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Presentation Transcript
Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand – Feast of Tabernacles
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Have you ever experienced a paradigm shift – an *ah-ha* moment where you look at data or a situation you've been familiar with for some time, and suddenly, you see it in a completely different way, or with additional meaning – changes everything? Well, after reading the same material in the Bible many times for years, I suddenly saw the same scripture in a new light with added meaning. What I learned from that has settled over me like a blanket of relief and thankfulness.

So, let me take you there today. Maybe you can gain the same thing I did. We have talked about for years in the Church of God the coming Kingdom of God – you know, the Millennium – God's Kingdom on earth that is going to come after Christ returns. There is, however, in the scripture, another aspect of the Kingdom that Jesus talked about over and over while He was here in the flesh. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Now, He knew that He was not going to overthrow the Romans and set up the Kingdom of God right then. He also knew that He was not coming back for a very long time – at least in human terms. So, what did He mean back then when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand?" We always tried to explain that by saying that God's sense of time is different from ours. But He was talking to people then. So, what does *at hand* mean in this context, given that He was not going to overthrow the Romans or establish a literal kingdom at that time?

Well, first notice that He did *not* say, "...the Kingdom of God." He's used that term in many other places in the New Testament – in the Gospels – but here He said, "...the kingdom of heaven." Why? Could it be that He wants us to think about what it's like up there in this instance, rather than whose kingdom it is? That, in itself, might be an *ah-ha* moment for us – might even be a no-brainer.

So, let's go back to Matthew 4, and look at the phrase *at hand* – the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The Greek word for this phrase means, if you look at Strong's and Louw & Nida, to bring near, to be close by, in the vicinity. So, in Matthew 4, he uses the word and it's translated *at hand*. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. So, we could say, in English, today it could also mean nearby.

But again, what was Jesus getting at? Could He be talking about Himself? "I'm right here." I'm sure that's a huge part of it. But, it seems there's something more. The kingdom is real and it is close. I think this is where it gets a bit interesting.

One of things that Herbert Armstrong did when he created Ambassador College was to fill the halls with great art. And I remember that there was a picture hung over a fireplace in Ambassador Hall that I walked by every day. I was taking classes there, and some of the classes were in some of the old mansions along Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena. One day, several ministers were there, along with a man who had been hired to – and I don't know the correct terminology – refresh, or maybe, preserve a painting that they were looking at. This man had a case open and there were soft cloths and brushes, and little bottles, and various tools laid out. But it wasn't so much the tools that caught my attention. This man was practically swooning over this painting, explaining and excited, in reverent tones, the brilliance of the artist as he marshalled all his skill and creativity to produce this masterpiece. As he pointed out the various aspects of this painting that made it a masterpiece, my eyes went to each one of his observations, and I could suddenly see them. And that painting was there all along, but now I saw this painting in a completely new way. And I think that's what Jesus meant when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." There's something important about that.

So, if we go back to the Gospels, we can recall the many times Jesus said to His disciples, "Only believe..." "Oh you of little faith..." "Follow Me," "Seek the kingdom first and I'll have your back." And for the very longest time they had such a hard time getting it. In this new TV series, *The Chosen*, there's an episode where Jesus and the disciples traveled a long way to talk to a crowd of upset people. We learn from this scene that the disciples thought Jesus wanted them there to protect Him – as though He needed protection. After over a year of following Him, they were still amazed that He could feed 5,000 people with two fish and five loaves of barley, or walk on water, or heal the sick, or raise the dead.

What are some of the things that are *at hand* for us today? Perhaps we don't see or understand. So, are we like that? Are we not understanding some things about Christ? What are some of the things that are *at hand* for us that, perhaps, we don't see.

Let's look in Matthew 11:28. Look at this with me. This is something Jesus said to the people to explain what He meant by, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He said:

Matthew 11:28 – *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Now, one kind of rest we can think about that is used in the Bible is the rest of the Sabbath day. Paul used the term *rest* in reference to the Kingdom of God when Christ comes. But He's talking about it as something that is here right now.

So, Jesus promises us rest *now* if we're a part of His group. So, what's keeping you from resting now? Do you have, perhaps, a thorn in the flesh – to quote Paul – or maybe some persistent sin, or some sort of physical ailment that plagues you? Are there financial problems in your life? Or, are you suffering from an illness? Or, maybe an addiction? Or, persecution at school or work? Or, not being able to get along with people? Or, sometimes, family problems persist? Are you caught in the vicious grip of judging others? *Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* So, why can't we find the rest that we're looking for sometimes?

I was counseling with a woman once who wrestled with a sin all her life – all her adult life. And people in her own family and some friends became aware of her sin, and had rejected her – forgetting that they will be judged by the same harsh judgment they had for her. Since they were not sin free either, they were in danger of being judged in a harsh way. She was in agony about it – for her sin, and for their sin, and for the fact that they were sinning because of her sin, for what might happen to them because they didn't seem to be able let go of their judgment. After some time, she told me that she still felt terrible all of it, but she knew that she had to get up and go forward towards God, seeking God first and His righteousness and His grace while letting God take care of everything else. It's like the song, *My Chains Are Gone* – my chains are gone, I've been set free. *Amazing Grace* – we sing it a lot. For her, when she came to that realization, her burden was relieved – not in the millennium, but right now. And I remember thinking that God is a very efficient God. He was using her sin to humble her, and her sin to humble her family as well. And it will end up a win-win for everybody, if everyone just follows Jesus' way in the world. And my friend said to me, "I will focus on, and count on, and pray for that." So, do you know another of saying what she just said? *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Your will be done now, here on the earth, by me, like it is done in heaven.

All my life when I prayed God's will be done on earth like it is in heaven, I was always thinking about the bigger picture – you know, the beast and the false prophet, and the two witnesses, and all of that – the stuff in the book of Revelation. But you know, Christ returning to cause His government to rule humanity – that's what I was thinking about. But lately, it seems so much more personal. God's will can be done on earth by me and by you, like it is in the kingdom of heaven right now. So, as long as we let God and Christ live in us, that can happen for us. We do not have to wait. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. All we have to do is *live* it with God's help. And benefits are going to be immediately forthcoming.

Let's look in Matthew 6:31:

Matthew 6:31-33 – *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"* So, He's talking about the needs we have right now in this

life. And He says in the next verse: *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* Not later, but now. So, that's how it's going to be for us in God's Kingdom. Jesus said we could have it now. Right? Right now.

What is it about following God, and trusting, and having faith, and relying on, and living by all these things, instead of fretting over them? Where did they all come from. Well, from God. And where are all these things the way of life now? Well, all of these good things are lived out every day in the kingdom of heaven. There's no hate there – only love. No fear there, only safety. No burdens there, only rest. No struggle there, only peace. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, Jesus, the Father, and all the angels, they live this way already. They live the ways of the Kingdom. And the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament are the values that they live by in heaven right now. When Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," He was saying, "You can have heaven's values right now. They're ready for you. You can have them right now. All you have to do is put them on and start living that way." All these things Jesus taught us are the values of God's Kingdom. That's the way it is in heaven – in the kingdom of heaven. It's at hand.

At times, it seems like we will never be able to believe all the things that Jesus taught us like He laid it out for us, but there is something that we have not factored in yet. And that's the Holy Spirit. Oh yeah, that! Jesus said that He and the Father would come live in us by their powerful Spirit. What will happen when they do that? Well, they will bring their values with them. And all God needs from us is the desire – the heart for – and they will take us where we need to go. It isn't that the Kingdom is at hand and we can reach out to it. It's that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and they will help us reach out to it to take it.

Remember, this process, by which God changes us is, called sanctification. And sanctification is always seen as God's supernatural effort rather than a human one. So, we have the Holy Spirit, and it's been a great mystery down through the ages how God was going to change us. But that all changed once He created the church. There, all the angels and all the beings in heaven understood what He was doing. Paul called it *Christ in you, the hope of glory* – the Holy Spirit in us. The hope of glory – becoming like God – is because Christ lives in us.

What else? Well, there's an account in the Gospels about a woman who was staggeringly good at what we've been talking about today. She had been sick for twelve years. Yet, when she simply tracked Christ, with her illness and all, and simply touched the hem of His garment, she received a benefit of the Kingdom of God. She was healed. She was literally coming to Him as her healing occurred. Jesus said, "Come to me." That's what she was doing – for the exact purpose of being healed. And Jesus explained to her that her faith had made her healing possible. So, that's how we participate in the kingdom of heaven now – by faith.

In contrast, there were many people who had seen many miracles, which were His proof of who He was, and yet, refused to believe. He even told the Pharisees that it didn't matter how much

evidence was before them, they would still refuse to believe it. And Jesus said people like this, who saw and yet refused to believe, were categorized by a term that He used frequently – hardhearted. And He included His disciples at time in this description – and the people of His own home town, even. And as a result, we’re told something that’s very instructive for the topic we’re discussing today in Matthew 13:58. It says:

Matthew 13:58 – *And he did not do many mighty works there – in Nazareth – because of their unbelief.*

So, the trick to it, from our side, is to remember and apply what Jesus said to Jairus. Jairus was an administrator of the synagogue there, and his daughter was sick. He went to Jesus for help, because he was desperate. While they were on the way to his house, word came that she had died. And Jesus said to him, “Do not be afraid, only believe. She will be well.” Only believe. In contrast then, Jesus was saying, “Stop doubting God’s Kingdom and believe in it. It’s right here. You have all the proof you need. So, drop the heart-hearted resistant weak faithlessness and *believe*. That’s all you have to do.”

So, how do we know if we really believe in it? Well, we can ask ourselves a question: Does all this belief and “we will be taken care of” stuff seem real, or does it seem like it won’t really make a difference – like it’s out-of-touch with the harsh reality of life on earth? Or perhaps, for some of us, like it might happen to everybody, but us? So, which way is it for you? Well, here’s a scripture that clarifies it all. It’s in 1 Corinthians 1:18.

1 Corinthians 1:18 – *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing – it doesn’t make sense to them – Godless view of things – but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.*

So, don’t let it be foolishness to you. Let it be the power of God. If we look at the kingdom of heaven God’s way, instead of our own – if we see the paradigm and look at it in God’s way of it – God’s paradigm – we’ll see it – especially with the Holy Spirit with us. And with it will come all the Kingdom blessings Jesus promised us – not in a thousand years, but right now. So, that’s why Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” His Kingdom will be not only at hand, but *in us* – as God the Father and Jesus the Son take up residence in our hearts and live out their plan, their values, and their loving way in each of us.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.