

Welcome to Eagle Rock Baptist Church. If we haven't had the chance to meet – my name is Andrew – I'm one of the pastors here. This morning we are going to wrap up our series "At the Movies," where each week we've been investigating one of the summer's biggest blockbuster, to see where that film may or may not intersect with biblical truth. As you probably guessed from the trailer, we opened with or looked at your worship folder...we're going to use the film "The Lion King" as our jumping-off point. I want to start by confessing that I didn't go and see the most recent Lion King. I know that's disappointing to some of you – if you want to leave because I didn't see it, I'm ok with that. I figured if I left my wife home alone with our two-year-old and our four weeks old, to catch a movie, maybe snack on some milk duds I think that immediately disqualifies me from father of the year contention – so I didn't go. I have seen the animated one, and I've asked some people. I think it's the same movie.

The fun thing about Lion King, as far as our series goes, is that there are some pretty significant themes we could tie into. At the very beginning of the Lion King, Simba was anointed, just like Jesus was in his baptism, we'll unpack that that in a bit, Mufasa the King, demonstrates self-sacrificing love, by giving his life so that another might live. Scar, the brother of Mufasa– plays the perfect Satan character. He hates the King and wants to take control of the Kingdom. How about this tie in In Revelation 5:5, Jesus is referred to as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. So apparently it's biblical to say Jesus is the Lion King. Don't get me wrong there are significant differences in the worldviews communicated in scripture compared to Disney's Lion King, big surprise, but what is central to both, is the focus on the issue of King and Kingdom.

Before we get into this: I want to ask you a question. You don't have to answer out loud but just think about it. What do you think was the central message of the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Maybe you're not a bible reader, and you're new to all of this so we'll get even more general. What do you think was the central message of Jesus?

You can probably guess from the direction we've started down and our movie tie-in. The central message of Jesus and the message of the Gospel's is that the **Kingdom of God has come**. Don't feel bad if you didn't get it right. In modern evangelical Christianity, we've buried the lead on this one – but the message of Jesus is the message of the Kingdom of God has come. A quick and simple definition of this Kingdom of God, it's where God dwells, and where he exercises his dominion or his Lordship. A kingdom has got to have a place, doesn't it? And it's where God's rule and reign is experienced.

From the creation story to the call of Abraham up to the anointing of Saul, God was the King over his people. And then the people rejected God's Kingship and wanted a king of their own. So in a sense, God exercised his rule through that King. That went downhill pretty quickly, and eventually, God's people found themselves under one foreign ruler after another. The Old Testament prophets spoke of and looked forward to a time when God's dominion would be reestablished through a Davidic King – that is a King in the line of David and when God would return to dwell with his people in the Land. Jesus in fulfillment of those prophecies. In Jesus, God returned to dwell with his people, and through his life, death and resurrection restore God's dominion over the land – not just Israel – but all creation.

Rather than limit ourselves to one main text and work from that, I want to take you to a number of places in the gospels that bear this out. This is not exhaustive, I'm just going to take you to several texts that demonstrate the point, and hopefully, we'll get out of here by Monday.

Let's start at the beginning of the Gospel, with the birth narratives. In Luke chapter one, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and in verses thirty-two and thirty-three he told her **"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his Kingdom will never end."** In the book of Matthew, chapter two, we're told of these Magi, wise men who came from the east, and they show up on King Herod's doorstep with a question. Do you remember their question? **"Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?"** It's right there in the beginning Jesus is the King they've waited for, and the Kingdom is coming with him.

If we keep moving forward in the gospels - all four tell us the story of Jesus' baptism. Matthew verses 3:16 and 17 says, **"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** Often we look at this passage and focus on what it teaches about Jesus' identity as the Son of God, or even how this passage contains for us a complete picture of God's nature as trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And those things are important. Maybe you've been in some spiritual conversations with a Mormon, and they've asked questions about the trinity, perhaps you took them to this passage. It's great for that kind of dialogue. But if you're a first-century Jew, hearing Matthew tell this story, that's not necessarily the primary way you make sense of it. In the Old Testament, it was typically a prophet who anointed the King, Samuel anointed Saul and later David, Elijah anointed Jehu. I mentioned in Lion King, the Monkey priest or prophet, Rafiki anointed Simba, then in that famous scene, he holds him up for all of the animals gathered around. That's what's going on here: Jesus was before the prophet John the Baptist, but his anointing isn't with oil and doesn't come from John, it is the Holy Spirit he's anointed with, come down from the Father. When you combine this picture with God's words "this is my Son" which echoes Psalm two, which is about the Lord's anointed and future King, most first-century Jews when they would have heard the gospel writers tell this story – they would have understood, they're talking about a king.

I hate to do this, but for the sake of time, let's fast forward through Jesus' three years of ministry to the cross. Do you think it's a coincidence that Jesus had a crown of thorns placed on his head, or that he was wrapped in a purple robe before he was beaten? Do you think it's a coincidence that the charge against him that ultimately got him crucified was that he claimed to be King? John tells us, **"Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the jews."** His life was bookended, with proclamations of his Kingship: at birth by an angel, at death by a Roman bureaucrat.

One of the things that some people find curious in reading through the gospels is that Jesus was at times elusive in allowing people to apply the label Messiah, which literally means anointed, to him. Certain skeptical scholars claim – Jesus was a teacher, that's all he was, he never claimed to be the Messiah, or he certainly didn't claim to be God. To come up with such a ridiculous claim requires the most selective in your reading and interpretation of the gospels.

While Jesus was careful about the language of King and Messiah, he did not shy from using the title Son of Man, a title he used over 80 times in the gospels. The title is found in Ezekiel, but Jesus' use comes from a vision in the book of Daniel chapter 7 which says **"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."** Judaism was and is strictly monotheistic. It prohibits the worship of anyone or anything but God. You just have to go a few chapters earlier in the same book to Daniel chapter three to see the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They chose to be tossed into the fire rather than bow down in worship to anyone but God. Now four chapters later, Daniel is telling us, the entire world will bow down rightfully so, to the Son of Man. This is the title Jesus appropriated for himself, speaking of a divine king and eternal Kingdom.

Some of you might be thinking, Andrew, this is all your interpretation. Your cherry-picking. Ok, let's go straight to Jesus' words themselves. These are Jesus' first words in the Gospel of Mark. He's been baptized. John's thrown in prison. And Jesus' ministry begins with **"The time has come," he said. "The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"** In Luke 4, Jesus was staying in the home of Simon Peter, and everyone was bringing the sick and demon-possessed to him, and he was healing them and casting out demons. Which must have been cool, but I'm guessing a little bit nerve-racking if your Peter and you've got a line of demon-possessed people sitting in your living room sitting around the coffee table waiting for an exorcism. The next morning at daybreak, Jesus went out to spend some time alone with the Father, when the townspeople caught up to him, they tried to convince him to stay. This seemed to happen with some frequency in Jesus' ministry. In John six, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus perceived that the people wanted to take him and make him King by force. Jesus refused to stick around. He knows how this was going to play out. He responded, **"I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."** His purpose was to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom.

I want to show you one final passage, as we close up this section before we move on to talk about what difference it makes. In Luke chapter seventeen, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, where he knew he would be crucified for our sins. At some point along that road, Jesus was confronted by a Pharisee who asked him, "when the kingdom would come?" Why does he ask Jesus this question? Is it because Jesus is a sage with great wisdom, a prophet with knowledge about the future? Or was he asking a more personal question, when are you really going to get this thing started? Jesus responded, **"The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is in your midst."** Some bible translations have missed the meaning of what Jesus is saying, by translating it, the Kingdom of God is within. That's not it. What Jesus is saying is that the Kingdom of God is here, because he's there. The Kingdom of God has broken into the world in and through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the King and in him and through him is the Kingdom.

The Kingdom has come into the world through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and we can enter into the Kingdom through our repentance and belief in him. This is not something we have to wait for it's not something that we only experience once we die. We get to enter into the Kingdom today.

I want to qualify this, with the caveat that the Kingdom has not yet come in fullness. As if you didn't realize it. In teaching us the Lord's prayer, Jesus taught us to pray thy Kingdom come, not because it hasn't arrived yet, but because it has not yet fully arrived. I won't belabor the point. It doesn't take long watching the evening news to recognize that the Kingdom has not yet come in fullness. Perhaps you've experienced it in your own life, where certain things have changed since you've placed your trust in Christ. You've found yourself loving your enemies, forgiving those who've hurt you, performing acts of generosity that were totally foreign to you before, and yet still there are failures and frustrations where you end up wondering have I really changed at all? Theologians have called this the "already but not yet." We are in the springtime, where we can see the sprouting forth of Kingdom seeds but we don't yet see what they will finally become. Jesus taught that the Kingdom is here, but it is also coming – and will do so when he returns riding on the clouds, on the day of judgment.

Maybe this is all a bit confusing to you: “Andrew, I thought forgiveness was Jesus’ central message, or I thought love was his central message.” Those things are not necessarily incorrect; they're just incomplete. They make up a part of Jesus’ kingdom message, but they don't define it. Let's take love first. In God's love, he created all that exists. He didn't have to, he chose to, in order to invite us into a relationship to be loved and return love back to him, and to be in loving community with one another. Humanity rebelled against God's rule – his Kingship. Adam and Eve did what we've all done; they chose to rule their own lives. And for that rebellion, they received death, just as we all will should we continue to choose to live in rebellion apart from God. It's not because God's cruel. He can't have citizens in his Kingdom who are actively staging a rebellion against him. That's just not a good way to run a kingdom. In God's love, he's brought the Kingdom to us through the Incarnation of his Son. Through his Son the King, he made it possible for us to enter into His eternal Kingdom, that's the message of John 3:16? In God's love, he's also given us the freedom to respond to his invitation to enter into his Kingdom or continue living in our own false kingdoms.

Forgiveness, far from being the central message of Jesus, is actually the means that enables us to enter into God's Kingdom. We ask God to forgive us and trust that Jesus paid the price for us on the cross. But it doesn't end there. It's the door that enables us to enter into the Kingdom life. Forgiveness is to the Kingdom, what the wedding is to marriage. It is the initiating act through which we enter. I know some of you are wondering, what difference does it make, whether we choose to focus on forgiveness or the King and Kingdom? One of the issues that we face when we focus on forgiveness as the central message of the Gospel is that forgiveness doesn't always change us. Sadly, many people, have come to understand the Gospel of Jesus solely as a get out of jail free card. I ask Jesus to forgive my sins, and I can go on living any way I want to live, free from the fear of any eternal repercussions – because I've been forgiven. Though I'm forgiven, I can still be enslaved to all the same desires. Now I am not bagging on forgiveness; it is something for which we should praise God for and give glory to him every day. But Jesus didn't just die to make us forgiven creation; he came to make us new creation. The Kingdom comes in power, and that power is here to transform us. **God's Kingdom doesn't just**

change our personal sin ledgers it changes everything. Yes, we are forgiven, but we're also set free from the tyranny of sin over our lives, enabling us to live as Kingdom citizens holy and pleasing to God. We don't need to fear death any longer because, in God's Kingdom, death has been defeated, and the enemy the devil has been overthrown. When God's Kingdom comes in fullness, there will be no more hunger, no more pain, broken relationships will be restored, and peace will prevail. Corruption, oppression, disease, and hatred are all done away with. God's Kingdom isn't just a spiritual thing; it is nothing less than a reordering of the cosmos to reflect God's good intention.

We'll close with this: **The character of the King Shapes the Character of His Kingdom.** If Jesus is King, we do it his way. His life, death, and resurrection define the nature of the Kingdom. It should define the way we as Kingdom citizens live and how we interact. His selflessness, his humility, his love for all, and his special concern for the child, the poor, and the marginalized. His hunger above all to live for the will of the Father and to please him should shape our priorities, dreams, and desires. It gives us a dis-ease when we look at the brokenness of the world. It gives us hope to look into the darkest places in this world and see opportunities for redemption and new life. And because we're kingdom citizens, we follow God into those places. To be his Kingdom present, dwelling and allowing his dominion to reign in us and through us.

To be shaped in this way, we've got to know Him, and not just some theological points. This is more than a passing familiarity. We've got to know his life, death, and resurrection as it's told through God's word. We should be committed to reading and studying Jesus' words so that we can live going with the current of the Kingdom, rather than be carried off by the current of our world. We should be prepared for the ways that living as a citizen of the Kingdom will conflict with the allegiances of this our world.

Our memory verse this week is found in the sermon on the mount; it says, ***"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*** I didn't give it to you as a next step this week, but if you want to see what Kingdom living looks like from the mouth of the King – there's no better place to go than the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon on the plain in Luke is pretty good too. That's a pretty good place to seek him in his word, may we be a people that reorder our lives rightly, that the King would be first in our hearts and first in our lives, now and forever.

Let's pray.