

## ANNOUNCING THE KINGDOM

12 MAY 2019



1. Thinking back to Sunday, what does the image above communicate in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven?
2. Scriptures used: Matthew 4:12-17 and Isaiah 9:1-7. What does Matthew mean when he refers to 'heaven'? Why did Jesus and, later, the disciples preach "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand"? What do we understand by the term 'repent'? Why did Jesus link 'heaven' and 'repentance'?
3. Read Matthew 5:1-12. The Beatitudes are sometimes referred to as the constitution of the kingdom of heaven. These blessings/ promises that Jesus is announcing are not saying 'try hard to live like this'. They are saying that people who already are like that are in good shape. The point is not to offer a list of what sort of people God normally blesses. The point is to announce God's new covenant.

In our world, still, most people think that being blessed consists of success, wealth, long life, and victory in battle. But Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, and the peacemakers.

4. So when do these promises come true? There is a great temptation for us to to answer: In heaven after death. At first sight vv. 3,10 and 11 seem to say this: the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit and there is reward 'in heaven' for those who are persecuted for Jesus' sake. But this is again a misunderstanding of the meaning of heaven. Heaven is God's space, where full reality exists, close by our ordinary (earthly) reality and interlocking with it. One day heaven and earth will be joined together for ever, and the true state of affairs, at present out of sight, will be unveiled. After all, verse 5 says the meek will inherit the earth, and that can hardly happen in a disembodied heaven after death.

No, the clue comes in the next chapter, in the prayer Jesus taught his followers. We are to pray that God's kingdom will come, and God's will be done, 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

5. The beatitudes are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God's promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. How does this relate to discipleship? Discuss.