

# The Kingdom of God Is Near to You

by Stewart Ruch

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*Stewart Ruch emphasizes the nearness of the Kingdom of God and the dual realities of peril and power in Christian ministry.*

**Duration:** 17:24

**Scripture:** Isaiah 61:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 9:37-38, Matthew 10:16, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:43, Luke 10:1-3

**Topics:** "Kingdom Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by describing a sense of pressure and fog that often clouds our minds. He emphasizes the importance of staying close to the Word of God in order to navigate through the perils of life. The speaker then shares a personal experience in Cambodia, where the presence of royalty in the palace changed how people thought and acted. Drawing from Luke 10, the speaker highlights Jesus' sending sermon and the nearness of the kingdom of God. The sermon concludes with a tri-focal message, addressing the city of light launch team, Trev and Bonnie, and the congregation, emphasizing the importance of living lives of nearness to the kingdom of God.

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## Transcript

Trevor's Spanish vocabulary, to my knowledge, extends basically to one word, guacamole. Which, if you happen to know Trevor, he has a particular obsession with it. But he has told me he's pledged to actually be fluent in all things Spanish by the opening service on October 18th.

And I do hope you have a priest who doesn't lie to you. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we're now here seeking the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can do nothing without Him. Nothing without Jesus and His resurrection power. Lord, the peril is out there.

There are wolves among the sheep. And we ask now, Lord, that You would come near to us as You have promised. Come near by the Word of God.

Come near by the Holy Spirit. Come near by Your Holy Church. Come near to Bonnie.

Come near to Trevor. Come near to City of Light. Come near to Rez.

We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

Several months ago, you all sent me, and actually the diocese sent me and Madeline and you all sent Pastor Matt Woodley on a mission trip to Cambodia where another man, Gregory, was ordained here as priest and then sent out a little bit farther than Aurora to Phnom Penh in Cambodia. And when we were there, we had an afternoon where we were able to actually go and visit the royal palace. Cambodia is a monarchy, a monarchy system.

It still has a living royalty member that is the head of state, although the prime minister runs the country. The palace is very hard to get into, but we happened to hit just the day at just the time when we could get in. It's an unbelievable and majestic structure, a kind of stunning Buddhist Far Eastern architecture.

We walked into the gates and immediately you are absolutely clear that you are somewhere utterly unlike our beloved Wheaton, Illinois. My daughter, because it was 105 degrees, was wearing a modest but sleeveless dress. And immediately, as we walked to the grounds of the palace, an official came up to her and said very politely, you cannot wear that in the palace.

You have to buy a t-shirt. So of course we did and she covered her arms because it's understood that this is a place where the king resides. He doesn't even reside there any longer, but this is a place that captures and symbolizes the kingdom of Cambodia.

And when the king and the palace and the royalty realities are near, it changes how you think, it changes how you act, it changes even what it is that you might wear in this case out of honor, out of a sense that there is a nearness to the kingdom and the king in Cambodia. And this morning when the kingdom of God is described for us, when Jesus begins to launch and vision for the first time ever the idea of a kingdom of God, not a kingdom of this earth, not a kingdom of this world, but a kingdom of God, He describes it as that which has come near to us. I'm preaching trifocal this morning.

I'm preaching to Trev and Bonnie, I'm preaching to the City of Light launch team here, and I'm preaching to all of you gathered this morning. We're going one, two, three. So I'm saying it to them, I'm saying it to you guys, and I'm saying it to all of us.

That to be a Christian is to be a man or a woman of nearness. To be one who lives near to the kingdom of God is to come near to you. Near to the Word of God.

Near to the Holy Spirit. Near to the heart of Jesus Christ. You want to understand the kingdom of God? Don't think about it remotely.

Don't think about it in a detached way. I understand that it has come near, right up against us, in the person and the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, which is now being ministered and given to the world through the church. The flesh and blood, the body of Christ.

The church, Holy Communion, right now, right here. So to be a Christian is to be a man or a woman of nearness. And to be a priest is to be called to be a man of nearness.

You're pushing up near to the kingdom of God, Trevor, as the kingdom of God pushes up near to you. You're putting it in the hands of the people of God who are called to do the work of God. All they need in the Holy Spirit.

All they need from the Bible. All they need in understanding our culture today. The culture of Aurora and bringing the gospel into that culture.

So you're coming near to Aurora, amen? We're coming near to Wheaton, amen? The kingdom of God is now near to you, so we press up nearer. The kingdom of God is pressed up nearer to us, and we live lives of nearness. Now, Jesus is giving a sending sermon.

It's a remarkable piece of preaching here in Luke 10. Go there in your bulletin with me if you would. It's a sending sermon.

He's sending out 72. We literally almost have that number approximately of men, women, youth, and children on the Aurora launch team. It's kind of wonderful that way.

And it's actually fascinating in church planting how that tends to be a key number to help get things moving and inaugurate new works depending on the model that you're using. And Jesus in his teaching on mission, his teaching on the kingdom of God, talks about nearness in two ways. When you come near to the kingdom of God, you actually come near to peril.

When you come near to the kingdom of God, you come near to peril. There are wolves, and they desire to devour the sheep. And you come near to power.

The power to heal. The power to heal. The power to take that which has been rent asunder, that which has been torn, that which has been broken, that which has been obliterated seemingly, and trust in the God who takes nothing and makes it something.

Who takes that which has been fractured and divided and irreconciled and heals it. You're near to peril. You're near to healing.

Jesus says very clearly, right in the beginning of his sermon, go your way. Behold. Behold this.

Listen closely to me right now. Hear me, 72. I'm sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

When the Civil War began, the citizens of Washington, D.C. actually found it a bit of a curiosity. It wasn't known what kind of a long, horrific war was ahead of them. And they would actually, because they were close to the fronts there in Virginia, would actually pack up picnic lunches on Sunday afternoons to go out and watch the battle from afar.

This was a pleasant undertaking until someone in that picnic discovered that their brother had been killed on that field that day. Or until one time when the Confederates broke the Union ranks and began to rush toward the very hill that they were all parasol and picnic basketing. And they fled in terror, realizing that they were far closer to peril than they ever imagined.

Man, I feel like so many of us are that way. With the peril that's there, the spiritual warfare that exists, that's going on. We might have heard about it.

We might even have some interest or curiosity in it. But we're setting up picnics. And there is this high-stake, life-and-death battle going on that Jesus talks about as the fact that there is a wolf.

He's also described as the enemy. He's described as the devil. He's described as Satan.

And he drives the steel to kill and destroy. He is on battle. He is on point.

And he has a very specific purpose. He wants to take people who are far from God and push them farther from God. He wants to take marriages that are struggling and divide them and break them up.

He wants to take communities that are apportioned by ethnic difference and language and divide them further. He wants to take artists and confuse them so their art can't be used. He wants to take businessmen and businesswomen and make them think that their work doesn't matter at all for the kingdom of God and put them over in a corner.

He wants to confuse scientists. He wants to confuse people who are about doing the arts and the crafts and all kinds of critical work. There's an absolute battle.

We're pressed up right near the front. We're pressed up against the walls. So it's important that you understand the calling of nearness.

To understand there's a nearness to peril. Can I say two things at one time? It's really joyful to do this work, isn't it? And it's a joy that we have as Christians on mission. If you're not there, you can't even imagine it.

But can I also say this at the exact same time? This work is really hard. This battle is really hard. And I deal with more disappointment in my ministry than I do victory.

I see folks that are coming so close to the kingdom of God and then something lures them away and they walk away. I operate half the time in some kind of a fog in my own head. A sense of kind of obscure pressure that never seems to go away.

We're near to peril. Because we're about freeing captives. Healing the broken.

Leading the blind to sight. And it matters so much. And the kingdom of God has come so near that there's one who seeks to thwart that.

That's how Jesus starts out His sending message. Trevor and Bonnie, you'll be fine in the peril if you stay close to the Word of God. What else can I give you but this? This is your way through.

This is your lamp to your path when the fog rolls in and it's dark and it feels like dawn's never going to break. Go here again and again and again and again. The Word will not disappoint you.

And then go to your laborers. Go to your co-workers. Stay close to the Word and stay close to the laborers.

Stay close to the people of God who are doing the work with you. Jesus says, before He says that there are wolves among the lambs, He says, but laborers are being raised up. As a pastor, we find our strength among our brothers and sisters that we're working with.

So stay deeply connected and stay connected to Him. You're never going to know how much He needs you. He's not going to be able to find a way to say it and He'll forget to say it.

And we're embarrassed to say how much we need help. It just happens. Stay close to Him.

Stay close to Bonnie. Your support, your prayers, your email of encouragement, the Scripture came to you and you send it on. Bond together so you can bond with the work in Aurora and serve those who are

harassed and helpless.

But near to peril is not the last word Jesus gives. Amen? He gives the word that we're near to the power of God. When Jesus says healing, He's saying power.

When Jesus' ministry is described, He's described as preaching, He's described as teaching, He's described as healing. Healing is not some niche concern of Christians. Healing is the work of the Kingdom of God come near.

The salvation of a soul is a healing. The enlightenment of a new way of understanding God is a healing. The healing of a broken bone miraculously is a healing.

The freedom from a pattern of thought that is obsessive or compulsive or stuck in a temptation of sin constantly, the freedom that happens there is a healing. The release of an unclean spirit from a heart or a mind is a healing. The work of healing is the Kingdom of God come near.

You are empowered with that. May you be laying hands on people throughout City of Light and way beyond in Aurora and beyond, trusting in the healing power of God. May you be ready in season and out of season to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

Do not be surprised in these next intensive months as you all launch that there'll be peril, but there'll be more power. Be ready. Be ready.

Moments that you thought were simply a mundane moment may become a moment where you're called to pray for somebody for the healing of their heart, mind, or body. Try focusing. Rest.

Be ready. I once had a tour of Washington, D.C. It's a Washington, D.C. sermon. And we actually ended up through kind of these hallways somewhat accidentally in the office of the whip of the majority at that time.

That's the third-ranking leader of Congress. And we walked into these offices and the ceilings were 24 feet high. There were columns in the office itself.

The whip happened to be there and he was actually at that point leaning against his desk like this. And there were three people on one side and two people on the other just waiting for whatever needed to happen. We walked in and he was very warm.

He greeted us. And everything about that setup in that moment said power. But it said remote power.

It said distance power. It said I have a power that you do not have. That's not the power of the kingdom of God.

It's the power that you give away. I began to realize that Trevor and Bonnie were suited for the ministry of the gospel in a very specific circumstance that occurred in our work life together several years ago. I want you to know the kind of priest and priest's wife, worship pastor that's being set apart.

We were in a budget planning time at Rez and Trevor was working part-time at that point and we had every hope to bring him on full-time. We wanted to get his gifts and his exercise and his talents and full-time work. And we felt that was really an important next step.

They were putting things together with one child and income challenges. And we just hoped to put this all together. And the last moment, the kind of last iteration of the budget, it was just an impossibility.

We just couldn't put the numbers together. We couldn't get the health insurance as part of a full-time benefit. We couldn't get the salary.

We just couldn't do it. And I was heartbroken for myself because I wanted Trevor full-time on the team. I was heartbroken for them.

It's a really hard conversation. I had to sit down with Trevor and say we thought we could put it together, Trevor. I'm sorry.

We can't. We can't make this happen. I said, if you need to leave, I totally understand.

You need to provide for your family. You need health insurance. I totally get it.

It must take 24 hours to come back and just tell me what you and Bonnie are comfortable with. And Trevor came back 24 hours later and he said, it doesn't matter to us. It doesn't matter to us.

We know we're called the minister of the kingdom of God. We know we're called the minister of the kingdom of God no matter what risk we're taking. We're able to secure some level of health insurance.

We'll take that risk. We'll take the risk of the fact that we're working part-time. We're trying to raise a family.

So we just want to do the ministry of Jesus. See, that kind of behavior, that kingdom of God come near behavior. That's when you understand that there is a peril and there is a battle, but there is a greater power.

So I charge you, Trevor and Bonnie, minister the power of Jesus' resurrection. We're sending you from the resurrection to take the resurrection of Jesus Christ into your new family, into your new community in Aurora. Praise the Lord.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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