

# “Bigger and Smaller than We'd Imagine

*Third in a Series on the Christmas Gospel*

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Mark 1:14b-15; Colossians 1:15-20 (also Luke 1:39-56)

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## Jesus' Gospel

What is the Gospel of Jesus?

Here's the message I first heard. You might recognize it.

*God loves me. But I'm sinful. My sin separated me from God. I can't do anything about this, and it is killing me. But Jesus died in my place. He paid the penalty for my sins, so I don't have to. I am forgiven. I just need to believe that his death for me was enough. My relationship with God is restored. I'll go to heaven, will be with God, forever.*

I still believe all of this. I am so thankful for it.

But I've also come to realize that the Bible's vision of Jesus' Gospel is far, far bigger. What I had believed is part of it, but only part. It's not everything!<sup>1</sup>

The Great News is everything of Jesus. It's all he is, all he has done, and all he means for everyone. It's bigger than we imagine. And, it's smaller too. Because it's *Jesus*. It's his Gospel.

One of the earliest accounts of this was by a guy named Mark. He tells us:

*Jesus came . . . announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"<sup>2</sup>*

That's the Gospel. *Jesus is bringing God's Kingdom! Trust this!*

## The Sovereign's Kingdom

What is Jesus' Kingdom? I dug into this last week.

Any kingdom has a sovereign. Jesus is the Messiah (which means "king"). He comes

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lisa Sharon Harper, [The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right](#) (New York NY: Waterbrook, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:14b-15 (Common English Bible)

from Israel's royal line. God put him on the throne. But get this. Jesus is an ordinary, working-class, blue-colour tradesman from some backwater.<sup>3</sup> He's born as far from a palace as we can imagine. This is God's Kingdom!

A sovereign battles to protect the kingdom. But get this. Jesus rejects violence. He acts with love for his enemies. He is crushed by the world's rulers. He is executed. And get this. He rises from death. He has defeated his enemies and ours. Not by spilling blood, though, but by letting his own be shed. This is God's Kingdom!

In any kingdom, things are done the sovereign's way. But get this. You heard Mary's song. Did you catch what Jesus is about?

*God's mercy flows in wave after wave  
on those who are in awe before him.  
He bared his arm and showed his strength,  
scattered the bluffing braggarts.  
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,  
pulled victims out of the mud.  
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;  
the callous rich were left out in the cold.  
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;  
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.<sup>4</sup>*

God's Kingdom. Our social order overturned. Oppression met with justice, terror with peace. People healed, sin's curse defeated, guilt and shame lifted, death's power broken. All this, Jesus does. All this, God's Kingdom!

### **The Sovereign's Territory**

Another thing about kingdoms. They have territory. What is Jesus' territory?

Listen to another Scripture. It's by Paul. Jesus gave Paul a mission: bring news of his Kingdom into the sophisticated cultures of Greece and Rome. Paul wrote this letter to a small group of Jesus' people. They lived in Colossae, a city that was once important, but not so much anymore.

This is bit is near the beginning. As you listen, hear how big this picture of Jesus is. Also, notice signs of smallness.

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<sup>3</sup> See Jordan K. Monson, "My Boss is a Jewish Construction Worker." *Christianity Today* (November 22, 2021). [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/december/jewish-construction-worker-jesus-vocation-profession-stone.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/december/jewish-construction-worker-jesus-vocation-profession-stone.html)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:50-54 (The Message)

*The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the one who is first over all creation,*

*Because all things were created by him:  
both in the heavens and on the earth,  
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.  
Whether they are thrones or powers,  
or rulers or authorities,  
all things were created through him and for him.*

*He existed before all things,  
and all things are held together in him.*

*He is the head of the body, the church,  
who is the beginning,  
the one who is firstborn from among the dead  
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.*

*Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,  
and he reconciled all things to himself through him—  
whether things on earth or in the heavens.*

*He brought peace through the blood of his cross.<sup>5</sup>*

### **Bigger than we Imagine**

How far is Jesus' Kingdom territory?

Did you notice all the "alls?" Jesus, **all things created** by him, through him, for him. Jesus, **holding all things** together.

From the far expanses of the cosmos, one end of the ever-expanding universe to the other.

From the largest supercluster of galaxies, a billion light years across, to the tiniest quarks at the heart of every atom.

How far is Jesus' Kingdom territory?

More "alls": Jesus, **before all things**. Jesus, **first over all creation**.

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<sup>5</sup> Colossians 1:15-20 (Common English Bible)

Jesus, God the Son, God's Word from before the beginning, holds it all together in love.

I love how Eugene Peterson translates Paul's praise of Jesus:

*Everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.*<sup>6</sup>

And beyond this moment, into the future forever. When our sun has burned out, and our earth is no more, all things will still be his: in his care, under his protection. Jesus' Kingdom.

How far is Jesus territory?

More from Peterson:

*So spacious is he, so expansive, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding.*<sup>7</sup>

How far? As far as every-place. As far as every-time.

As far as needs fixing.

Another "all," one more, which we need so much. Jesus, reconciling **all things** to God through himself.

### Smaller than we Imagine

Jesus Kingdom territory embraces all. And to fix everything, he begins small.

As small as an embryo conceived in a woman's womb. As small as a tiny village in Galilee. As small as he could travel by walking.

As small as the threads of his cloak, touched by a woman desperate for healing. A small fishing boat battered by waves and winds. An eye healed to see, a leg to walk, skin to touch. A child who shows us greatness. A loaf of bread and cup of wine. An empty tomb in a garden. And on a rock, a cross.

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<sup>6</sup> Colossians 1:16b-17 (The Message)

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 1:19 (The Message)

The Gospel of Jesus:

*All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.<sup>8</sup>*

The Gospel of Jesus bringing God's Kingdom stretches so big and starts so small. One person's death. At a specific time (about 3 in the afternoon). On a particular day (a Friday starting Passover). At a particular place (Golgotha). On a particular planet, orbiting a particular star, in a particular galaxy, minuscule within the vastness of all. All that is his.

He who sets starts alight, surrendered his hands to cruel nails, and bled out.

*Here comes God's Kingdom. Crucified.*

### **Starting Small, Embracing All**

This is the paradox of it, right. Jesus Kingdom is everything. Nothing lies beyond his presence, his love, his power. And so much of it needs to be set right. Right?

How much longer, until all is made well? Billions cry, those living and those dead.

I get impatient. Is that okay? Join with me, I pray. Surely impatience with injustice and suffering is a godly virtue. And creation groans.

*"Pray this way," says Jesus. So we do! "Thy Kingdom come!"*

*Thy will be done!*

It is. He's bringing his Kingdom. His way.

A tiny seed, planted in a garden. It will grow into a tree, with shelter for all. But it begins small.<sup>9</sup>

Yeast, mixed into the dough. It will work its way through the entire batch, making it rise and grow to feed all. But it starts small.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Colossians 1:20 (The Message)

<sup>9</sup> Luke 13:18-19.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 13:20-21.

Near Jerusalem, a huddle of grieving women who discover an empty tomb.

In the city, a cluster of bewildered misfits waiting in a Pentecost-room.

A handful in Colossae, reading together a letter from Paul. Other handfuls in Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Rome, and then throughout the world.

Not powerful. Not prestigious. Not privileged. Low-class and low-lives. As spectacular as a potter's cheapest inventory, clay jars. As breakable too. *"Fools!"* most say.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus specializes in fools, to better show God's wisdom. Clay jars, Jesus packs full of treasure. Those low in life, Jesus fills us with his. With those low-class, Jesus fits right in. Our only power is his resurrection. Our only prestige is his glory. Our only privilege is Jesus' call: *"Follow me! Belong to me! Trust me!"*

Another of Jesus' handful. Here. Us. And so Jesus grows his Kingdom, continuing small for all.

Jesus is bringing God's Kingdom! *Come, Jesus. Come. Amen.*

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<sup>11</sup> See 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:18-31 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:3-12.