

BENEFITS TO THE KINGDOM OF YOUR SPIRITUAL FITNESS **Luke 17:20-21**

INTRODUCTION:

As by now you surely know, our theme for 2010 is “Fit For Life”. I am confident that we all want to be spiritually fit enough to inherit eternal life. I am certain that we all want to be spiritually fit enough that we can enjoy the abundant life. And I know I am on sure footing when I say that we all want to be spiritually fit for the rest of our lives.

For this first part of the year, we have been thinking about what it is that motivates us to put forth the effort to become spiritually fit...because it does require motivation and it does take effort. Today, I want you to think about the fact that your spiritual fitness benefits the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps that doesn't stir you to stop being a pew potato – but I hope that just means that it hasn't stirred you yet. I hope, by the time we have finished this morning, you will be roused to spiritual fitness at the thought that you matter: you matter to the Kingdom of God.

Cincinnati Christian University, one of our church-supported Bible colleges, is in a capital advancement campaign they have titled “Beyond The Walls”. I like the phrase: “Beyond The Walls”. It conveys a lot of meaning and it has application to us. For Clay City Christian Church to be the church that God wants us to be, we must think beyond the walls. The church is bigger than this congregation and we have to remember that.

Not only is it true that for Clay City Christian Church to be the church that God wants us to be that we must think beyond the walls, it is also true that for us to be the disciples that God wants us to be, each of us must think beyond the walls. You see, your decisions, your lifestyle and your spiritual fitness have an impact far greater than simply on your own eternal destiny. Your decisions, your lifestyle and your spiritual fitness have an impact far larger than on this congregation; far wider than this county or even this country. Whether you know if or not, your spiritual fitness, or your lack of fitness, impacts the Kingdom of Heaven in all places and for all time.

I. WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

For us to grasp that fact, perhaps the place to begin is by defining what The Kingdom of Heaven is. Many people, when they hear the term “Kingdom of Heaven” think of the celestial city with gates of pearl, streets of gold and walls of jasper. They regard The Kingdom of Heaven as a future reward for the faithful. And it is.

But the Bible not only speaks of The Kingdom of Heaven as a future reward, it also speaks of it as a present reality.

When John the Baptist was conducting his ministry, he preached in the desert of Judea preparing people to accept Jesus. His message was, *“Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.”*

Then, in Matthew 4, when Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison, Jesus took up the call and he began to preach, *“Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.”*

In Matthew chapter 5, 6 & 7, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the sort of people who make up the Kingdom of Heaven. For instance, he said, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”*

In Matthew 13, Jesus told eight different parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, 32 times, Matthew records some teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. And Matthew’s use of the term “Kingdom of Heaven” specified the fellowship of those who have proclaimed Jesus as their King.

In Luke 17:20-21, the author of the third gospel wrote:

²⁰ *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, ²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”*

If you are following along in your Bible, you may notice that you have a footnote in Luke 17:21. The translation in the body of the text reads, “The kingdom of God is within you.” But the footnote suggests that it could be translated, “The kingdom of God is *among* you.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is the worldwide domain over which God is sovereign. His Kingdom includes all who will allow Him to be their sovereign.

Every year at church camp and at Vacation Bible School, we teach the kids to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Christian Flag. It says:
I pledge allegiance to the Christian Flag and to the Savior for whose Kingdom it stands: one brotherhood uniting all Christians in service and in love.

It is a promise of loyalty to the flag and also to the Savior for whose Kingdom it stands. That flag represents, stands for and symbolizes a Kingdom and if Jesus is your King, you are a part of his Kingdom.

II. WHY DOES THE KINGDOM MATTER?

If you have come to understand that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now and it includes all who have accepted Jesus as their King, then

perhaps we should consider why it matters that there is a Kingdom and you can be a part of it.

Please understand this: being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is not just about your personal relationship with the King but it is also about your relationship with the Kingdom: others within this church and other Christians in this area and around the world.

Tip O'Neill, the long-time Speaker of the House of Representatives, is credited with having said, "All politics is local." I understand what O'Neill was saying but it does not apply to the Kingdom of Heaven. All Christianity is not local.

Sometimes we can forget that we are a part of something worldwide in scope and eternal in span.

Realizing that we are a part of a Kingdom that is larger than this congregation makes a difference. It makes a difference, for example, in Missions.

- We support Lincoln Christian University as they educate young people for ministry. Most of those young people will not come to Clay City to serve as ministers or youth ministers but we still support the college because we acknowledge that the Kingdom is bigger than Clay City.
- We have sent contributions to the Wabash Christian Retirement Home and we would even if no one from this church ever went to live there. We have because this is Kingdom work and we are a part of the Kingdom.
- We support Oil Belt Christian Service Camp in Flora, where a lot of our youth go for one or more weeks in the summer.
- And we support Collegio Biblico in Eagle Pass, TX even though none of our youth are likely to go to college there.
- We support Pine Haven Christian Children's Ranch in St. Ignatius, MT and Oblong Children's Christian Home only about an hour away from here even though most of us do not anticipate that our children or grandchildren will ever need the services of these ministries. We do so because they are doing the work of our Kingdom on behalf of our King
- We support Dwaine and Becky Anderson in Thailand and the Myanmar Samaritan Mission in what used to be known as Burma. Most of us will probably never visit one of those missions – but we support them because they are doing the work of our Kingdom.
- We support the Christian Counseling and Family Services. We never know when any of us will need their services but even if we don't, others will need Christian counseling and we have helped to insure that this Kingdom work continues.

The plight of Haitian Christians matters to us because there is one King and one Kingdom. We have not met these disciples of Jesus but we know that they are part of the same Kingdom of which we are a part so we care and we share.

You see, it matters that the Kingdom is larger than this congregation. It is a great thing when we have a chance to meet with others of the same Kingdom – such as at Men’s Day, Ladies’ Day and Senior Adult Day at Oil Belt. It helps to remind us that we are not a Kingdom unto ourselves. And our monthly area men’s meeting, incidentally named “Kingdom Builders” is another place where we are reminded that the Kingdom is bigger than this church.

The fact that there is a Kingdom matters.

III. **WHY DO YOU MATTER TO THE KINGDOM?**

And the fact is that you matter to the Kingdom. Your life, your witness and your service can make a difference to the entire Kingdom of Heaven. What you do can have both a global and an eternal impact. Think of that. Where else can you invest your life and make an everlasting difference?

To illustrate this truth, over the next four weeks, we are going to be looking at Old Testament examples of spiritual fitness and how their lives impact us to this day. We are going to look at New Testament examples of spiritual fitness and the bearing those people have on our walk with Jesus. We are going to look at the history of this congregation and find examples of people whose spiritual health help to make us spiritually healthy. And then, on the fourth Sunday, I want to get real personal and share my testimony of those who have been the greatest influence on my life and ministry and, by ripple-effect, therefore on you.

Now, because what we do can have a profound impact on so many, that will affect the choices we make regarding the activities of the Kingdom. I want you to understand that you have a responsibility to other believers both within this church and outside of this church.

I want you to come to the various activities of the church even if you don’t think they strengthen or feed you. I want you to come anyway for the sake of the rest of us. Your presence will help to encourage those who are getting fed and who are being served. Even if you don’t believe you are going to get anything out of it, come anyway so you can put something into it!!

I am grieved at the ministers in our area that will not participate in Kingdom Builders because they say they don’t get anything out of it. I have urged them to come to the meetings and put something into it, then.

If they are at such a level of maturity and are so Biblically knowledgeable that they can't receive anything of value from the meetings, then they are in a position to nurture the rest of us who have not attained that level of spiritual maturity. And the same goes for all the men of this church.

Are you involved in our Sunday School? Maybe you already know everything that will be taught in those classes. And if that is the case, come anyway so the rest of us can learn from you and so your very presence will be an encouragement to the rest of us.

The same holds true for our Wednesday evening Bible study and our Sunday evening service. Even if you have no more room to grow in your spiritual life, you can be making a difference in the lives of the rest of us by your presence and your participation.

I guarantee you that you will make a greater contribution to the Kingdom of Heaven by being here than by watching television or playing computer games.

For the last week, I've watched a lot of Olympic events. I've enjoyed them thoroughly! There have been times that I caught myself cheering for the athletes – especially in the curling. When I think of it logically, it makes no sense to cheer. No matter what I say and no matter how loud I say it, they won't hear me. My support for those athletes won't make a particle bit of difference. But my support for the servants of Christ matters. For now and for eternity.

CONCLUSION:

Do you remember that when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he modeled this type of prayer for them: "*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

When God's will is done on earth in the way that His will is done in heaven, the Kingdom will have come. It is both our privilege and our responsibility to prepare the way for the King so that the Kingdom can come. It is an exhilarating thing to be called to such an important task. And you are!

Astronaut James Irwin is one of the few men who have walked on the moon. Irwin reports that as he stood on the lunar surface and looked up at the earth, he prayed for the first time in his life. He says that he thought about the strife among nations, poverty, hunger, and rampant evil; and that he thought to himself: "What is more important than man walking on the moon is that God should walk on earth."

02/21/10

God walks on earth in fellowship with His people. Friends, we have been called to partner with God in the advance of His Kingdom so that His will is done on earth as it is in Heaven. It is to that we have been called. Will you answer the call?

INVITATION: #592 – *“Jesus Calls Us”*