

## **Far Away, Near, Outside or Inside?**

Sermon May 15, 2022

**Scripture reading:** Isaiah 55:1-7 and Mark 12:28-34

**Golden verse:** *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”* Mark 12:34

Once upon a time, two love birds were driving down to Florida to join other snowbirds. On their way, these love birds, Ross and Evelyn Witmer, as good Christians, stopped around Atlanta on a Sunday morning to worship in a Presbyterian Church. As they entered into the church building, a greeter welcomed them with a warm welcome, a great smile and an unusual question: “Welcome to our church. Are you born again?”

Dear beloved, try to imagine, that every Sunday when you would arrive to Calvin, the greeters would welcome you with the same questions: “Welcome to Calvin. Are you born again?” How would you answer this question? Some of us would say: “Well, for a Presbyterian, this is a toughie.”

Some would say: “Well ... this ‘being born again’ is an over-emphasized topic used by some new churches. I am not born again, I am Presbyterian.” This kind of answer just confirms that we are false Christians, trying to earn salvation by being Presbyterians. This is tragic. I think we need to rethink how we understand “being born again” as Christ is teaching us.

This whole cosmos, including our earth, belongs to the Creator, who created heaven and earth. We all are his creations, we all are his children, but we don’t all love and worship him in the same way.

In Psalm 14:3, we read: *“All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”* For this, God sent Jesus Christ into this world to help us to find God again. Jesus Christ created and established a NEW KINGDOM in this world, a new country in this one big country called the world, and defined the parameters of HIS new dominion. This can be called a smaller country in a big country with Christ’s rules and regulations.

In Mark 1:15, Jesus, right at the beginning of His mission, said: *“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

God established his kingdom in this world, He created the borders of his kingdom. By giving us the ten Commandments, God informed us about the laws of this country.

God summarized the Ten Commandments in two commandments: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus Christ summarizes these two in ONE commandment before he was crucified: *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* John 13:34-35

About the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ said two things: The Kingdom of God is here on this earth, and if we want to belong to God, if we want to enjoy all the benefits of God’s protection, if we want to enjoy God’s blessings, we have to become citizens of His kingdom. You can simply ask Jesus: Lord Jesus, I would like to be a citizen of your kingdom. I want to be part of you and your kingdom, I want to spend the rest of my life under your loving care, and I want to be part of those citizens who will be taken to heaven when the time will come.

Jesus Christ is calling you now, offering you His citizenship: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:28-30

When I came to Canada from Hungary, I was well received as an immigrant, a stranger. When I wanted to be a Canadian, I was asked to study all those laws and rules that a Canadian has to follow and obey. Then, I had to go through an exam to prove I knew all the information I needed to live accordingly in Canada and I knew the rules I have to follow. (On that exam, my wife got 100%. I got only 95%.) A few weeks later, we were invited to a nice ceremony, where we took the oath and we were received as Canadian citizens.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is inviting us to come and be part of his kingdom, to be saved, to be washed from all our sin, to enjoy all the privileges which come with the new status. Those who entered into his Kingdom are called CHILDREN OF GOD, and one day they will inherit his heavenly glory.

How can we receive this citizenship? No one can enter the kingdom of God without contact with his king. We have to accept Jesus Christ as our King and Saviour. We have to ask for his forgiveness for all our sin. We have to offer our life and services to him, and we have to decide to follow him faithfully, to love

him with all our hearts, minds and souls. We don't have to be perfect to be received into his Kingdom, and we don't have to know everything about God. Christ Jesus will make us whole, and he will teach us step by step about what we have to know.

Those who are entering into his kingdom on earth are called "born again", starting a NEW LIFE in Christ and with Christ. They are accepted by Christ and they accept Christ's rules. They are not sinless, but their sins are forgiven. They are not perfect, but they are guided by the Holy Spirit. They receive strength not to sin as much as before.

My question is: Where are you right now compared to God's kingdom? Are you far away from his Kingdom? Are you close to his Kingdom? Are you still outside of the border of his Kingdom? Or, are you IN his Kingdom? Far away? Close? Still outside? Or inside?

Jesus said that his kingdom is amongst us, on this earth, and he said that the kingdom of God is IN US.

What is very important to know about the kingdom of God is that it means both the presence of God and the rule of God. It is not a geographical area, but the presence of God in the spirit and inwardness of men. But there are conditions for that. The kingdom of God is Christ-dependent. This is why Jesus Christ announced at the beginning of his ministry that the kingdom of God arrived with him. If a person will come to a living relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the presence of God enters INTO into that person, and if he follows the Lord according to the Word and is filled with the spirit of God, God's dominion will be realized in his life.

To be part of the kingdom of God depends on your own judgment and choice. God does not force his rules over you, but you must accept them and submit yourself to his will, to his Spirit, and to his word. Please seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, because then everything will be given to you.

The kingdom of God will come in a visible way, with the return of the Messiah. Christ will take all his children with him, all those who were part of his invisible dominion, who carried him in their hearts, who accepted his salvation, and they will be with Christ forever in his dominion.

But we have to be BORN AGAIN here and now, because we don't know when he will return.

So “being born again” applies to today. Christ is offering you a fresh grace today. Christ offers you a fresh anointing. Christ offers you a new identity. The Holy Spirit is transforming your soul, and you are being re-formed and re-developed in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Let us come and ask Christ Jesus to transform us to be born again as citizens of his invisible kingdom. Amen