

Well, good morning, everyone.

Everyone have a good Memorial Day weekend? Yes. Do you remember it? It's been ages ago since that happened. Wasn't it?

Time flies by when you hit 60. It's like, listen, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. And I'm sort of excited about it at this point in my life. Over the weekend, I watched a short little snippet video. They do these.

I think PBS did them. And I watched a little one about 12 minutes long. And they interviewed a gentleman, old, old guy. I mean, probably older than Alan. And.

And he had been. He had been recruited at the age of 50. Well, he signed up at the age of 50, 15 to go to war, and he served in World War II. This is obviously a little bit of an older video, but. But he left home.

He left the States with his head full of the promises of his recruiter, who would you know he was going to go see the world? His ears still ringing with the sound of brass bands, his heart just stirred by waving flags. Anyone still, their heart just thumps a little louder, a little faster when you see a flag waving. His imagination filled with honor and victory and pride in his country and what he's going to do. And he left with the image of his dad's proud look and his mom's hug and the neighbors slapping him on the back, congratulating him.

And then he reached the front lines. And if you've served in the military, you know what happens here. War becomes not just this abstract idea. It is. It's real.

And it's not a fun parade. It's not an inspiring speech. It's bullets flying past your ear and the smell of dirt and blood. It's confusing. There's a lot of yelling.

There's fear. And in that moment, he says, I looked around and he thought, I'm not sure I signed up for this. The front lines are very different from the home front, so kids do not repeat this, but I'm going to say it because it's a saying. They say war is hell and life is no cakewalk either. We all face pressures that challenge our idea of what life is supposed to be.

We just finished a series in Ecclesiastes, and we talked about some of these pressures, some of these challenges, the pressure to keep up or get left behind. The longing to feel known and the longing to feel loved. The search for peace in a world that just doesn't seem to offer much of that. And the quiet ache of wondering, am I enough? Enough for me, enough for others.

And Enough for God. And ever since sin, challenged, upset, shattered the peace of Eden, that perfect place that God designed for us to live in. Humanity. Men and women have been longing for the day when everything is made right again, where it's the way it is supposed to be, when all things are restored, when what is broken is healed, when God brings everything back into alignment with his original design. And it's in this tension, this place where Jesus comes on the scene.

And Jesus comes on the scene and he says this. The kingdom of God is near. And people look around and some are like, yes, finally. And others go, I don't know, has it, It's. So where is it?

Are you sure the kingdom of God has come near? Because right now my life still feels like chaos. The world feels like chaos. I'm living on the front lines.

Jesus announces not merely a someday promise, someday the kingdom will be here, but he announces a right now reality. The kingdom is here. The kingdom is at hand. And that's what these next several weeks will be like. Well, we're going to discover what happens when, when the Gospel meets us in just the everyday humdrum normalness of our lives.

In the coffee shop, in the. In the workplace, at home, at church. What really amounts to our own front lines. Everyday front lines where we see how Jesus is going to reshape the way we live in that place. I'm going to pray and then we'll start.

If you've got your Bibles with you, you can turn to Mark. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the four gospels. Matthew Mark is the second one. If you've got your Bibles and you see some red letters in it, look above, you'll see Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Mark's where we want to be.

And we want to be in the very first chapter of Mark. Mark 1:14. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, when you say the kingdom is here, when you say the kingdom is near, when you say the kingdom is at hand, there's a part of me that looks around and goes, I don't know what you're talking about, but it's not what I see. But on the other hand, if you say it, then it's true, no matter what I see.

So help us to see with your eyes. Help us to understand what you mean when you say this. Open our eyes to your word, Open our eyes to your truth. Holy Spirit, speak through me and speak to us in Jesus name. Amen.

So Mark, chapter 1, verses 14 and 15 says this. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming The good news of God, the time has come. He said, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Now, if you're reading closely, you notice

something that we might be tempted to just skip over to get to the good stuff, to get to the Jesus stuff.

But it begins this way. It says, John was in prison. Now, this is not just any John. This is John the Baptist. Many of us know his story, and if you don't.

Let me just remind you a little bit about his life. John is the one whose birth was announced in a miraculous way by an angel. John was the one that was born to, like, really old parents who could not have children, who had given up on the idea of having children. Children. And all of a sudden, they've got a child.

They're going to be. They're expecting a child. This is the same John who the angel said would be filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb. This is the same John that was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. And so this little John, this little miracle baby grew up and he fulfilled that calling.

He. He did what the. What the. What God said he was going to do. He ended up preaching to massive crowds out in the wilderness.

And he's calling the people to the same message that Jesus is saying. John's message is this. Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

What that means is this. God's promised reign is just around the corner. The old way of life must give way to the new. The Messiah is coming, and everything must change, including you. You must change.

You must repent. And then Jesus shows up. You remember this scene where Jesus shows up there at the River Jordan, and. And John says, this is the one right here that God has called. Jesus walks into the water.

John baptizes Jesus. The dove comes down, and this voice from heaven lets everyone know that God is very pleased with this moment. Jesus is revealed for who he is, and John is right there in all of it, fulfilling his mission, doing what God has called him and appointed him to do. And now, despite all that, John is in prison. Life does not often turn out the way we expect it to turn out.

He's in prison because the kingdom that he is announcing and proclaiming is in opposition to the kingdom that exists in the here and now. Herod's kingdom. So Herod has him arrested and put in prison. And if you can identify with John in this moment, I don't know if anyone here has been in prison. And I'm not going to ask for a show of Hands, Kedra, you're good today.

I don't think Kedra's ever been in prison. I don't think that's her

story. I'm not telling it. John's in prison in this dungeon cell, and I don't think it was much like what our cells are here. I think it was nasty.

And John's there. And I don't know that I would be surprised if this thought didn't pass through John's mind. Okay, Lord, what is going on? I don't think I signed up for this. Now, if you are knowledgeable at John the Baptist, if you.

If you remember what Jesus said about him, he was. He was. No greater man born of woman has ever been John. Jesus thinks very highly of John the Baptist. So it may say strange, it may seem strange that John may feel shaken by this.

We want our men of faith to be unshakable, don't we? We want these heroes of the Bible to be like, never giving up, never going to let you down, never going to give you up.

But even John struggles, doesn't he? Now, if you don't believe me, here's what happens. Matthew 11. Turn your Bibles back just a few Pages to Matthew 11, verses 2 and 3, which says this. When John, who was in prison, heard about what Jesus was doing, the deeds of the Messiah, he sends his own disciples.

John had his disciples too. And he sends his disciples, his. His trainees to find Jesus and ask him, are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? And again, knowing John's history and his history with Jesus, this is a little bit of an astonishing question. And John is essentially saying this.

I've done everything that was asked of me and expected of me. I did it. So why am I here? Did I screw this up somehow, or are you failing me in some way?

Now, if you're like me, you have probably asked yourself the same version or a different version of this same sort of question. And this is what happens when, what I preach on Sunday, I have to remind myself on Tuesday. I remember singing songs and leading worship for years and singing about God's amazing grace. And then, and then the week happens Sunday. So you may not be in prison, bullets may not be flying past your head, but you may still know what it's like to think, okay, I'm not sure I signed up for this.

I would lead songs about amazing grace on a Monday. Still feel like I somehow had to work hard to earn God's approval.

On Sunday. There's this great message about Being part of the family of God. And on Tuesday, you feel really alone.

The sermon on Sunday was all about God's. God's surpassing peace that

passes understanding. And on Wednesday, I'm wrestling with anxiety.

I take communion on Sunday and I take the bread and the cup and I'm so thankful for the forgiveness of God. And then on Thursday, oh, I'm feeling guilt and shame again. Sunday says one thing often, but the week seems to say something else, doesn't it? If the kingdom has come near Jesus, then why does life still feel like I'm living it? Life on the front lines with stuff flying past me.

Scary. Jesus answers that question by teaching us how to understand what he means about the kingdom. I've said it this way, and I don't know that I said it first, but at this point in time, I've said it enough that if you want to quote me, you can, you can do so. Christians live in both the here now and the hereafter, and we do it simultaneously. The kingdom is truly here now because Jesus has come.

We've received Him. He's in our life, he's working in our lives. And yet the kingdom is still yet to come. The hereafter is not here yet because Jesus promised all things would be made new and be made right. And they haven't just yet.

The kingdom is present, but not yet complete. It's real, but not yet finished. It's getting close, but it's not yet fully revealed. And that means that we live in this tension between the here, the here now and the hereafter. We have received God's grace.

We really do belong to God. We really do have access to his peace that passes understanding. We really are forgiven. But in the here now we find ourselves living intention of trying to understand that fully. But the here now is being used by God to prepare us for the hereafter.

And one helpful illustration of this is pregnancy. Connor Sash. I got permission not from Connor, but from Rachel, which matters more, to share this story. They're expecting their fourth child. By the way, congratulations to Connor and Rachel.

Sash.

So I don't know if this is true with the fourth child, but when a family learns that the first child is on the way, it's wonderful news. The fourth child. You may go. Okay, okay. We know too much now, but the first child, oh, man, it's so exciting, isn't it?

There's joy, anticipation, excitement, there's parties of all types. But that joy, that excitement, that celebration, is accompanied by discomfort, waiting, adjustment, strain.

Connor told me about extreme Fatigue and headaches and nausea. Body aches, sciatica, Stretch marks, heartburn, constipation. Anyone? Swelling, Restless leg syndrome. And that's just Connor.

I've even talked to Rachel about her stuff, so it's completely understandable. In the midst of all of that, expectant dads and moms just look at themselves and go, hold on, I'm not sure I signed up for this. But then they remind themselves, yes, hard things are happening, but also delightful things are happening. Oh, think about it. You're preparing a space for this new little addition to your family.

You're cleaning and painting and shopping, and you get all those little clothes and little booties and little shoes and everyone oohs and ahhs over them. You hold them and go, oh, can you imagine? They're gonna fit in this. You're collecting stuff for the little room. You're hanging pictures on the wall and you're just.

You're creating this perfect little, little room for this perfect little life that you're going to bring home to your perfect little family. Families, you're picking out names. You're planning their future for this life that is coming but is not fully here yet. And that's what the Christian life is like. Hard things are happening at home, at work, in your marriage, with your kids.

It's hard, but also hopeful things are happening, and you see it. Painful things are happening, but also holy things are happening. God is working and doing beautiful things in the midst of the hard stuff. And it's happening all at once, all at the same time in the here now and the hereafter, just working together. God's using the here now stuff to prepare us for the beautiful and promised hereafter.

All the struggles of the here now are being used by God to prepare us for the hereafter. When I feel the frustration of failure, I really am amazed when I go to God with it, how amazing his grace is. And when I feel isolated and alone, it just takes a call from a brother or sister in Christ, a stop by time with them to realize how important the family of God is and why God made it a priority that we be part of it. When anxiety hits hard, and I know some of you guys experience in waves that I don't know anything about, but I still feel enough of it to know I don't like it.

I don't like it at all. But each time that happens, I learn to breathe and pray and lean on the peace of God that God promises me and receive the prayers of his people. And when the front lines get the better of me. I am driven back to the one that I know will never leave me or forsake me and who loves me no matter what else is going on. The front lines can be very painful.

They can be very disorienting, they can be anxiety inducing. But they're not pointless. They're not pointless. Can we go back to John, who's in prison, and he sends his disciples to go talk to Jesus? So they go there and they say, are you the one that was promised?

Are you really the Messiah? And Jesus responds to them this way. He says in Matthew 11, says, Go back and report to John what you hear and see. And here's what. Here's what they.

That's. Here's what they heard and here's what they saw. The blind receive sight, the lame walk. Those who have leprosy are cleansed. The deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor and blessed.

Pay attention to this right here. Pay attention to this right here. Pay attention. Pay attention. Pay attention.

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me. Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, John, John, it's all going to be all right. It's going to be good. It's going to be good.

You'll see. Just hold on, hold on. I've got it all worked out here. He doesn't say, john, everything's going to turn out the way you hoped, the way you expected. He doesn't say, I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you, John.

I promise. Trust me, I got this. He doesn't say that. Instead, he points John to the evidence that the kingdom really is here. The blind see the lame walk, the dead are raised, and the good news is being preached.

John, look. Jesus says, john, look, the kingdom is at hand. The kingdom that you preached about. It's happening. It's happening all around you, even though it doesn't look the way you might expect it to happen.

So here's how this applies to us today. I know some of you are going through circumstances right now where you're doing what you know God told you to do. You're following Jesus. You're walking the walk. You're doing it.

It's hard. It's hard. But you're getting up every day and you're walking the walk, and you're doing what you know Jesus Christ called you to do. You're doing the walk of obedience, and yet you're living on the front lines in your marriage with Your kids, at work, in other areas of your life, you're living it. It's hard.

You're doing what you're supposed to do. But man, there's days where you wonder, did I sign up for this? Your prayers may not all be answered the way you hoped. Your struggle may not disappear overnight. But Jesus says, listen, don't be offended by me.

Don't be offended by what I'm doing. And you're here now. Instead. Open your heart and open your eyes so you don't miss what is happening in the middle of this here now because God is using it. And I am using

these things to prepare you for your hereafter.

God is still at work. God is still doing what God can do. Grace is still amazing. Peace is still possible. Hope is still alive and well.

The kingdom is at hand. Jesus says. Paul says it this way. And we'll finish with this second Corinthians 4, 17, 18. He says, Our light and momentary troubles.

Remember what Solomon said. Temporary, temporary. It's all temporary. And Paul says the same thing. He says, here's what's temporary, these light and momentary troubles.

Because here's what's happening. They are achieving for us. An eternal glory that follows outweighs them all. The here now is preparing us for the hereafter. So what do we do?

We don't get offended by them. We don't get discouraged by them. We don't give up because of them. Instead, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

We keep our eyes on the hereafter even as we live in the here now. The struggle is real, but so is the grace of God. The pain is real, but so is the promise of God. The front line is real. Don't delude yourself.

It is real. It's hard, but so is the kingdom of God growing and going all around you. And one day what we live by faith today in the here now, we'll enjoy fully. In the presence of God in the hereafter, we're going to take communion. And as we come to the communion moment here, this room is filled with people who know what it is like to live on the front lines.

I. I know some of your stories. Right now, you're living there, where it is just very, very challenging. You're dealing with disappointment. You're dealing with prayers that don't seem to be answered. You're fighting battles that very, very, very, very few people truly know about.

And I've talked with you and some of you have expressed Monday's reality doesn't seem to align with Sunday's promise. And I say listen, be offended on account of Jesus, because here's the truth. He's with you right there on Monday, just as he promised to be on Sunday. He's with you on the front lines. The kingdom of God has come near to you and it's right there with you.

Jesus, the King is with you in your front lines. In this moment, we're going to remember that Jesus gave His body and blood for us. He entered into our suffering, into our challenges, into our pressures. He bore our sin. He carried our shame.

He secured our peace. Peace, everlasting peace that passes understanding. He secured it through the cross and now he stands with us on the front lines. He does not leave us alone. He is with us in the here now and he's preparing us a place in the hereafter and he's preparing us for the hereafter.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Jesus, as we receive the bread and the cup this morning, we pray that this moment would strengthen our faith. Remind us again that your kingdom is near and we are part of it. Even in the here now, we are part of that kingdom. So fix our eyes on you.

Fix our eyes on the glorious things you're doing around us. Fix our eyes on the realization that our own eyes have been opened, our own mouths have been unleashed to speak of your goodness where we stumbled and fell. You are raising us up to walk in newness of life. The kingdom of God is near and we are part of it. So help us to fix our eyes on you.

In Jesus name. Amen.

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