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Sermon Title	: The Currency of the Kingdom
Series	: <i>Living in the Kingdom of God</i>
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Introduction

We're going to pick up where we left off a fortnight ago. We've been talking about *Living in the Kingdom of God*; we've defined the Kingdom of God – The Kingdom of God is God's will and His authority. A fortnight ago we saw how prayer is the means by which we can exercise the authority of the King, prayer is how we can take control of situations and circumstances and bring them into submission to God's will.

But prayer in itself is not enough. Too often people use prayer to delegate responsibility; they pray "God, please do (xyz) in this situation that I'm facing, amen" and that's it. They've prayed, now the ball is in God's court – they try to absolve themselves from any responsibility for the outcome.

We've gone through a few requirements or conditions for experiencing the Kingdom of God in our lives. Things like accepting forgiveness from God for all the things we've done that don't measure up to His standards, embracing a relationship with Jesus Christ, obeying God's commands – to live in the Kingdom we need to be living by the laws of God's Kingdom, we need to be praying – that is, inviting God's rule into the situations we face.

But let me share this with you; we will never experience the fullness of God's Kingdom unless our prayers and obedience are backed up with a faith that believes the Word of God and is prepared to persevere until God's promises to us are fulfilled.

Scripture Background

I'd like to share with you part of a most phenomenal letter on faith that perseveres far beyond what could be seen or even imagined.

This letter was most likely written to Jewish Christians in Rome. The author is unknown, but it is a very personal and eloquent letter which reveals it was probably written to a specific group of people rather than a large audience like many of the other letters in the New Testament.

It's actually quite likely that the letter was written based on a sermon that the author preached and which he, or she, felt contained essential truths for its recipients.

Today, we are the recipients...

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-40

[Read from *The Message Bible* by Eugene H. Peterson.]

Faith in What We Don't See

Most Bible's give this passage a title, the NIV simply entitles it "By Faith", but I love the title the Message Bible has; "Faith in What We Don't See."

This is the kind of faith we need to have in order to fully experience the Kingdom of God in our lives, in the situations we face, in the circumstances we find ourselves in.

It's this faith that enabled Jesus to see the impossibility of sight for a blind man and yet reach into what He knew of God's power and see God's Kingdom come into that situation.

It's this faith that allowed Jesus to turn up late for a friend's funeral, so late they'd already buried the guy and then to waltz up to the tomb and call him out.

Jesus had faith in what He knew, but didn't see. This is the faith of the Kingdom of God.

For us, this means calling into our reality the power and authority of God's Kingdom which has been promised but which we don't yet see.

I love this verse in Hebrews 11:20

MSG Hebrews 11:20 *By an act of faith, Isaac reached into the future as he blessed Jacob and Esau.*

This is what we do when we pray God's rule into a situation when we pray in faith; we're reaching into the future that God has promised, the future of His perfect rule being established over all the earth and inviting it into the present.

The thing we need to grasp today is that it's not enough just to have faith that God *can* do the impossible, not even to have faith that God *will* do the impossible, but the persistence, the tenacity, the perseverance to hold onto that faith regardless of how things may seem to us.

Nearly all of the amazing men and women of God that are mentioned in this passage in Hebrews had to persevere. They were given a promise from God and they held onto it for days and weeks and months and years and decades and beyond.

None of them saw the complete fulfilment of God's promise to them in their lives, it didn't mean God didn't fulfil it, but their entire lives were spent faithfully trusting God and holding onto the promises of God, persevering in their faith knowing that God is always faithful.

Verse 26, speaking of Moses, describes this attitude perfectly:

MSG Hebrews 11:26 *He valued suffering in the Messiah's camp far greater than Egyptian wealth because he was looking ahead, anticipating the payoff.*

Living in the Kingdom of God *today* means looking ahead to the *future* God has promised and inviting it into *today*. Looking ahead to the day when God's absolutely perfect will, His complete desire; things like healing and life and health – life in abundance, and staking our claim as His ambassadors to have these things revealed in our lives today.

But the fact is that although the Bible clearly reveals that, as Christians, we can experience life in God's Kingdom, under His authority today – it's not always the case.

We pray and people don't always get healed; dumb stuff still happens to us; life isn't a bed of roses. Well – the Bible also promises that being a Christian is tough and that there are hardships and trials – all designed to cause us to be stretched and to grow and develop perseverance and endurance to be worthy of the hope we're called to.

Sometimes dumb stuff just happens; it's all part of living in a world where God's perfect rule is not yet enforced. Other times it is to test our faith and to teach us where our faith ends and where total reliance on God needs to begin.

The Limits of Our Faith

The famous preacher Smith Wigglesworth, the man credited with bringing the Pentecostal movement to New Zealand, once wrote in his book *Faith That Prevails* about a time when he visited a young couple where the wife was clearly demon-possessed.

Smith Wigglesworth describes the situation then writes:

“That brought me to a place of compassion for the woman. Something had to be done, no matter what it was. Then with my faith I began to penetrate the heavens, and I was soon out of that house, I will tell you, for I never saw a man get anything from God who prayed on the earth.

If you get anything from God, you will have to pray into heaven; for it is all there. If you are living in the earth realm and expect things from heaven, they will never come.

And as I saw, in the presence of God, the limitations of my faith, there came another faith, a faith that could not be denied, a faith that took the promise, a faith that believed God’s Word.

And from that presence, I came back again to earth, but not the same man. God gave a faith that could shake hell and anything else.”

He goes on to say he then prayed and the wife was completely healed. But it was not in the faith that he had, only when he recognised the limits of what he could believe but accepted that the Bible is God’s Word and as such he needed a faith and strength greater than himself in order to see God’s Kingdom come in this and hundreds and thousands of other situation he faced.

Dr. David Cartledge, a very well known and respected authority on Apostolic and Prophetic Ministry, one whom Penny and I have had the privilege of hearing and meeting and can testify that this man lives what he preaches as far as faith goes. Dr. David Cartledge says that no matter how many times you pray and see someone healed or pray and see circumstances turned around or even pray and see someone raised from the dead – every single time is a test of faith and endurance that you need to draw on God’s strength for.

It would not be faith if it wasn’t a challenge. If we didn’t need to completely rely on God’s strength for the situations we face how could it be faith?

Persevering in Faith

On Easter Sunday in 1987 the Waiuku Assembly of God held its first meeting here in this hall. Pastor Grant Buchanan and a number people from what was then called Papakura Assembly of God who were living in the area, along with others from Waiuku formed this Church.

Of those people six are still here today; Steve Spring, my parents, Peter & Jayne Woodham, my sister Vicki, my brother Mark, and me.

Shortly afterwards we were joined by the young and stunning Gail Drain and her tribe; Logan, Tania, Koren, Nicole and Christopher.

The church numbered around sixty or so until Christmas in 1991 when Pastor Grant and Shelley believed God was moving them on.

For nearly a year we had no pastor and no growth. The church shrunk to just four adults and ten kids; Steve, Gail, Peter & Jayne, Steve's daughter Jo, Gail's children, and us kids.

I'd like to invite Gail Drain to come and share with us something about her journey and our church's journey of faith and perseverance during this seemingly hopeless time...

[Gail Drain]

God's Word is Enough

The situation looked hopeless for this church; but we were given God's Word and I am thankful that this church held fast to what God promised and to what they knew about God's faithfulness.

If we want to experience God's Kingdom in our lives today we need to accept that it's not always going to be easy. Sure, there are times when God moves instantly in situations, when it seems there is an open window above us through which heaven seems to be pouring into our lives, but there are other times when we don't feel a thing.

There will be times in our lives when we meet together and everyone else seems to be experiencing God while we worship, when we respond to the offer of prayer and don't feel a thing, when we read our Bibles and nothing seems to hit us, when we just seem to be walking in a valley.

Let me tell you, God is no less real during these times than when you're on top of the world. God's Kingdom is no less able to penetrate our lives when the skies are cloudy than when they're clear.

But it is in these times that we need to persevere regardless.

Smith Wigglesworth says further on in his book, *Faith That Prevails*:

"You have the Word of God and it is enough."

Dyson Hague gave this powerful testimony of the Word of God in an address to the Parkdale Bible Society in Toronto in 1912:

"Never, never compare this Book with other books. Comparison is dangerous. They are of earth. This is from heaven. O, do not think and do not say that this Book only 'contains the word of God! It is the Word of God. Think not of it as a good book, or even the better book, but lift it in heart and mind and faith and love far, far above all, and ever regard it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God; nay more, as the living Word of the Living God: supernatural in origin; eternal in duration; inexpressible in value; infinite in scope; divine in authorship; human in penmanship ; regenerative in power; infallible in authority; universal in interest; personal in application; inspired in totality."

When we have the Word of God, either in the form of a promise God has given us or in the basic commands and promises in the Bible then it is enough – we need to ask God for the strength to believe and the perseverance to hold onto His Word regardless of our circumstances.

We need to take our belief as far as we can and then ask God to take it further. Then we need to hold it there and be prepared to hang in for the long haul.

Faith For Our Lives

I want to present two areas for us to apply this perseverance of faith.

The first of these is in our lives personally. We've been looking at the Kingdom of God as it relates to us as individuals, so let's begin by looking at applying faith in the Kingdom of God to our personal lives.

I believe that God gives everyone a promise; whether you have received it or heard it yet – I believe God has a promise for your life.

To discover it we need to be praying regularly, we need to be reading our Bibles, we need to be fellowshiping together and putting ourselves in situations where we can receive God's prophecy to us.

If you haven't received a promise from God for your life then ask Him and continue asking. Make sure you're doing the things that are required to hear from God; things like I just mentioned, obviously being obedient to God's commands is essential, making a commitment to growing in our relationship with God is essential – even if you don't know how to – make that commitment that you want to know God more in your heart.

When God speaks to you, when you're reading your Bible, when someone prophecies in church and confirms something on your heart; however it comes, once you've heard from God hold onto it no matter what.

If you've got a promise from God then don't let go of it, pray into it, claim it, reach back into God's Word and His faithfulness and accept it, then stretch into the future of God's fulfilment of it and believe it for today.

As well as specific words that God speaks to us the Bible is God's Living Word to us today. Read it, understand the promises and the context of them, believe them, claim them for yourself, and live in them today.

The Bible says that God loves you and cares for you and will provide for your needs, read it, accept it, understand the context then believe it for today. Take your belief as far as you can then ask God for a faith that only comes from heaven.

We have God's Word and it is enough. Read it, accept it, believe what you can, accept what you can then stretch out and ask God to complete your faith for the fulfilment of His Word today and persevere until you see it.

Faith For The Future of the Church

The second area of applying this faith that I want to share is in the life of this church, this community of believers of which we are all a part.

Around four years ago this church stopped growing. People came, people left, but overall the number of people in this church has remained pretty much static. God spoke to Ray & Carolien and confirmed that it was time for them to move into the next stage of His plan for them. It was time for this church to move into the stage of God's plan for us too.

But just because something is God's plan it doesn't mean it's going to be easy and it doesn't mean it's going to happen immediately and it doesn't mean that we won't need to persist in it.

There's this belief that seems to have infiltrated the church all over the Western world; it's this belief that if something is God's will then doors will automatically open, that everything will be plain sailing.

I heard someone once say that living in God's will is about a life of kicking doors down. If something is in God's will then we can expect resistance.

It was God's will for the Children of Israel to possess the Promised Land, but even when they were being obedient and were being faithful it was never easy. Even when God was fighting on their side they still had to engage the enemy in battles and fight one-on-one.

Just because something is God's will doesn't mean seeing the results won't come at a price or won't come without hard work and perseverance.

What we need to grasp and hold onto and persist in is faith for the future God has for us. Faith that reaches into the past to the things God has promised us, to the things God's Word reveals in the Bible then reaching into the future to lay hold of the things that have not yet been revealed or that we are not yet experiencing and then proclaiming and living these things in our lives today.

We lay hold of the Word of God, we look forward to the time when His Word will be fulfilled and we proclaim it as our reality today. In our passage in Hebrews all of these men and women of faith reached back into God's Word, they took hold of the future that was promised and declared it in their lives.

For us we need to believe God's Word that He will build His church, we need to realise that a New Testament church cannot stay small. Hear me on this, you often hear the line "we may be small but we're..." whatever. There's a hundred and one excuses for remaining small.

There's nothing wrong with being a small church, but God's church doesn't remain small, God's church cannot remain small.

We need to look at God's Word on these things and claim it and then persist in them! The book of James teaches over and over that our faith is demonstrated in the things we do. Wigglesworth had two lines that were the mainstay of his ministry: He would say "Faith is an act", and "Only believe!"

If we believe the Word of God, if we accept it and claim it then we need to act on the things that are going to position us to see them fulfilled in our lives.

We need to reach back and receive the Word of God, we need to look at our present circumstances and see where the Word of God has yet to be fulfilled and then we need to stretch out our faith and grasp the future fulfilment of that Word to enable us to persevere in doing the things that will position us to see God's Word fulfilled today.

God promised Abraham a nation of descendents and a land for them. That was God's Word to Abraham. But it would never have been fulfilled if Abraham did not act in faith to God's Word.

Abraham had to leave his homeland, he had to set out without knowing where he would end up, how he would get there or how God would fulfil His promise. Along the way he faced setback after setback, trial after trail, impossibilities that would cause many people to quit. But he knew the Word of the Lord and he put His faith in God and persevered.

Abraham positioned himself and his family to have God's Word fulfilled.

We can look through the Bible and we can see the God's Word is that everyone may enter a relationship with Him, that we, the church, demonstrate God's Kingdom to those around us in the things we do and say, in the way we live our lives; we can see God's promise of miracles of signs and wonders, of healing, of broken lives made whole.

We can then look at our present situation, at our church today and at our community. We can identify the people we can reach in our community; we can identify those that God has strategically gifted us to connect with. We can look at our community here in Waiuku and highlight the areas of opportunity for ministry around us.

Then we can decide to act and position ourselves to fulfil or potential, to reach those we can reach, to minister to those areas we can minister, to connect with those we can connect. We can decide to purposefully and strategically position ourselves for God's Word to be fulfilled today.

Then we need to reach beyond our faith, into the faith that comes from God and see the fulfilment of God's Word to this church and declare it to be so this day.

Believing God's Word, holding onto His faithfulness and the fulfilment of it we can then persevere and persist and endure until that day that it becomes a reality.

But until that day we need to act, we need to position ourselves to reach, to connect, to minister, and to do everything we can do to be prepared for God to fulfil His Word to us today.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of God is available to us as a present reality. It's a future hope but a present reality for Christians who will exercise the authority of the Kingdom in prayer and who will refuse to passively and vainly hope that things will magically change but who will instead deliberately thrust themselves into acts of faith, declaring God's rule today, believing for God's rule today – for the fulfilment of His Word today and then gritting their teeth and committing to the cause for the long haul if need be.

Exercise the authority through prayer and back it up with faith that God's Word is enough; faith to endure regardless of situations and circumstances, faith to persist in *acts* of faith and in positioning ourselves for God's Word to be fulfilled.

God's Word reveals a growing and vibrant church reaching the community around it; what do we need to do to position ourselves for that Word to be fulfilled.

God's Word commands us to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God with others; what do we need to do to be effective in communicating this to our culture and community?

God's Word says that His Word will not return void; how can we prepare ourselves for the fulfilment of this Word?

Read God's Word, hear His promises to you and to this Church; claim them, hold onto them, pray over them; stretch your faith for them as far as you can then ask and believe for God to take it further; then stick at it.

When you've received God's Word persist in it, persevere in all these things, in faith and prayer because God's Word is enough. Then make sure you are personally positioning yourself for God to fulfil His Word, and make sure that as a part of this assembly you're part of positioning this church for God's Word to be fulfilled.

The Word of God will do absolutely nothing for us; it will have no power in our lives if it remains the Word of God *inside* the Bible. The Word of God is living, it's powerful and effective to change lives and situations and to bring God's Kingdom into our present circumstances – but only if we take the Word from the Bible and pray it into our hearts.

For the Word of God to have any effect in our lives, for the promises of God to be revealed in our lives we need to pray the Word off the pages and into our hearts and lives.

Don't settle for a mediocre Christianity; don't settle for a seat on the benches and coast through this life without ever fully experiencing the Kingdom of God in your life.

Take the Word of God, read it, pray it, claim it and live it today!

Reach into the Word of God, stretch your faith to believe that God will accomplish that which He has promised and then persist in that faith to pray the fulfilment of God's Word into your life today.

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