

In 2012, I attended a conference in Louisville Ky. called Together for the Gospel. T4G.org. And Mark Dever began his talk with this account by Langston Hughes, and I couldn't resist sharing it with you.

Anyone hear ever heard of Langston Hughes? I would not have either, except a favorite photographer of mine, Roy De Carava did a book of photographs, and the poetry that combined to make the book was by Langston Hughes.

He was a black man, born in 1902, which would make the account I'm going to read to you have happened almost exactly 100 years ago as we speak.

Salvation, by Langston Hughes

I was saved from sin when I was going on thirteen. But not really saved. It happened like this. There was a big revival at my Auntie Reed's church. Every night for weeks there had been much preaching, singing, praying, and shouting,

My aunt told me that when you were saved you saw a light, and something happened to you inside! And Jesus came into your life! And God was with you from then on! She said you could see and hear and feel Jesus in your soul. I believed her. I had heard a great many old people say the same thing and it seemed to me they ought to know. So I sat there calmly in the hot, crowded church, waiting for Jesus to come to me.

A great many old people came and knelt around us and prayed, old women with jet-black faces and braided hair, old men with work-gnarled hands. And the church sang a song about the lower lights are burning, some poor sinners to be saved. And the whole building rocked with prayer and song.

Still I kept waiting to see Jesus.

Finally all the young people had gone to the altar and were saved, but one boy and me. He was a rounder's son named Westley. Westley and I were surrounded by sisters and deacons praying. It was very hot in the church, and getting late now. Finally Westley said to me in a whisper: "I'm tired o' sitting here. Let's get up and be saved." So he got up and was saved.

Then I was left all alone on the mourners' bench. My aunt came and knelt at my knees and cried, while prayers and song swirled all around me in the little church. The whole congregation prayed for me alone, in a mighty wail of moans and voices. Now it was really getting late. I began to be ashamed of myself, holding everything up so long. I began to wonder what God thought about Westley, who certainly hadn't seen Jesus either, but who was now sitting proudly on the platform, swinging his knickerbockered legs and grinning down at me, surrounded by deacons and old women on their knees praying. God had not struck Westley dead for taking his name in vain or for lying in the

temple. So I decided that maybe to save further trouble, I'd better lie, too, and say that Jesus had come, and get up and be saved.

So I got up.

Suddenly the whole room broke into a sea of shouting, as they saw me rise. Waves of rejoicing swept the place. Women leaped in the air. My aunt threw her arms around me. The minister took me by the hand and led me to the platform.

I couldn't bear to tell her that I had lied, that I had deceived everybody in the church, that I hadn't seen Jesus, and that now I didn't believe there was a Jesus anymore,

And so I've been thinking hard about the real gospel. The biblical Gospel. And I've titled my little talk today, the Gospel of Jesus.

This is the gospel Jesus started with. And this is the gospel Jesus finished with. This is the gospel that is consistent with the entire Bible. It works in Genesis, and it works in Revelation. And I believe this is the gospel that the 12 disciples turned the world upside down with.

Listen carefully, because this gospel is not common today.

Turn with me if you will, to Matthew; Chapter 4, and verse 17 (12-17)

12Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

*15“THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN,
GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—*

*16“THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A
GREAT LIGHT,
AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND
SHADOW OF DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.”*

17From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the

kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The other verses give us a little bit of context. This is at the very start of Jesus public ministry.

John the Baptist has been taken into custody. It's time for Jesus to begin His public ministry, and He goes about a 3 day journey on foot, about 80 miles, up to the area at the north of the Sea of Galilee.

It's beautiful there. The land of Israel is not quite like Central Nevada, although much of it is that dry, and dryer, but it's more like Southern California. The chapparrel is identical to what I grew up with. It's hot and dry. Mostly.

But Galilee, up at the north end of the sea of Galilee, there is shade, and grass. I was there in 1971.

Luke tells us that He went to Nazareth where He had grown up, first, and they became angry and rejecting there, so He journeys further and makes His ministry home base in this area at the top of the Sea of Galilee.

Isn't it interesting that Jewishness, fanning out from Jerusalem, is a threat to Jesus life, and His ministry ultimately is based in "Galilee of the Gentiles". The threat was red hot in Jerusalem. It only took them a week to kill Him. Fan out to Nazareth. Not quite as threatening, but they tried to throw Him over a cliff after one sermon (hopefully I fare better this morning).

North end of the sea of Galilee, it's a fringe area. Jews and gentiles combined.

The circumstances of political and religious pressure down south, east of the Jordan river where John was taken into custody, and hostility and rejection at Nazareth combine to work together to fulfil prophecy, and Matthew notes that Isaiah had said this exactly in Isaiah 9:1.

So that's our time frame, and I want to unpack for you, if I can, these

simple words that Mark in 1:14 calls *the gospel of God*. Gospel means 'good news'. This is the Good News of God. And this was Jesus message. This is what He preached. This is the Gospel . . and almost no one recognizes it as - that.

Just 9 words. ***Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.***

Such a simple message. Most people skip right over it. It doesn't mean anything to us at first glance. What an obscure little phrase.

And there have been some weird interpretations of it's meaning. Dispensationalism spins into Ultra Dispensationalism around these words. Not less than C. I. Scofield believed Jesus was offering the Old Testament Kingdom promised to the Jews here, and they reject it, and God comes up with a new plan, which is the church.

Have you heard that before? That's a dangerous path. Quickly you get to a whole bunch of stuff about you don't need to pay any attention to what Jesus said most of His ministry because it wasn't for you, it was for the Jews, and they rejected it, and so pretty soon you've dismissed about 95% of the 4 gospels...

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This is still the gospel today. The Good News is all packed up inside that little message. Let's unpack it.

I want to leave the repent part for a moment and first talk about this term, Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew is the only gospel that calls the Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven. Mark and Luke and John are talking about the same thing but always use Kindgom of God.

There's a reason for that. Matthew is writing to Jews. And the Jews were nervous about saying God's name. So Matthew, in respect to his hearers, doesn't want to cause a stumbling block over semantics they're sensitive about and substitutes heaven.

We do the same thing. We might substitute "Washington" for that whole mess that governs there. Or we might talk about "The White House" but everyone knows we're talking about the man in the white house. etc. Matthew's just respecting his audience.

You can use Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God, interchangeably. *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*

Here's the heart of the message though. To understand what the Kingdom of God is talking about we need to understand that the concept of the words meant something slightly different to the original hearers than it does to us.

We think of Kingdom's in terms of real estate. Boundaries. Countries. United Kingdom.

In biblical parlance, a kingdom, was an authority to reign. It's a little different. Jesus tells a story about a man, presumably from Israel, that goes to Rome, to receive a kingdom.

And that's exactly how it worked in that land at that time. Rome was in control. But Rome had local governors, all over the place. And people fought over those and they changed from time to time. Herod had the kingdom over the area east of Jerusalem, all the way up to Galilee. He had the authority to reign. Pilate had a kingdom encompassing Jerusalem and Judea. He had the authority to Reign.

And Rome would pull that authority and give it to someone else if the person couldn't rule effectively for Rome. That's why Pilate feared the Jews who were rioting later on about this same Jesus. It was 3 strikes and you're out, with Rome, and Pilate already had 2.

So, as you read through the New Testament, and the parables, and any place you see teaching about 'the Kingdom', you can substitute the words Authority to Reign. Try that at home! Re-read some of the parables in Matthew 13 and substitute this idea, "authority to reign" for

the word Kingdom.

Jesus begins His ministry, and His message is this. The Authority to Reign of God . . . is here. At hand means, it's here! You can reach it with your hand. It's here. *Repent, for the authority to reign of God, is here.*

That's what He said. That's a reliable translation.

You say, "since when did the creator of the universe not have the authority to reign?"

And what you find out is that God gave that authority to Adam. And when Adam sinned, Satan, who tempted Eve, usurped that authority.

1 John 5:19 *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

Paul says; in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 1Cor. 4:4

In Luke's account of the temptation of Jesus, Satan leads Jesus up a high place and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 4:6 *And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."*

Jesus is victorious in those temptations, and Immediately after that Jesus says; Repent, for the authority to reign of **God** . . is at hand.

Jesus says; God is taking back this realm. This real estate is under the control of Satan, and God is putting Satan on notice. The authority to reign of God . . is here.

There's going to be a collision! 2 people say they own the same place. Satan, and Jesus. This is going to be a cataclysmic train wreck. The two greatest powers in the universe both claim to own the same place.

Earth.

It's no coincidence that this preaching immediately follows the temptation of Jesus in the 3 synoptic gospels.

Satan, meet Jesus. Jesus, meet Satan. Satan, here's your chance to throw everything you've got at Him. And he does!

Jesus Victorious. And Jesus puts Satan on notice. Satan, your usurped kingdom - your authority to reign on earth - is put on notice.

The authority to reign of God - is here. Satan is deposed. Time is up.

So, what's that going to look like?

Two beings that have power we can't even imagine, fighting over this real estate. What's it going to look like. UGLY!

Satan isn't going to just hand it over. It's going to be ugly on a scale our brains can only fathom.

War in heaven. Armegheddon. Stuff John was going to write down in Revelation, and the angel stopped him. Don't even write that part down. It's too scary for us. And that part is after 1/2 of the world's population has already perished. That part wasn't too scary??

You say, I thought this was good news! Gospel means good news.

And there IS good news!

We've been fighting on Satan's side of the war, taking pot shots at God. We are born enemies of God. David said in the Psalms "*In sin did my mother conceive me*" ps. 51:

But God, in His Grace, is offering . . . amnesty. Forgiveness of sin. Our sin is applied to Jesus and He takes it to his death on the cross. His righteousness is applied to me. The resurrection proves it happened that way. Amnesty. For a time.

In Luke's account, exactly the same time frame, immediately following the temptation, Jesus goes into the synagogue in Nazareth and reads from Isaiah 61.

Turn to Luke 4 because it's important what He says; this is huge.

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

*18 "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO
THE POOR.*

*HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE
CAPTIVES,*

*AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,*

19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."
20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down;

Now turn to Isaiah, chapter 61, and look with me at vss 1 and 2;

*1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;*

*2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;*

Jesus didn't read the part about the vengeance. There **will be** vengeance when He takes back this world that belongs to Him. But not now. Not yet.

Right now, we're in the sentence just before the vengeance part. Jesus came to *proclaim the favorable year of the LORD*.

We don't know how much longer . . it's lasted 2,000 years . . but right now, is the favorable year of the Lord. Everything's on 'hold'. Re-taking the world from Satan is on hold until God has finished bringing His elect to safety. That door could close tomorrow. Then He comes and judges His enemies.

So how do I get in on the amnesty? How do I cross over - out of Satan's kingdom - into God's kingdom.

There is forgiveness purchased for you by the blood of the resurrected King.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that who-so-ever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting LIFE. Jn. 3:16

How does that happen? What does that transaction look like?

We only have this one word from Jesus. Repent. What does it mean.

Well, physically, it means turn around and go the other direction. Reverse direction. Go a different way.

In the context of kingdom's, authorities to reign, it can only mean one thing. Move out of Satan's realm, and into God's realm. Come out of Satan's kingdom and into God's kingdom.

Jesus gives us some picture stories of what this looks like. Parables.

He says; Matt. 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.

I get that. I'm a horse trader, and I get that. I'm constantly selling these cool toys, because I found a cooler toy.

A guy is walking through a field and his foot catches on something under a bush he's stepping over. What was that? So he holds the bush aside, and brushes some of the loose dirt away, and there's a box! He pry's open the box, and there's an unfathomable treasure.

The field is for sale. But he's just a working guy. So he does the math, and if he sells everything he owns, it'll be enough to buy **that** field! Everybody thinks he's crazy. Why **that** field? Because he knows the treasure buried there is worth a gazillion times more than the junk he had to get rid of.

Satan's kingdom, God's kingdom. You can't have both! What'll it be?

Then there's the pearl guy. I do this all the time. Some antique holy grail camera lens will come on ebay that I've dreamed of having. But I don't have the money to just buy it! I've got to sell my other lenses to get that one lens!

Satan's kingdom. This world and all it's goodies. Sin. Prestige. Pride. Ease. Comfort. Acceptance by the rest of this world. Or, God's kingdom.

There is cost! You can't buy it, Jesus bought it, but there is cost. Your friends? Your family? Your wife, your husband, your mom, your dad, your kids!!

What would you pay to cross over from Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom.

Most people that **get it**, just say no. I'll keep the world. It seems OK. I won't pay the cost to leave this world that belongs to Satan in order to have Jesus.

But some people, it's like their mind all of a sudden see's what a train wreck this world really is, and they don't walk to Jesus, they flee!

John Bunyan, the great Puritan that wrote Pilgrim's Progress understood this concept. Christian's friends are laughing him to scorn. What are you running from. Why are you fleeing. And he tells them he's fleeing from the city of destruction. Christian sees a firestorm about to descend on the city where he lived and he can't get his wife or children to go with him, so he flee's alone out of that place.

This world that belongs to Satan is the city of destruction. We don't know how long the acceptable year of the Lord is. When that door is closed, it's closed, and then vengeance.

Fully 1/5th of the Bible is about the vengeance that God is going to bring against His enemies, against this world when that offer is closed. Much of the Psalms and Prophets in the old testament, most of the Minor Prophets, the Apocalypse, it's all about payback day when Jesus returns to this earth and takes it away from Satan, and judges it with fire.

Jesus said, *Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven . . is at hand.*

Jesus walked all over the land of Israel, North to Tyre and Sidon, East out into the hill country and pastures of the gentiles, South to Judea, and He brought this gospel to the people.

He healed the sick. He did miracles and miracles and miracles. Thousands, literally, followed Him from place to place. Everywhere he went, there were crowds of thousands.

They watched the miracles. They listened to His teaching. They killed Him.

At the end of the day, after His resurrection, how many people had crossed over from Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom. About 120. In that little gathering in the upper room, in acts, about 120. 11 disciples and a few others. And they went everywhere proclaiming this message. They turned the world upside down.

What Jesus offers; - amnesty - forgiveness of sin - eternal life - pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

There's amnesty! Revelation 22:17 at the very end of the book; *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*

The offer is open. It's the acceptable year of the Lord. It may not be tomorrow. It may not be this afternoon. If you eat a big old hamburger up at Dinky's and your heart quits, that offer is over.

Come. Come to Jesus for forgiveness of sin and eternal life.