



Links Players

The Kingdom of Heaven

From that time on, Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'
(Matthew 4:17 NIV)

In a previous devotional, I floated the notion that athletic fields, in general, and golf courses, in particular, serve as refreshing escapes from the real, sinful world.

And even though a golf course and a round of golf provide a place where the scenery is appealing and the complexities of life are consigned to the land outside the OB stakes (assuming you turn your phone off), the course remains part of this fallen world. Heavenly, maybe - but not Heaven.

Sin is pretty ubiquitous. False witness shows up now and then on scorecards. God's name is occasionally taken in vain on golf courses. Injuries and even deaths occur. Not everyone beelines to the clubhouse when the storm horn blows, some preferring instead to tote a bag full of little lightning rods around the fairways.

Alligators bask on banks. Snakes lurk in the deep rough. Google "deaths on golf courses," and some crazy stuff comes up.

Today's verse, from Matthew's Gospel, happens early in Jesus' earthly ministry. He has undergone his temptation in the wilderness by Satan, selected his disciples, and gone to Capernaum to begin spreading the word. Specifically, the word that the kingdom of Heaven had "come near."

His Jewish hearers were less than enthused about how things were going in the kingdom of Earth. The Romans had conquered their land and were an oppressive presence. And no matter whose picture appears on the coins - Caesar or Lincoln - there are always issues in the kingdom of Earth. It's a fallen world.

Jesus also claimed to be the King in the kingdom that he brought near. A kingdom quite a bit better than a golf course. He displayed for us many of the realities that would apply in this kingdom. Food would be plentiful. A few loaves and fishes would go a long way. Fish not biting? Try throwing the nets on the other side of the boat. And consider getting a bigger boat. Out of wine? No worries if you've got some water on hand.

These signs and wonders reversed an element of the curse administered in Eden when Adam and Eve fell into sin - the part of the curse that stipulated that providing food would henceforth be a toilsome slog.

Starvation is currently a problem in our world, but it will not be a world-to-come problem. Sickness, blindness, paralysis, deafness, and leprosy aren't welcome in Jesus' Kingdom, either.

The leprosy thing had an interesting twist. Jewish law had it that you weren't supposed to touch a leper. But Jesus did it several times. If anyone challenged him on this, I imagine his response would have been a chuckle followed by, "What leper - I don't see a leper?"

So, as pleasant as an afternoon spent chasing the white ball around the course, it'll pale compared to an afternoon in the kingdom of Heaven. A kingdom that I suspect will bear a striking resemblance to the world we know, except minus the fallenness. Frankly, I can't picture it.

Another interesting wrinkle he revealed about the coming kingdom was that the citizens needed to become like little children. And, when you think about it, if this kingdom is eternal - if life there is truly everlasting - it's hard to pin down exactly when someone becomes old. No senior tees, I suspect.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, that your Son, by his grace, has granted us citizenship in his eternal kingdom.

—

Peter Muller

Copyright 2024 Links Players International

The Links Daily Devotional appears Monday-Friday at linksplayers.com.