

# Pressing Into the Kingdom

## Luke Series #41

Luke 16:16-18

David Sunday

October 27, 2013—Evening Service

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Today is Reformation Sunday and one of the things the reformation gave us afresh was confidence and delight in the Word of God, the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures. So we do not want to come to the sacraments—the Lord’s Supper and baptism—without letting them be framed by the Word of God.

We’ll pick up in Luke 16 where we left off this morning—verses 1-15; next Sunday we’ll look at 19-31. But in the middle, there are three verses that can be a little bit of a head-scratcher. Why are these verses here in this chapter? A chapter about money, possessions and an eternal perspective? I believe we’re going to find in these verses a message that is especially powerful for us as we come to the waters of baptism and then the Lord’s Supper.

Hear the Word of God from Luke 15:16-17 and then think about these verses for a few minutes together:

*<sup>16</sup> “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. <sup>17</sup> But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.*

We live in a dangerous world. The greatest dangers are not the things that strike us as threatening; those aren’t the dangers that most of us have to be aware of on a daily basis. The dangers we have to be aware of are things like money, possessions, the pursuit of the good life and affluence. These are the things that are always encroaching on the minds and hearts of Christ’s disciples and the great danger that we face is that we will become blind to what is truly valuable; that we will become duped, deluded and deceived into thinking that the things of this life—our possessions—are the things that really matter. We’ll miss the pearl of great price, settling for cheap alternatives; we’ll buy a whole field and never know that there’s a treasure hidden in that field (Matthew 13:45-46).

This was the Pharisees’ problem: they loved money as we see in verse 14. Their hearts were not in tune with the values of God’s Kingdom. All around them were people who were in sync with the values of God’s Kingdom, energetically coming to Jesus and listening to His

teachings and seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness but the Pharisees were missing it. The religious people of Jesus' day were missing it.

On this baptism Sunday, Jesus wants us to be reminded that it is a dangerous journey for all those who will finally reach the celestial city—heaven. It will only be those who have been resolute and determined to reach it who will reach it in the end. It will only be those who have set their hearts on a pilgrimage; who have said in the words of the song we love to sing...

Find rest, my soul, in God alone  
Amid the world's temptations;  
When evil seeks to take a hold  
I'll cling to my salvation.  
Though riches come and riches go,  
Don't set your heart upon them;  
The fields of hope in which I sow  
Are harvested in heaven.

(Psalm 62 by Aaron Keyes)

So it's in this context of the Pharisees missing what really matters that Jesus speaks these words in verse 16: *"The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it."* Everyone presses in to the Kingdom. What is Jesus telling us here? He's telling us that we now live in a glorious time in redemptive history. God's revelation right now is brighter and clearer and fuller than it will ever be until Christ returns.

The coming of Christ marked a major turning point in redemptive history—in human history. Yes, God offered grace before Jesus came. He offered that grace through the law and prophets—through the Old Testament Scriptures. But that grace before the coming of Christ was always anticipatory—it anticipated a Savior Who was still to come into the world. They were looking forward to His coming. Grace was seen in the old covenant but it was seen in shadows. All the godly people from Adam until John the Baptist were looking forward to the day when God's saving grace would be seen with brilliance in the coming of this Savior.

Then Jesus came. We're in a new era now—the era when the good news of the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed. It's good news because now God is bringing His grace and goodness to people who will repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as their Lord and King. When we submit to the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ over our lives, we enter into a new realm—the realm of God's Kingdom. It's a Kingdom that is free from sin and sorrow. It's a Kingdom that will have no end. It's a Kingdom where Satan has no sway. It's a Kingdom where all that was

ruined by man's fall into sin is now being restored. It's a Kingdom where the paradise that was lost in the Garden of Eden is being regained now in Jesus Christ in the new creation.

When we set our hope on Jesus as King, we can sing the last verse of that song:

I'll set my gaze on God alone,  
And trust in Him completely;  
With every day pour out my soul,  
And He will prove His mercy.  
Though life is but a fleeting breath,  
A sigh too brief to measure,  
My King has crushed the curse of death  
And I am His forever.

(Psalm 62 by Aaron Keyes)

That's good news, Jesus said. It's wonderful news to be living in the era of redemptive history when we can look clearly and gaze upon the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, knowing that He's already taken care of your greatest need and He's already brought you into this Kingdom that will have no end and that He's crushed the curse of death and that you belong to Him forever. That's good news that the law demanded. That's good news that the prophets anticipated.

But only in Jesus Christ does that good news get enacted. Only in Christ does that good news get freely proclaimed to all the world. Christ is King and wherever He's proclaimed and you submit to Him in repentance and faith, His Kingdom is present. You enter into this Kingdom when you bow to the gracious rule of Christ the King in your life.

That's what these people who will be entering into the waters of Baptist are saying. They've bowed to Christ the King; they've entered into His Kingdom. They've submitted their lives to His Lordship.

The Pharisees didn't want to do that. The King was right there in their midst but they wanted to hang on to their own little rogue kingdom. They didn't want to hand over the reins of their religious power to a new King; they wanted to hang on to their own interpretations of the law and prophets, all the while losing the key to the Kingdom of God, not trusting in the One to Whom the law and prophets were pointing. They searched the Scriptures because they thought in them they'd find eternal life; but they wouldn't come to Christ. All the Scriptures were about Him so they stood in a precarious place.

On the one hand, they wanted to hang on to the law and prophets—as if these would lead them to eternal life—but they were rejecting Jesus, the One Who fulfills those Scriptures. On the other hand, they don't even keep the law and prophets themselves. They were living illustrations of the impossibility of keeping the law. In duration, they wanted God's law to be unlimited; they

wanted the law to be the way to heaven. They didn't want to trust in the revelation that God has given in Christ; they wanted to stay with the law. Then in scope they were trying to limit the law; they were trying to define it down to a level where they could keep it, manage it and justify themselves.

Jesus is telling them in these two verses, "You've got it all backwards. The law of God is limited in its duration. It was only intended to be a schoolmaster to lead you to Christ. It was only intended to bring you to a point where you recognize your need for the good news of the Kingdom. That was the purpose of the law. It's limited in its duration."

But Jesus also says, "It's unlimited in its scope. That why He says in verse 17, *"But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."* In duration the law must give way to the gospel; it's there to point you to Christ. But in scope, God's law remains holy, righteous and good, revealing His holy and perfect character. It's never going to pass away. The Law of God is always going to be the law of God and that why I think Jesus speaks in verse 18 about divorce and adultery:

*"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."*

He's telling them, "I think you've got a problem in this area. You want to water down the law and the prophets. Do you really want to be justified by the law? Look at your own lives. Look at your own hearts. Look at the adultery. Look at the divorce that's rampant."

Jesus says don't think for a moment you can redefine God's law or ignore it or sideline it. If you think you're good enough—if you think you're one of those people who always obeys what God says—you're inevitably going to end up ignoring it or redefining God's law or lowering God's standards. But none of us can be justified by the law; none of us keeps God's law perfectly.

But praise God there's good news. Good news of a King Who has come into the world, Who has died on behalf of His lawless people, Who is offering eternal life freely to all. And Jesus says in verse 16 that when you realize you need that salvation, when you need that good news, you will force your way into it. *"...[S]ince then, the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it."*

Jesus is saying that when we finally encounter the gospel—when we finally see the good news of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, when we finally see the gospel for what it is—we will do whatever it takes to come to Jesus. When we realize how much we need Him—when we realize what He's done for us—we won't let anything get in the way of coming to Jesus. Whatever it takes, we will press in to the Kingdom. We'll be earnest. We'll deny ourselves. We'll be

determined. We'll even use some spiritual violence to press in—that's the word Matthew uses in the parallel passage to this verse (Matthew 11:12-14).

Just think of the men who broke through a roof to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing (Luke 5:17-26). Breaking through a roof to get to Jesus—that's pressing your way into the Kingdom.

Think of the woman with the discharge of blood who pressed through the crowds (Luke 8:43-48). I remember the Sunday School pictures with her crawling on the ground through all those feet just to touch the hem of His garment. That's pressing your way into the Kingdom.

About 13 years ago, I attended a political rally in Naperville for the man who was to become President of the United States. This was only the second time in my life that I'd done something like this so I was excited to have the opportunity to attend this rally. After his speech was over, the man who was about to be elected President made his way down from the platform and started walking along a fence line. I remember that it suddenly occurred to me, "I bet if I can make my way through there I could get to him just in time. I could actually have an opportunity to shake his hand." I don't know what came over me; I wouldn't have wanted you to have a picture of whatever I did in that moment because there wasn't a lot of time and there were a lot of people in the way. I wasn't going to let anyone or anything get in my way of touching that man's hand. I forced my way forward—not very gently at all—and I made it to the front of the line and made it just in time to have him look me in the eye and say, "Good to see you. Thanks so much for coming." And with that he put out his hand and with this very hand, I shook the hand of the future President of the United States.

Don't we do that whenever we see something or someone of value approaching? When we realize, "I have the opportunity of a life time. Right here; that's what I need." Whenever we see something like that, we don't stand passively at the door. We say, "I must get in or I'm lost. I must press in. I must fight until by the grace of God my pride has been subdued and my heart has been enabled to trust and rest in Christ alone." Jesus is saying the Kingdom of God calls for that kind of supreme desire. It's not one among many desires. It's a desire so great that you would gladly give up all that you possess; you would gladly count everything as loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (Philippines 3:8).

Jesus is saying that the good news of the Kingdom demands firm resolution. Many people say, "Well, I would take Christ if I could have Him without His cross; if I could have Him without any cost to myself." But Jesus says, "No, there are sacrifices that need to be made. There are trials that have to be suffered. Sometimes there are agonies that have to be endured. If your hand offends you, cut it off; it's better to enter the Kingdom of God maimed than to have two

hands to go to hell (Matthew 5:30). If your eye offends you, gouge it out (Matthew 5:29). It demands firm resolution. All must be surrendered. The gate is narrow, the way is hard, that leads to life and few there are who find it (Matthew 7:13-14). Sin—the weight that keeps us from running the race with endurance—has to be cast off (Hebrews 12:1).

But in the end there's Jesus—King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Author and Finisher of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). There He is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high. He's ready to crown you with glory and honor and immortality and life in His Kingdom of saints. So Jesus says press in. He's there. He's calling you. His good news is freely offered to you. Press in. Forcefully cast off whatever keeps you from embracing Jesus Christ as your King—get rid of it; clear the way; remove the obstacles." *"...[P]repare the way of the Lord... Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low..."* (Isaiah 40:4). Enter into His Kingdom, determined to follow Him at any cost and fear not, little flock, because it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). Press your way into it, Jesus says.

That's what we're going to do as we celebrate several baptisms and the Lord's Supper. We who trust Jesus, who recognize the value of Christ's Kingdom, are going to confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then in these waters of baptism we're going to see a living example of the value of the Kingdom of God. We're going to see what it means to be united to Jesus Christ. When they go down into the water, it's a sign that through faith they've been united to Christ in His death and they've died to sin; when they come up out of that water, it's a sign that through faith, they've been united to Christ in His resurrection. They belong to Him forever; all that is His is theirs.

As we see this great gospel drama enacted before our eyes, Jesus is calling every one of His followers to continue on the path of discipleship; to keep pressing into the Kingdom and to do so with a joyful confidence that He is at the finish line, waiting to welcome us .

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## **New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

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Text provided by [sermontranscribers.net](http://sermontranscribers.net) ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)