to my seat I didn't tell anything to my family, as if there had been no happening at the restroom. Probably, they would make fun of me if they knew of that incident. Language barriers bring us not only miscommunication but also misunderstanding.

Cancun is a part of the Yucatan region in Mexico. When the Spanish soldiers arrived by ship at the Yucatan, at the present location, at first they didn't know where they were. The Spanish soldiers asked the Mayan residents where they were. But, the Mayans didn't know what they were saying. So they said, "I don't know what you are you saying," in their Mayan language, which sounded to the Spanish like "Yucatan." Then, the Spanish misunderstood, and thought that the name of the location was called "Yucatan." After that misunderstanding, they named and called that the place "Yucatan," "I don't know what are you saying" in Mayan language.

I will ask you a question. What would you call those who speak more than three languages? "Multi-lingual" What about two languages? "Bi-lingual" And then what would you call those who speak only one language? The answer is American. Most Americans don't speak other languages, and many don't even try to learn a foreign language. The problem of communication is not only in language. Even though we speak the same language, we may experience communication blocks. One example is the Kingdom of God. Even when we speak in English, we do not understand what the meaning of the Kingdom of God is.

Today's scripture lesson, Mark 1:9-15, shows us two great pictures of the Baptism and the Temptation of Jesus our Lord. The Baptism of Jesus shows us that Jesus identifies himself with sinners, which in due course will take him to the cross. Also, the temptation of Jesus indicates that Jesus defeats the kingdom of Satan. The temptation is strenuous and long, some forty days of agony, which implies that our temptation in the world is unavoidable and will also be long and persistent.

And this picture sounds the magnificent music of the Kingdom of God that the Lord, the King of kings, will reign over. The Kingdom of God is the theme of the entire Bible. The parables of Jesus are all about the Kingdom of God and the theme of the sermons and teachings of Jesus are focused on the Kingdom of God.

Kingdom of God throughout Scripture represents reality, future expectation and hope. When Jesus came into Galilee, he preached the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom was truly at hand.

The first word of Jesus, as with John the Baptist who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus, was "repent," to turn to God with a radical change of mind. John spoke only of the threat of judgment, however, and said little more. Jesus saw also the promise of redemption and included the positive note: believe the gospel. Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ remain the two key words of the gospel. Therefore, the Kingdom of God" is the ultimate concern for all of us.

One day Nicodemus, a "Pharisees," a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus secretly at night. Jesus read his mind before he asked his question and said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." That is the answer to why we should be baptized. Christian Baptism is not only a sign of washing away of sins, but also the sign of being born again.

Without the message of the Kingdom of God, the gospel of Jesus is vague and stands in a vacuum. The first and the core message of Jesus was the Kingdom of God. "The time is near, Repent and believe the Gospel!"

Last Wednesday we had our Ash Wednesday Service. During the service, I called the congregation to come forward to impose the Ashes on their foreheads. The meaning of the imposition of Ashes is to repent and believe the gospel. You may remember my saying, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit you are forgiven" during the imposition of ashes on your foreheads.

One may ask, "how can a pastor forgive my sin?" It is not I who forgive your sin, God whose forgiveness is given freely in response to your repentance and the gospel. I just confirmed your repentance and affirmation of faith in the gospel. Those who repent their sin and believe in the Gospel are forgiven by the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is the definite truth in the Christian gospel.

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One day, as Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. There was a controversial argument between his disciples about the blind. They asked a question to Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.” And then Jesus ordered to this man, “Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

This incident brought an issue of accusation about Jesus to the Pharisees: “This man does not keep the Sabbath.” The Jews still did not believe that Jesus healed this blind man and when Jesus saw them said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin, but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

Spiritual blindness cannot see the Kingdom of God. Koreans and most oriental people don't say “I love you,” often, even to one's spouse. You may say that that is problematic. I met a man a couple of months ago who had been dating a young Chinese lady. He said, “This Chinese lady didn't say I love you.” Also, she didn't expect me to say, “I love you to her.” She had told him, “We Chinese do not say ‘I love you.’ Even though you don't say, ‘I love you’ to me, I know whether you truly love me or not.” “How could you know that I love you?” the man had asked. She replied, “What you are concerned about is me.”

What you are concerned about it what you love. The Chinese character for “concern” means “sight in the mind.” In other words, mindful seeing lies in Jesus' sayings. Have you ever had a spiritual vision test? What your concern is, that is where your mind is. If your concern is limited to this world, no matter what faith you have, you are blind in spirit. Jesus said clearly and directly, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Where your treasure is there exactly is where your concern lies.

When I was a boy our family used to have a big meal table for ten people. We sat around a big meal table. On the table there were rice bowls and soup bowls for each person, and some side dishes to share in the middle. Compared to the number of family members, the food was always not enough. So, I learned table manners from early childhood. I learned that should observe these table manners, which were unspoken, but which nonetheless restricted, “You cannot pick twice at a particular dish on the table, especially a dish with meat in it, unless everybody takes turn. And also, you have to pick only a small portion of it at one time.”

I was a little boy who wanted to have tasty food, but I was well trained that I should not eat from the special dish more than once until everybody else had a chance to take of it. Do you know what I did then? My eyes were focused on certain dish but my chopsticks moved in other directions. That was an unfortunate situation. Don't you think your habits

are similar to my childhood habits at the meal table? Your eyes are supposed to focus on the Kingdom of God, but your actual concerns are on this world.

I heard this funny story from my senior friend in California. When paper money is worn-out, those worn-out bills are recalled by the government and sent to certain places to be burned. In that place many, many different kinds of cash bills come from all over the place. Since the pile of worn-out money is too high, they have to wait their turn to be burned. Meanwhile, those paper bills waiting for their turn share their stories.

At first a one hundred dollar bill told his story, boasting about himself, “You know what, I have traveled to a lot at many places. People loved me so much they always carried me in special places in their purses. I traveled to hotels, and prestigious dinner parties, musicals, concert halls, and a super ball game!” My life is so pleasant.

And then, a fifty dollar bill said, “Those are good places. Once in a while, I traveled like that, too. But, I usually traveled to grocery stores and high-class restaurants, beauty shops and shopping centers when there was a sale.”

When it was a twenty-dollar bill’s turn, the twenty dollar bill said, “I was a frequent customer of grocery stores, popular restaurants and gas stations.”

Lastly, the one dollar bill confessed, “I have traveled on very busy schedules. I was a favorite customer of fast food restaurants, seven-eleven stores, and...um, yeah, churches also. Many people love to put me on the offering plate during the worship service without hesitation.

Now-a-days we learn what the Bible said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” If I knew that the money I invested would be gone, I should invest it instead in God’s bank.

The word kingdom, “**basileia**,” in Greek means either reign or realm. Kingdom of God throughout Scripture represents reality, future expectation and hope. When Jesus came into Galilee, he preached the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom was truly at hand. The Kingdom of God has come close to human beings in the person of Jesus, and in his person it actually confronts us.

I had an opportunity to go snorkeling in Cancun. Wearing a life jacket with snorkel equipment, I jumped into the water. I could see seven deep into the bottom, and I could see many kinds of fish near-by. There was a realm under the sea that I hadn’t recognized standing at the shore of sea. The Kingdom of God is the realm that God rules and governs over the people of God.

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom in which the Lord is enthroned as King forever. In Jesus’ actions God’s rule has invaded this world. God’s rule became present with

humanity. “The Kingdom of God is in you” the Lord said. The Kingdom of God in its essence is the reign of God, the personal relationship between the sovereign God and the individual. In the person of Jesus human beings are confronted by the Kingdom of God in its nearness. The only response is repentance and faith. You and I am in the reign of the King, our Lord. Whoever believes in Him are the people of the Kingdom of God. Sovereign God will reign over all of us.

Turn to God with a radical change of mind and believe in the gospel that Jesus promised to forgive us, restore us, and govern us in His realm of the Kingdom of God. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are people of His Kingdom. We are under God’s forgiving, restoring, and governing Kingdom, and that is the gospel of Jesus.