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Last week we ended our thoughts very briefly with Vss. 24 and 25. Just one aspect, but I purposely wanted to visit these important verses two times.

I pointed out that in vs. 3:15 we have the challenge of being "ready" to give every man an answer for the hope that is in us. And part of accomplishing that readiness is an understanding of the mechanics, if you will, of the gospel, the good news. So this morning we'll just consider these 2 verses and revisit the gospel message so prominent here.

Jesus came preaching, *repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Our question is; How do we distill that brief message to a usable, understandable message that is meaningful to someone who asks? And yet, in those few brief words, as ever when God speaks, is everything necessary to ask the right questions.

The gospel message is the good news that an insurmountable problem has a solution, given freely by God. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

If you've been listening to my approach to the Bible for any time now, and most of you have, you've discovered that I am a Kingdom guy. That one word has unlocked so many questions for me.

The biblical use of the word kingdom is not about real estate, it's about authority to reign. Authority to rule. And that is where our problem is rooted.

God created this world, this tiny planet, and all of the universes and solar systems in the heavens. They belong to Him. He created them to bring glory to His name. He spoke them into existence, and they are His. And mostly, His creation perfectly reflects the glory of the creator

back to Him.

With one exception. This tiny rock where we live. God created a beautiful habitable garden full of good things, and He gave a subordinate authority to Adam and Eve. They would be answerable to Him, but within those bounds, they would have authority to reign over everything else on this planet. All of the animals, everything, theirs to enjoy, but with one caveat. Ultimately they still belonged to the Creator and must live within boundary's He set.

They abdicated that authority for a bite of a forbidden fruit. And we learn later, in this book, that by doing that, the authority to reign on this planet was defaulted to Satan who tempted them to disobey the Creator.

Fast forward several thousand years and we have a world immersed in chaos. This world is in rebellion against the Creator God who ultimately owns it. Sin entered at the garden, and sin is intolerable to God. Every man born since Adam is born in sin. It's a disease we are born with. Every one.

So when Jesus says, the Kingdom is at hand, "The authority to reign of heaven is at hand" what He's saying is that God is coming to depose Satan, to put away and judge all evil, and to restore the glory that this world once had before sin entered. He's taking back what is His. There is violence involved.

That's either really good news, or really terrifying news, depending on which side of that cataclysmic battle you are on.

If you are in rebellion against the Creator, and every man, woman, and child is born into that rebellion, if that is your status, then fiery judgement is coming. Mountains are going to melt like wax when He comes in judgement. The stored up wrath of God on all of the sin and rebellion of this place is going to be unleashed.

And if that wasn't bad enough news, this book tells us that every man, woman, and child that dies in that rebellious state they were born into will be seperated from God and will exist in physical torment, forever.

God cannot have the filth of sin in His presence.

Right about here you're probably forming an argument in your sin affected mind that goes something like; Wait a minute. Is that fair? I didn't ask to be born with this disease called sin. If I had been in the garden instead of Adam, or Eve, maybe it would have gone differently. Why do I get to pay for their problem?

And the answer is; The pot doesn't get to say to the one who formed it, why have you made me thus. He is Creator, you are created. Everything He does is perfect. His judgements are without question. He is righteous altogether.

But. There are other attributes in play here. God loves His creation. When He created us, He made us in His image, and even in our defiled state, He loves us and values us. And so a rescue was set in motion immediately after the wreck in the garden.

God is merciful and gracious. Longsuffering and patient. Yet this creates a conundrum. Justice must be satisfied. Wrath must be appeased. In order for Him to re-instate fellowship, friendship with a defiled creation, sin has to be removed.

Now we're getting down to the nuts and bolts of the good news. How can a Holy and righteous God forgive sin without the judgement necessary. It's like one of His attributes is in conflict with other attributes. Mercy and judgement. Love and seperation. Holiness must cast off the defiled yet love longs to restore.

God set a standard in His revealed word that cannot be broken. In Exodus 34 He tells Moses these words; *6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished,*

To summarize so far, God loves and values His creation. Every living

person bears the image of God. God created us specifically for fellowship, friendship, love. But sin entered and we are altogether ruined. Spoiled like oozing rotten fruit that must be thrown away.

Just how bad is this sin problem. Maybe we could change enough and be good enough that God would accept us back into His Holy presence. Maybe if we dress funny and ride a bicycle around and knock on enough doors we'll be good enough to impress a Holy God?

Maybe walking on burning coals with bare feet would impress Him. Or perhaps crawling on your knees for miles to some holy object would do it. Maybe murdering other people who we think God hates would please Him.

The secular atheists who claim that religion is what introduces most of the insanity and wars in this world are absolutely spot on. Satan is just having a great time forming religions and religions and religions, and the crazier they are, the more fallen humans seem to go after them.

There's a sky god and to make him like you better, cut off peoples heads. Run them down with your truck. Bomb them. Gas them. Nuke them, whatever it takes to please the god in the sky.

And this has been going on for centuries. Molech worship. Throw your little babies in the fire, an offering to molech. We're more sophisticated now, we cut them up in pieces and throw them in the trash can, or sell the pieces for whatever some other crazy person will pay.

I'm off on a tangent here, but stay with me. Think about what Jesus said when they crucified Him on the cross. I'll give you a clue, Stephen said the same thing when the religious people were stoning him. Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.

The entire lost world, in a thousand different ways, is being duped by Satan. All the craziness, all the violence, all the poverty and sadness and abuse done by evil people is happening because Satan rules this world and people do not understand that he is duping them.

They do crazy stuff, very much of it in the name of religion, and Satan is behind it. They are blind dupes of Satan. Forgive them Father, for they don't have a clue, in the modern vernacular.

Satan owns the world, and sin is rampant. The influence of christianity on western civilization saw the high point of restraint, and that restraint is coming unraveled, in my lifetime, as we watch. Darkness is replacing any light that was ever the restraining influence of christianity. Almost gone. Evil duped people are working day and night to finalize the victory over christians.

Bernie Sanders screams at the top of his lungs at some appointee that biblical christianity is not what this nation is about. No longer tolerated! And he's duped. He's accomplishing Satan's agenda. Crush the christians.

I need to get back to the discussion about sin. We see the evidence every day in the news. Just how bad is it? Is there any hope for men to actually be righteous enough to be in the presence of a Holy Creator God?

And here we turn again to scripture. Isaiah lays it out for us in such simple terms. Listen to Isaiah 59 and see if it doesn't sound like a more poetic way to say what I've just described about the condition of duped men.

*1Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short
That it cannot save;
Nor is His ear so dull
That it cannot hear.*

*2But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your
God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not
hear.*

*3For your hands are defiled with blood
And your fingers with iniquity;*

*Your lips have spoken falsehood,
Your tongue mutters wickedness.*

*4No one sues righteously and no one pleads honestly.
They trust in confusion and speak lies;
They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.*

*5They hatch adders' eggs and weave the spider's web;
He who eats of their eggs dies,
And from that which is crushed a snake breaks forth.*

*6Their webs will not become clothing,
Nor will they cover themselves with their works;
Their works are works of iniquity,
And an act of violence is in their hands.*

*7Their feet run to evil,
And they hasten to shed innocent blood;
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,
Devastation and destruction are in their highways.*

*8They do not know the way of peace,
And there is no justice in their tracks;
They have made their paths crooked,
Whoever treads on them does not know peace.*

Listen again to Isaiah 64 describe those who are more "righteous" than the folks above. What about the good people. Sure God is angry with the wicked and the rebellious, but what about the folks across the street? The really good, kind, decent people.

*6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;*

And Paul sums up his lengthy discussion on the human condition in Romans 3. 3:10 says simply; *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, **not one**:*

The best, kindest, most decent people who ever lived will stand before God and their garments will be filthy. The language is descriptive. Like you just went for a swim in the sewage canal and now you're standing before a Holy God? That's our condition and we are helpless to do anything about it on our own.

But God can. And finally with that groundwork in place, we get to Peter's verse in 1 Peter 2:24

24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

The one and only possibility for us that satisfies all of God's attributes, His love, His righteousness, His promise to judge every sin, His mercy, and His holiness is for someone who is perfectly and sinlessly righteous to die in our place as a substitute.

And Peter says, that's what Jesus did. He Himself bore our sins, in His body, on the cross. And Peter says that because of that, we can die to sin and live to righteousness.

I confess that I love the old hymns that have some depth that most of the modern ones are missing. When the hymn writer says;

*He breaks the power of cancelled sin
He sets the prisoner free
His blood can make the foulest clean
His blood availed for me.*

Those words and ideas come directly from what Peter is telling us in this verse. *24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*

The wounds and the stripes, the blood that flowed out of Him was the punishment I deserved. His wounds healed my sickness. Sin no longer has the power to reign in my heart.

Not only that, but the lights came on. I read this book and now I can see the reasons behind all the wickedness and chaos and destruction. It all makes sense, and Jesus took the punishment due me, and set me free from the debt that I had no resources to ever pay. He died a substitutionary death, in my place, for me, and for you.

Paul agrees with Peter. In 2Cor. 5:21 Paul says; *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Do you see the substitution there. Jesus takes my foul and vile sin to the cross and pays my debt, and His righteousness is given to me.

Again, Paul says; *8 More than that, I count all things as loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith.* in Philippians 3:8 and 9

He takes my sin away. He gives me His righteousness. That's the heart of the gospel. Jesus met every requirement of a Holy and Righteous God, and He imparts His righteousness to my account.

Peter is drawing heavily on Isaiah 53 in these verses. Remember that before the new testament was completed, the apostles had to preach this gospel with the Old Testament.

In vs. 25 Peter continues; *25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

Those would be familiar words to his hearers. Listen to Isaiah direct;

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,

Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Peter says, we are the people Isaiah is talking about. We are the ones who were rescued from sin by the good shepherd. We were the ones who had wandered away and were lost, and now the Shepherd has gathered us to Himself and He is our guardian. He watches over us.

Israel is blinded. The words of Isaiah have no meaning for them. We are the ones who love the Shepherd and the Shepherd loves and cares for us. Israel didn't hear His voice, though He spoke to them in His revealed word for centuries for 3 years His Son spoke to them in person. We are the ones who heard the shepherd and returned to His care.

Jesus builds on the metaphor of sheep and shepherd in John chapter 10. I want to read just a little of that chapter because it teaches so well the things we are talking about this morning.

7 So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 “All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

22 At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; 23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. 24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” 25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. 26 “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30 “I and the Father are one.” 31 The Jews picked up stones

again to stone Him.

We read and teach John chapter 10 to Sunday school children because it is so beautiful and easy to understand. But make no mistake. The depths of the sovereignty of God are powerful in this chapter.

The blinding of Israel. The fact that some hear and cannot hear, and others hear and say, "That's my shepherd's voice. I will go to Him and be safe."

We've talked about God's holiness. His righteous demands. His promise that He will not allow sin to go unpunished. His love and mercy. The value of His creation, the inherent dignity of we who were formed in His image, and the problem of sin.

We talked about man, every one of us, ruined by sin. Duped by Satan. Rebelling against the God who created us and loves us. Unless there is a rescue, we are His enemies, destined for judgement. Every one.

We talked about His holy standards and our helpless state to meet them on our own. We are bankrupts about to be thrust before the judge in the court of God. All we have to offer is altogether filthy. Our righteousness is sewage to Him. Unacceptable.

We talked about God's only Son, Jesus the messiah, who came to intervene in our behalf. He takes our sin to the cross. He bears our punishment in our place. He gives us His righteousness. We can stand before God, in Him, with a righteousness, not our own, the very righteousness of Jesus.

He takes away our filthy garments and clothes us in righteousness, white and clean.

We've been taught all our lives that things that sound too good to be true, are usually not true. That free vacation the guy on the phone is trying to give you . . .

So why do we believe that someone would die for us, take our

punishment, give us His righteousness, and then give us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places? That's a lot to believe. What is the proof?

This man who said all these things, did in fact die on that cross, and on the 3rd day, He rose up again from the dead. That's why we believe.

Finally, how do we appropriate this good news. How do I cross over from Satan's prison house into eternal life, the abundant life He promised, with the Lord Jesus.

And here we retour back again all the way to where we began with Jesus simple message. Some of the first words recorded out of His mouth.

Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. In Mark 1:15 He declares;

"The time is fulfilled," He said, "and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!"

Repent and believe. And here, in the context, I rarely hear preachers teach what that word repent actually means.

Jesus says, the authority to reign of heaven is at hand. The authority to reign in human hearts instead of Satan reigning and holding you hostage in his prison house, is at hand. Repent means you understand that you have the opportunity to leave Satan and his world behind, and become a citizen in God's authority.

Repent means you leave this world behind and gladly come under the authority of a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter the cost. Having Him trumps everything else. Satan and this world is no longer Lord of you, Jesus the Son of God becomes your Lord on the day that you believe and give yourself wholly to Him.

The discussion about Sovereignty of God and will of man is ongoing and sometimes odious. I believe in both. There's a reason the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, and fishermen dropped their nets and followed Him.

There is one verse that I love that is so helpful to me. John 7:17. 17 *“If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.*

Repentance that leads to life is a repentance that encompasses that willingness to obey. Don't come to Jesus thinking you'll get the fire insurance and He'll be okay with you sleeping with someone you're not married to. Don't come holding onto this world and the sin you love. Listen to that verse. It means exactly what it says; 17 *“If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.*

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True repentance means you're willing to leave this world behind.

Jesus gave two brief parables that are pictures of this kind of repentance. Matthew 13:

44 *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

45 *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

The sheep who hear His voice are the ones who will trade everything they have in order to have Him.

I hope there's something useful for you here this morning. Some here may need to repent and believe. Others may need to revisit these truths until they are ready inside us, so that we can answer those who ask us about the hope that is in us.