

## I. Set Up

- A. Introduction. Welcome. Guests.
- B. Mike is back and today is week one of a two-week series the revolves around REACH.
- C. Mike has promised:
  1. to introduce himself to those of you who are wondering who he is;
  2. to briefly update you on what he has been up to;
  3. and to focus on some of the big promises of God that frame our life.
- D. Right now, I want to read you one an Old Testament prophecy of what lies ahead.
  1. It's a poetic description from chapter 11 of the Book of Isaiah
  2. The prophet speaks about a ruler who would be a descendant of Jesse, who is the father of King David. He says that this descendant would rule justice and establish true peace – one so great that even wild animals would be able to lie down next to one another.
  3. The descendent is Jesus. This is a description of what Mike will be referencing when he talks about the kingdom.
  4. Listen to this foreshadowing of a world without sin. Where Jesus is fully and finally in charge and his vision and values are fully embraced.
- E. Isaiah writes:
  1. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.
  2. the cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
  3. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
  4. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.<sup>1</sup>
- F. Right now...

## II. Intro

- A. Good to be back
- B. My name is Mike. I actually work here, but I have been away since Christmas Eve. On a sabbatical and just got back this Monday.
- C. The video was of the campus pastors
  1. Brad oversees Highland Park; Aaron leads over at Crossroads, Paul Fowler is the Director of Finance and the Venue pastor for the Sat night service at the Lake Forest campus and Syler heads up the 01
  2. Not seen in this video was: 1) Ben Torres who is spearheading the work in Highwood focusing on 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Hispanics; 2) Or Ben Dockery, who is the campus pastor at Lake Forest; 3) Or two people we just hired to help launch site four. You'll hear more about that next week.

D. As many of you know, this is the Half Time of REACH, the campaign we started a year ago to lean more fully into our mission and vision. Our goal has been to double down on efforts to fuel a movement that Reaches People and Renews communities.

E. In terms of the first:

1. We organized around seeing ten new communities of grace, hope and love that are based on the life, teaching and work of Christ get up and running. The goal was that six of these would be overseas, done in conjunction with our global partners. 1) Here are pictures of a building going up in Ghana, where we are sending a team in a few weeks; 2) Here is a picture of me in India with Solomon, who we just hired as the church planter there. We are helping our long-term partners in India plant a church in the IT corridor of Chennai; 3) We also are down the road of having a fellowship among Muslim refugee converts in Istanbul Turkey.

2. Locally we wanted to start three new campuses. You'll hear more about that next week.

3. What we are really after is seeing people come to faith and grow in Christ-likeness, so the second thing we are counting are baptisms. We want to see 500 people baptized. We have another baptism coming up tonight. Right now we are under 200.

F. Finally, under Renew Communities we have been moving towards 100,000 volunteer hours – and we are ahead of schedule.

1. We have work going on through a variety of programs: NCCP, Love Inc, Justice Center, Cars ministry, PADS, ?,

2. A big focus us the work being done via Renew Communities – a 501 c 3 we started to work with community leaders and residents to increase jobs, provide affordable home ownership, and strengthen community with the goal of revitalizing areas so people flourish.

3. Right now we are focused on placing people in homes who want to be a missional part of seeing North Chicago get traction and move ahead.

4. And alongside that we have a job's program that is working with businesses, and the high school and chamber of commerce

5. By the way, we will be doing Serve Your City again this summer. We have moved it into July and expanded it in some good ways. More details to follow.

6. And there are other things going on.

G. Thank you for being a part of this. Let's keep our foot on the gas. Sharing the Gospel and loving and serving others. We are called to this. And – as Paul said – we should not grow weary of doing good.

III. Our passage is found in Mark 1:15.

A. It's the first thing we hear Jesus say in Mark's Gospel: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel."

B. I want us to focus on the Kingdom of God. "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." The Kingdom of God is a big and important topic.

C. Let me back up and get a running start here. I've been on a two-month sabbatical. Sabbatical's come in two types:

1. Pastors often take them to rest – the job has a high burnout rate. In fact, when I have applied to foundations that give money to pastors for sabbaticals I am turned down because you have to promise to do nothing but rest. I was a bit tired but not exhausted. We have a great staff here. As I get a bit older part of my job is staying out of the way. So I didn't want to rest.

2. So, the second kind of sabbaticals pastors take are those designed for professors get sabbaticals if they promise to go learn something new or to write something or complete a project.

D. So, my sabbatical was the second type and was divided into three areas:

1. Mostly I was involved in writing.

2. I also traveled: I spent a week at a science foundation out west; Sheri and I spent a week in Florida, I spent some time at a theological library in Oxford and a few days in India visiting our church plant there – as you saw.

3. I also set aside an extended time every morning to spend with the Lord

E. About two years ago I started to believe that who I was mattered more than what I did.

1. Part of this was because I could see too much of myself at Christ Church. I've been here nearly twenty years, and as a result, the church now looks a lot like me. One day I realized that the problems I was seeing in the church were the same things I saw in my own life, and I realized I probably couldn't fix them by focusing on the church, I had to focus on my own life, my own heart. Which is a lot harder. I'd much rather fix other people.

2. While I'm here I should note that as I settle deeper into God's grace, I see more in my own heart that I do not like. We are sinners saved by grace, and I think the more we understand and experience that, the more we are able to see ourselves honestly.<sup>2</sup>

3. Most of us are not very self-aware, in part because our hearts are so defensive. We are so quick to rationalize and justify because we need to think we are good, because we do not really believe the Gospel. It hasn't sunk deep enough into our heart to let us relax.

4. Until we really, really, really make peace with the fact that we are saved in spite of who we are not because of who we are, we can't see ourselves very clearly.

F. So, one of my goals over the last few years – and during my sabbatical – was to try to drive the Gospel deeper into my heart. And there were a couple Psalms that guided my time:

1. Psalm 62:1 - **Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him.** The idea of rest here means stillness, calmness, quiet. It means, my soul is not talking to me. It's not chattering away with its list of worries and concerns. I have moved into a place of quiet. Stillness, peace.

2. Psalm 143:8 - **Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.** I have this tacked to the wall in front of my desk, because I understand it to be the way to a non-chattering soul. **Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love.** I need to be secure in God's love. I need to get the Gospel in my heart again. I need to believe that I am loved by God, not because I have been good. He doesn't love me because I have performed or because I am loveable, he loves me in spite of all he knows about my small, selfish heart. What I need in the morning is to be secure in his love so I am freed up from trying to earn. I need to get to a place where I don't need so I can be a giver not a taker.

3. I did my best to stay in my morning devotional time until I had perspective Until the Gospel was clear. Until God was big and my problems were small. Until my chattering soul was quiet. I am going to talk more about that in a Psalms series that will start after Easter.

G. As I mentioned, the big part of my Sabbatical was working on book.

1. I set out to write six letters to a new Christian. In particular, to the kind of people I keep bumping into: Adults with lots of education – often with graduate level degrees in finance, law, medicine, whatever - but a 5th grade understanding of their heart and of Jesus.

2. It's possible today – in the West - to be considered educated without any sense of your heart or the supernatural. In few other cultures is this true. Few cultures – and fewer in the past - consider a person who doesn't understand themselves or God – who has not concept of moral knowledge – to be well educated.

3. So I wanted to write a book for people like that who have decided to follow Jesus to map out what that means. Because it means something. We have the option of following Jesus. If we decide to follow, we give up our rights. We do not get to opt in or opt out of things. If we call Jesus Lord, then he is Lord – He is boss. And we do not get to pick and choose. The book is not evangelistic – it assumes you are in. And it says: this is what a Christian believes and this is what a Christian does.

4. Well, by the afternoon of day one of my sabbatical, which was 62 days long – not that I counted – but by noon on day one I realized six letters was not going to work, and six turned into forty studies that are designed to be devotional in nature and comprehensive of the key ideas and issues.

a) And by day three I realized that this wasn't just for people new to faith, this was a good reminder of what a radical thing it is to say I am with Jesus.

b) It's a big stretch for people today to say, I will follow, because we breathe such hyper-individualistic air.

c) So many people think that truth is whatever they want it to be or what feels right to them. And that life should be easy.

d) Jesus never suggests it should be easy – especially for those who sign up. In Luke 14 he tells those who want to follow him to slow down and count the cost because for a while, it's all uphill. It does get easier. But Jesus doesn't say it's easy.

5. So I set to work writing forty devotionals on the most important forty questions: What matters? Who am I? What is expected of me? What happens when I die? How do I know what I know? What does the good life look like?

6. And I was head's down until about two weeks ago when I came up for air and thought, what do I need to get to rough draft stage on all forty.

7. I need to get everything I can to a rough draft phase before this sabbatical ends. So I looked at all forty topics and realized there were two I was avoiding.

8. Day 4 and 5: Day One is on the importance of getting a good foundation; Day Two defines what it means to be a Christian; Day Three is an exploration of the Gospel; Day Four is: What is the plan? What is God doing? Where is this headed? Day Five is: What is expected of me? What's my part?

H. So, I turned my attention here, and in short order got excited and also realized that this was the perfect place to look as we move into Half Time with REACH.

I. Next week we will turn to the Sermon on the Mount and the specific advice Jesus gives to those who want to follow him. This week we look at the plan.

IV. Mark 1:15 is our key passage. Jesus is speaking at the beginning of Mark

A. Matthew and Luke start in other directions. Mark jumps right into the action. These are the first words we hear from Jesus and it's game time. He says: "**The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.**"

B. This is a great place to note that Jesus frames his message around the idea of the Kingdom of God. This is what he preaches about. He actually talks about two things:

1. He talks a lot about Himself – which surprises people. He has a reputation of being very humble because He lives very simply and serves, but when you listen to what He says it's: I'm God, I created everything, I'm eternal, I'm one with the Father, I'm your future judge. Some of this flies over our head's when we read the Gospels, but the religious leaders listening to him knew what he was saying and they kept ripping their clothes and screaming blasphemy. So, Jesus talks a lot about himself. And He talks a lot about the kingdom.

2. He also talks a lot about the Kingdom of God. He doesn't preach about healing – he just heals. He doesn't preach about overcoming evil, he just overcomes it. He doesn't preach much about the resurrection, he just rises. And this is what he teaches his disciples to pray for: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come!

C. What Jesus preaches about is the kingdom: In Mark 1 he says: It's game time. **I am bringing the kingdom;** In Luke 4, in which he shows up in Nazareth to preach for the first time, His sermon is about how He has come to fulfill the prophecy about the Kingdom; In Matthew 4:23 - Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. And then at the end of that book, in chapter 24, as he is nearing the cross, he describes events ahead of us and then says, "**first the Gospel of the Kingdom is going to be preached.**

V. So that raises three questions:

A. First: What is the kingdom of God? Or the Kingdom of Heaven, they seem to be used pretty interchangeably. The word shows up 120 plus times in the Gospels.

1. If you read them you see that: the kingdom is not the church, is it not another name for Heaven,<sup>3</sup> nor is it something that does not happen until Christ's return.

2. If you think about it, you realize that we're hindered on understanding kingdoms because most of us have never known life under a king or queen. We've had presidents – perhaps some have had prime ministers. But both are different from kings and queens. Once you dig in, two things emerge: 1) A kingdom is a place where the rules of a king are followed. Dallas Willard said, "God's kingdom is where what God wants done is done." The kingdom of God is where God's perfect will is done without resistance. And, 2) it is big.

a) In Ephesians 1:9, Paul writes: **With all wisdom and understanding, God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.**

b) Tim Keller notes: **When we look at the whole scope of this story line, we see clearly that Christianity is not only about getting one's individual sins forgiven so we can go to heaven. That is an important means of God's salvation, but not the final end or purpose of it. The purpose of Jesus's coming is to put the whole world right, to renew and restore the creation, not to escape it. It is not just to bring personal forgiveness and peace, but also justice and shalom to the world. God created both the body and soul, and the resurrection of Jesus shows that he is going to redeem both body and soul. The work of the Spirit of God is not only to save souls but also to care and cultivate the face of the earth, the material world."**

B. So, the first thing to hear about the kingdom is that it's where what King Jesus's wants done is done, fully.

C. He didn't come to start a religion, he came to start a revolution. It's one where He reclaims all that is His own.

D. C.S. Lewis – who I spent some time focusing on during my sabbatical. I went to his house at Oxford, went to his college, spent some time talking to C.S. Lewis scholars (it was all great fun). C.S. Lewis wrote: **sometimes the impression that preachers leave is that they are simply mild mannered people exhorting mild-mannered people to be more mild-mannered.**” No. Jesus was a revolutionary and he said he was going to reassert His rule and reign over all

E. And he talked about this a lot.

F. He is going to bring a place where – as you heard in the set up – the world works. There is such a radical peace and contentment that wild animals lie down next to each other, and the child that puts its hand in the cobra’s nest is not hurt.

G. It’s hard to know how literally we take all of this. It has a very poetic feel – but it’s clear: he is going to establish a wonderful world that works.

VI. Question Two: when is the kingdom coming? When does it arrive? I’m ready already.

A. Well, to be clear, it’s started. 1) God is already King in heaven. We see that throughout the Old Testament;<sup>4</sup> and the kingdom has been introduced here, but it’s small. Just a beach head. It’s not like what it will be when he returns in power.

B. But to read the Gospels is to hear that Jesus is King and he brought the kingdom

1. When John the Baptist showed up he said, “get ready, it’s almost here.”

2. And when Jesus showed up he said: It’s here. In our Mark passage Jesus says: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.”

C. How does it grow between now and then? This is where we come in.

1. It grows as we embrace it, as we lean into it. As we follow Christ – let his example and teaching be our guide. We are expected to live into the values of the King right now.

2. The kingdom is not going to expand via armies or election victories it is going to come as we follow Christ – as we embrace his example and assignments today.

3. The first century Jews were looking for a Messiah who would bring the kingdom via power. They expected someone in the model of David – who had been a military king.<sup>5</sup> Jesus made it clear that this wasn’t what He was going to do. He kept his head down whenever anyone started talking this way, and he was pretty explicit in his conversation with Pilate. Pilate asked if he was a king. Jesus said, “yes, but not like you think. Not like Herod or Caesar. kingdom is not of this world.” Just to be clear, it is “in” this world, but not of it.

4. The kingdom of God doesn’t grow via force. Right now it grows as people come to faith and embrace the call to be his disciple and follow his plan. As they share about the king and live like him. And it will spread everywhere when Jesus returns – this time not in weakness but in power.

D. Right now we have an opportunity to be part of seeing his kingdom advance.

1. This is what we are trying to do as a church

2. We want to help people Discover Life with God

3. We are trying to fuel a movement that reaches people and renews communities.
    - a) Reaching people is about sharing the Gospel. Seeing those far from God place their faith in Christ and grow.<sup>6</sup>
    - b) Renewing Communities is code for loving and serving others. Embracing the call to reach out to widows and orphans, the poor and oppressed.
  4. We are called to both. We state them in the order we do not because the spiritual is more important than the physical. It is not. But: 1) the eternal is more important than the temporal; and 2) if you want to help others, one of the key ways to do this is to recruit others to follow Christ. (In spite of the many ways the church falls short of its calling, one of the things that is true is that Christians give more and serve more than others); 3) we have this order because others are helping the poor – it's not just Christ-followers, but Christ-followers are the only ones lifting up Christ; and 4) we hold to this order because outreach is always one of the first things that is dropped. It's much easier for me to recruit people to serve in a soup kitchen than it is for me to mobilize people to share the Gospel.
  5. So, we talk about our mission in the order we do, but I always double back and say: both matter. We must do both.
  6. Jesus did both and we are called to both. We must fight the effects of the fall at every level. Conservatives often want to focus only on evangelism. Liberals often want to focus only on social action. We get called to both. Jesus said his kingdom was not of this world. But he did not say it wasn't "in" this world. It is of God. And it operates very differently than an earthly kingdom.
- E. This is all reflected in our mission and vision. And this is what we are trying to do with REACH – which is an effort to double down on the basics. We are looking to "Fuel a movement that Reaches People and Renews Communities."

- VII. Let me land the plane with a few summary points. Five big ideas to get very clear about:
- A. God has a plan: History is not going around and around. It's not circular. Some cultures believe that it is.<sup>7</sup> But the Bible states that there was a beginning and there will be an end. Indeed, everything is marching towards the end.
  - B. In the end, God finalizes His win. There is a battle ongoing right now. It's between good and evil. Evil and death have been defeated but not destroyed. Death still happens and evil still wreaks havoc. They have been defeated and we are promised that one day they will be silenced. But that hasn't happened yet. But the outcome is certain. God wins! The skirmishes continue and the bullets are real. We can be hurt, so we must never be casual about the spiritual battle. Paul warns us to be on guard against the Evil one. But we can be certain that God prevails. Good triumphs over evil. It was never in doubt.

C. Jesus will return to reclaim and restore all things. The specifics on this point are not clear and frequently debated. In fact, there is a lot of pushing and shoving around this topic and some related ones – when Jesus will return, the specifics of heaven – is it simply a new, restored, sin-free earth. There are lots of debates. What we know is that when Jesus does fully and finally establish his kingdom it will be more amazing than we can comprehend. He will reclaim and restore all that is His. His victory will be complete. Go back and reread Isaiah 11 or Rev. 21 and 22.

D. There will be a huge party when Jesus returns and sets everything up. It is described as a party, a banquet, a wedding, a celebration that will make the receptions cities give to War Heroes or Super Bowl champions look desperately lame. You cannot over imagine how amazing it will be.

E. We are given a chance to participate in what Jesus is going to do. In helping set up his kingdom. The opportunity to be part of what will matter is amazing. The idea that we would be rewarded for our part is amazing. All of that is clearly spelled out. The opportunity to be involved is open right now. It's better than a chance to go back twenty years and buy Google or Apple. We have a chance to invest in forever. But it's not open ended. At some point it will be too late.

F. And... we are NOT needed. Let me be clear about this last point. Your involvement is welcome and expected – as I said earlier, if you are a Christ-follower, you are described as a soldier under orders, a slave, someone who is going to die to self, pick up their cross and follow Jesus. Your involvement is expected, but it is not needed.

1. God is going to do what God is going to do and He does not need us.
2. You begin to realize how amazing this all is when you think about how the Jews would have first heard this.
3. When they looked around at all of the “ites” that surrounded them what they saw were people who saw themselves as people created for the pleasure of the gods. The gods needed people to feed them – i.e., offer sacrifices – and to build them homes to live in – temples. So they created humans.
4. In Ps. 50, God says, I do not need anything. And if I did, I wouldn't come to you.

### VIII. We have a chance to do what we have been called to do.

- A. We have a chance to join the winning team.
- B. Being on the team looks like loving and serving and giving.
- C. We are half way through Half Time. We are off to a good start.
- D. Some of you did not sign up when we launched it – either because you were not here or you were sitting back. You have a chance to jump in.
- E. You'll hear more about all of in a moment from the campus pastors and also next week. Let me encourage you to get in the game.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis: For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.”

<sup>3</sup> Calvin says: “They are mistaken who think the kingdom of God is heaven.” Jesus is not talking about a location per se – this is not a paradise we enter after we die.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 103:19

<sup>5</sup> Israel’s messianic hopes focused on the coming of a military conqueror who would rescue them from their geo-political enemies. That is why they sought to make Jesus king (John 6:15). But Jesus reorients their vision by declaring, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Jesus transforms the kingdom, showing it is holistic in its nature, redemptive in its mission, and cosmic in its scope.

<sup>6</sup> We focus here because we are expected to focus here. In fact, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus says he will not show up with the kingdom in full force until the Gospel of the kingdom has been preached to all nations.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Newbigen notes that most cultures measure time in a circular fashion, like the Chinese rotation of Years of the Dog, Rat, Pig, Etc. It is, he says, only cultures influenced by the Bible that measure time on a linear scale. Of course it’s also worth noting that we restarted the calendar with the Incarnation. (Michael Lloyd, Café Theology, p. 319.