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New King. New Kingdom. New Year
Acts 3:12-21
January 1, 2017, Benny McGrath

The bible is a big book. Like a forest, sometimes we walk into it just to spend an hour or two discovering one awesome tree. And sometimes we get the whole forest in one eyeshot to stand in awe of its fullness. This message is a forest message. We'll be back and forth in the bible all morning. And I'll warn you now, it's probably going to feel rushed. We'll be grazing buried treasure every time we turn a page. And it'll be hard not to stop and dig. But my goal is to connect the enormity of the Christmas story into the grind of a new year. I emphasise new because new years can benchmark personal goals, they have never happened before, and they have a newness that reminds us of the new king and his new kingdom that came to us when Christ was born. — A kingdom that you and I are part of, if we are born again in Christ.

So I want you to imagine with me for a minute. Close your eyes if it helps. Think about the big one or two goals you have for 2017. Now imagine what your goal would look like if: Your goals were backed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your personal aspirations were as sure the prophetic word of God. Your work and your appetites were as satisfying as heaven? That's a tall order. And New Year's resolutions have a reputation of being lofty and unrealistic. But hopefully, we'll see in God's word today, that King Jesus has good plans for you in 2017 and he's able to help you achieve them.

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ACTS 3 - A NEW ERA. I am connecting this message to the Christmas story, But I've centred it around a moment long after the birth of Jesus. He's been executed on the cross, resurrected from death, ascended from the earth to be with the Father, left the disciples behind to live and serve as his representatives to the rest of the world.

The people in this passage are the first Christians. The church itself is only days old! At first, there's about 120 of them. Then in one day about 5,000 of them. God's Holy Spirit empowered the church to share the good news and minister to their community. Inspiring and miraculous things are happening every day! One day in a place called Solomon's Porch (virtually the Jerusalem equivalent of our Spirit Square) a guy who everyone knew as a local paralytic is suddenly healed in the name of Jesus Christ. There's a big commotion! The crowd around asks "What the heck is going on?"

Acts 3:12-15 [NLT] *"Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? For it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!"*

Thousands have come to faith in Jesus in days. The church has boomed into existence and is the most socially satisfying community in history. Signs and wonders happen every day as God's Spirit draws attention to the new King and the new kingdom. When the crowd asks "What's going on?" Peter responds like "Brothers... You killed the king."

Some translations capitalization of the words "Holy and Righteous One" to show that Peter isn't just talking about a guy that supposedly does holy and righteous things. He's actually talking about the ONE. The one who embodies holiness. In whom righteousness is defined. Who is supposed to take the throne and restore shalom; peace and prosperity in the midst of corruption and chaos.

"He came to serve you, and you hung him on a cross until he had no more blood to spill."

That's a pretty brutal response to a pretty fair question. People are loving each other, sharing stuff. getting healed in the name of Jesus Christ, who had just been killed. "What the heck is going on?" is a pretty reasonable question. Still, Peter's response is razor sharp. Clearly intended to cut straight to the point.

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WHY A KING? Peter doesn't say "king". But I'm saying king. I'm saying "king" to put it in the context of the grander story. The same story we celebrate at Christmas. Before I go on, let's turn back the pages in history to get some context. The concept of Kings and kingdoms is a bit distant to us. But we can put ourselves in the shoes of the crowd standing there listening to Peter. To do that, we'll read a prophecy by a guy named Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 52.

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ISAIAH 52 - GOOD NEWS. Isaiah is credited for writing the gospel story 700 years before Jesus was born. Actually, the whole Old Testament prophecies God redeeming humanity from sin by sending his son into the world as king. But it's most clearly illustrated in the Old Testament by Isaiah's prophecies. I was reading Isaiah 52 before Christmas and noticed something, I wonder if you can notice it too?

Isaiah 52:7 [NIV] *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"*" So there's some good news on the way! But what is that good news?

Verse 52:8 [NIV] *"Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes."*

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ZION is God's word for HIS kingdom in the world. Geographically it's centred in Jerusalem. But Zion is more than a mountain or city. Zion is the pronoun of God's kingdom. The domain over which he is king. Where he is honoured and worshipped from the throne room to the streets, to the fields, to mountains to the ocean. Zion is the KINGDOM that belongs to God. And here we see that God is returning to his Kingdom. Where he will sit in power to govern his people. (Ref. Isaiah 9:6) THIS is the good news! The Lord YHWH is returning Zion, his kingdom!

I sat back in my chair while reading this and thought to myself. "Of course, you think this is good news, God... You're the king!" It's good to be king! But why is that good news for us?

Right there in the verse it says "The watchmen lift up their voice together they sing for joy (to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.) for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. — Going back to Acts 3, we know Israel awaits a SAVING king while suffering under Roman Rule. But will another king help? There's a good chunk of the bible devoted to revealing the blunders of men who ruled Israel and other empires.

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WHAT KIND OF KING IS GOD? So bids the question... What kind of king is God? He told us his return was good news. But Israel rejected him. — To answer that question and make more sense of Peter's cutting words, we're going way back to Genesis chapter 1. A simpler time. Before sin darkened our vision. How many days did God take to make creation? Six. What was the last thing he made before he kicked back to enjoy his work? He made us; people. His people. But kings do more than possess a people. Kings govern. We see God doing that in Genesis 1:26-31. (Paralleled in Genesis 2.)

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FOUR DOS & ONE DON'T. God made people, gave them 4 jobs + 1 rule... Job #1. Be like God. (mini-gods Psalm 82:6) Job #2. Make babies. — Raise families. Job #3. Eat food. Job #4. Take care of the world and everything grows. Rule #1. Don't eat from the TOKOGAE tree. Notice the stark difference between this king and other kings. Some kings are good, some kings are bad. The bad; force servitude, threaten livelihood. The good; trade servitude for livelihood. But serving this king IS life. The things he commands us to do, are the things that bring life and meaning to who we are. That is the job! That's the work! Self-worth. Family. Food. Prosperity.

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COST vs CAUSE. God's government, is not the cost of our satisfaction — it's the cause of our satisfaction!

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A GOOD KING. So what Kind of King is God? — A very good king. So why did this amazing kingdom that existed in the garden of Eden ever come to an end? Genesis 3 tells us. It starts with us (Adam and Eve) breaking the one rule. Most of us know the story: The serpent tempts Eve, the first woman, to eat the fruit of the TOKAGAE tree. Then Adam ignores God's rule and the first man eats from the TOKOGAE tree. — That's when Adam, said to himself. God might be smart, the king of everything. But I'm a smart guy too! And I'm the king of me. And humanity suddenly bowed to a new king. Ourselves.

To our grievous detriment, we sat down in a throne that did not belong to us. Each one of us writhing for control of our own kingdom. And sin perpetuates as we make the world around us bow to our demands. Struggling against the demands of people around us. — Genesis is a heartbreaking part of the bible. What kills me is that Adam & Eve were tempted to be like God. But that was already the #1 job God have people.

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HIGH TREASON. That's the word for "betraying the king." What we call sin today, is actually just another word for HIGH TREASON against the best King we could have ever hoped for. The only king we would have hoped for. Our desperately skewed sense of purpose. » HIGH TREASON. Broken families, torn apart by selfishness and apathy. » HIGH TREASON. The lies we tell ourselves and each other in an effort to put food on the table. » HIGH TREASON. The traumatising abuse of our world to fill our bottomless shopping bags. » HIGH TREASON.

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THE LORD RETURNS. Remember the good news: "The Lord returns to Zion" God Almighty. — The Holy and Righteous One. A very good king. Every sermon about Jesus Christ attempts to display the goodness of his kingship. If I had time, I'd love to share how JESUS redeems us to his kingdom with each one of those 4 jobs. (Purpose, babies, food, management.) For time's sake, I'll just do the simplest one. One that I know we all can appreciate. "Eat food."

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JOHN 6 » EAT FOOD. Turn to John 6. This is possibly my favourite chapter of the bible, in my favourite book of the bible. Before we read, I'll give you a bit of background. Jesus is a grown man. After 18 years as a small town carpenter, he kicks his divine ministry into gear at age 30. Baptisms, wonders, and a lot of teaching about the "Kingdom of God." Before long, people are flocking to the God-man by the thousands, following him across the countryside. Trying to get away from the crowd to have a small group meeting with the 12 disciples, he gets in a boat and crosses the fattest part of the Sea of Galilee. It's about 10 miles but the crowd actually chases him on foot. Why are the people following Jesus? Because he's doing miracles wherever he goes!

John 6:7-11 *"Philip replied, 'Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!' Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. 'There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?' 'Tell everyone to sit down,' Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterwards, he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted."*

As Jesus and the disciples see the crowd swelling on the horizon, they say “Great! How the heck are we gonna feed these people.” That’s when Jesus performs the famous miracle of the fishes and loaves. One kid’s lunch feeds over 5000 people. It’s a \$13,000 fish cookout! That’s a great miracle! Actually, all Jesus’ miracles were great. But this one’s kinda different. He’s not just making bad things good again. He’s making good things last. In minutes he has multiplied a meal worth about \$2.60 into a feast worth about \$13,000. That’s a 5000% return on investment. Can you imagine what this king can do for the economy? For the environment? For poverty?

It didn’t take long for the crowd to imagine what kind of king Jesus would be. It actually says that they were going to make him king by force! (If Israel instate a king by force in Ancient Rome, an epic genocide would be inevitable.) So Jesus actually breaks away and hides out on a mountain until night when he can sail to another town, called Capernaum, unnoticed. The next day, the crowd tracked him down again! Another 7-8 miles on foot to a synagog in Capernaum where he was teaching. This time Jesus talks directly to the crowd about what they’re doing.

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JOHN 6 » BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:25-29 (NLT) *“They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”*

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But don’t be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God, the Father has given me the seal of his approval.” They replied, “We want to perform God’s works, too. What should we do?” Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.””

The crowd was right to want Jesus as their king. But Jesus taught them, rather than seeking a king to satisfy their hunger for food, their hunger was given to them so that they would know the satisfaction of a good king. Rather struggling to make the king bow to their needs by obeying his command, Jesus says “You will be satisfied by my command: Believe in me!” — The whole reason we eat food is to find and know God, the Holy and Righteous King. This is why he’s called, the bread of life.

All four jobs God gave people in the kingdom garden: 1-Be like God. 2-Make babies. — Raise families. 3-Eat food. 4-Care for the world. They all had one simple goal: That you would look to God, the good king, the Holy and Righteous One and be satisfied in him.

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THE SAME PEOPLE. Now back to Solomon’s Porch in Acts 3. The same people that followed Jesus around. The same people that shout crucify him. Now the same people are seeing miracles in Jesus name And they want to know, is there still going to be a king? Holding no bars, Peter tells them: You killed the king. You say you want life. But choose death. You say you want a king. But choose Barabbas. You say you want to do the work of God. But you reject the new king and his kingdom.

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DISBELIEF. Now this is an opportunity for us to put ourselves in the shoes of the people standing on Solomon’s Porch. They’ve committed the worst sin imaginable in history. The people God chose to receive his saving king punctuate their rejection with a crucifixion. The highest treason imaginable. We’re not so different...

We’re all guilty of sneaking our butt onto the throne that belongs to God. Maybe it’s eating more than God designed your body to eat; spending beyond the funds God entrusted to you; taking what God didn’t give you; giving less than what God equipped you to give; forcing others to serve your commands; distorting the truth so it serves you. Deifying your own comforts, securities, or goals. Like Adam, and like the crowd, we say to ourselves “God, you might be smart. But I’m smart too. And I know what’s right for me this time, even if you think it’s wrong.”

So the crowd shouts “Give us Barabbas the murderer. Crucify Jesus.” When God returned to take back the throne. And likewise, we turn away from the Good King saying “I’d rather be king and die in my sin than serve the Holy and Righteous One. It sounds sick when you put it in context. That’s why Peter doesn’t hesitate to put things in perspective. No matter how harsh it might seem.

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ACTS 3 - CHRIST FULFILLED. Peter says to the crowd in verse 18 to 20.

Acts 3:18 *“But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah — that he must suffer these things.” — » “...Christ has fulfilled...”* Treason can not go unpunished. That is why Christ became human. He came into our mess so that he could take the blame for it.

Acts 3:19 *“Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.” — » “Repent... so that your sins may be wiped away...”* Repentance and full forgiveness; it’s not too late. Even for the murderers of the king.

— » “...Turn to God...” Repentance is a turning movement. From your disbelief. To God, the good king.

Acts 3:20 *“Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah.” — » “Times of refreshing:* They crowd was invited... The ones who committed the highest treason imaginable; they are invited to sit and be refreshed at his Kingdom table. Every offence avenged in the body of Christ. Every debt paid in full at the cost of the King himself. You are invited too... Yes you! All of 2016’s sins, all of 2017’s sins. Maybe you think it’s too late? It’s not!

What does this all have to do with New Years? — I really wanted to squeeze in a look at some of the New Year's Resolutions written by a guy named Jonathan Edwards. He had been a pretty nominal Christian until the gospel penny finally dropped, and he was compelled to write 70 new year's resolutions in response to his new king. They're not all equally inspiring (there's a lot.) And his hair really dates him. 1722. But in his resolutions, he said some really cool things. Like "Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure..."

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RESOLUTIONS - LUKE 9. But, I though, better than looking to an old guy with weird hair is to look at the words of Jesus himself.

Luke 9:23-24 *"Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, **you will save it.**"*

Be like God. Eat food. Raise families (physical and/or spiritual). Care for the world. These are the things we're all trying to do. And we can do them as the kings of ourselves, in your own kingdom, to our death. Or do them unto Christ the good king. The Holy & Righteous One. In his kingdom. To life, abundantly, everlasting.