

The Kingdom of God (revised)

Background

- Before 2005, I'd never heard anyone preach specifically on it.
- The coming of the kingdom of God was the most frequent topic in the teaching of Jesus.
- Matthew 6 vv 31-33 says "Therefore do not be anxious, saying 'what shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' Or 'With what shall we be clothed?' For the nations seek after all these things. For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Peter has suggested how we can seek the Kingdom of God above all other things but what exactly is it?

A place?

The *Kingdom of God* and the *Kingdom of Heaven* seem to be used interchangeably by Jesus to mean the same thing or a variation on the same idea. So is the *Kingdom of God* simply "heaven" i.e. the place where our spirit will live eternally when we die?

In Matthew 19 vv 16-24 we read, "Then a man came to Jesus and said, 'Teacher, what good deed should I do to gain eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you want to enter into life, obey the commandments.' 'Which commandments?' the man asked. Jesus said 'Never murder. Never commit adultery. Never steal. Never give false testimony. Honour your father and mother. Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' The young man replied, 'I have obeyed all these commandments. What else do I need to do?' Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, sell what you own. Give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then follow me!' When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he owned a lot of property. Jesus said to his disciples, 'I can guarantee this truth: it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. I can guarantee again that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.'

Here, Jesus stresses that storing up riches in heaven is more important than having material wealth on earth. He tells the disciples how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Then he says it again but this time calls it the *Kingdom of God*. It sounds like Jesus is talking about a place.

In Mark 9 vv 43-47, Jesus says, "So if your hand causes you to lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life disabled than to have two hands and go to hell, to the fire that cannot be put out. If your foot causes you to lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. If your eye causes you to lose your faith, tear it out! It is better for you to enter the *kingdom of God* with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell." This implies that the *Kingdom of God* is the alternative to hell i.e. eternal life in heaven.

We know as Christians that we won't reach eternal life in heaven if we have not accepted Jesus as our Saviour. In John 3 vv 1-5 we are told, "Now there was among the Pharisees a man named Nicodemus, who was one of the rulers of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we are certain that you have come from God as a teacher, because no man would be able to do these signs which you do if God was not with him.' Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, without a new birth no man is able to see the *kingdom of God*.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How is it possible for a man to be given birth when he is old? Is he able to go into his mother's body a second time and come to birth again?' Jesus said in answer, 'Truly, I say to you, if a man's birth is not from water and from the Spirit, it is not possible for him to go into the *kingdom of God*.'" So we must be born again and baptised to recognise and enter the *Kingdom of God*.

But is it more than this? Is the Kingdom of God a selective part of heaven that rich men would not reach because of their concern with material wealth; or that people who know who Jesus is but are not born again will not be allowed to join?

A reward?

Galatians 5 vv 19-21 tells us which sort of people will not inherit the *Kingdom of God*: “Now the works of the flesh are clear, which are these: evil desire, unclean things, wrong use of senses, worship of images, use of strange powers, hates, fighting, desire for what another has, angry feelings, attempts to get the better of others, divisions, false teachings, envy, uncontrolled drinking and feasting, and such things of which I give you word clearly, even as I did in the past, that they who do such things will have no part in the *kingdom of God*.” And in Matthew 21 verse 43, Jesus warns those who aren’t doing God’s work: “For this reason I say to you, The *kingdom of God* will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation producing the fruits of it.”

So now it seems that the Kingdom of God is something given as a reward that can as easily be taken away.

The Thessalonians are told, “Your suffering proves that God’s judgement is right and that you are considered worthy of his kingdom.” (2 Thessalonians 1 v 5)

In Luke 13 vv 23-29, the *Kingdom of God* is described as a feast with a limited number of people invited. “And one said to Him, ‘Lord, are the ones being saved few?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter in at the narrow gate. For I say to you, many will seek to enter in and shall not be able. And once the Master of the house has risen up and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, and He shall answer you and say to you, I do not know you; from where are you; then you shall begin to say, We ate and drank in Your presence, and You have taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I do not know you; from where you are. Depart from Me, all workers of unrighteousness! There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the *kingdom of God*, and yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south, and will recline in the *kingdom of God*.” Again this implies that there will be a special event that not everyone will attend.

But when will this event happen? How long will it last? Is it eternal and that’s why it is so important to be part of it? Is God really this exclusive? Well we know to an extent, He is because he chose who would be Christians before the world was created and if he weren’t exclusive, there’d be no reason to have sent Jesus so that only those who come into relationship with Him would be saved. Let’s remind ourselves what happens if you don’t have that relationship: “If people are ashamed of me (Jesus) and what I say, the Son of man will be ashamed of those people when he comes in the glory that he shares with the Father and the holy angels. I (Jesus) can guarantee this truth: some people who are standing here will not die until they see the *kingdom of God*.” (Luke 9 vv 26-27)

This sounds like Jesus is telling us that the *Kingdom of God* is a period of time that will happen once He returns to judge the world. Is it therefore a forerunner to heaven that shows what heaven would be like if you were to go there?

An era?

We are told in Mark and Luke’s gospels that Joseph of Arimathea – the man who put Jesus’ body in his family tomb – was waiting for the *kingdom of God*, as if it were a period of time that would happen whilst he was alive.

In Luke 10 vv 8 –12, Jesus warns: “Whenever you go into a city and the people welcome you, eat whatever they serve you. Heal the sick that are there, and tell the people, ‘*The kingdom of God is near you!*’ But whenever you go into a city and people don’t welcome you, leave. Announce in its streets, ‘we are wiping your city’s dust from our feet in protest against you! But realise that the *kingdom of God is near you!*’ I can guarantee that judgement day will be easier for Sodom than for that city.” This seems to mean that everyone will know that the *kingdom of God* has arrived but only the ones that act in accordance with God will get a good deal out of it.

In Luke 19 vv 12-27, Jesus tells the people a parable because they thought the *Kingdom of God* was going to appear suddenly (v 11). His illustration was of a prince who went away for a time to be appointed king, and left ten of his servants with money to invest until he returned. They all used the money in different ways. When the king came back, he rewarded the servants according to what they had done with his money. The ones who had made the money grow were rewarded further but the one who had held on to the money and not used it wisely was punished, along with all those who hated the king. Jesus is explaining that although the *Kingdom of God* is coming, he has given the people all they need to be ready for it. They just need to use their time and resources wisely in order to be part of it.

What else does Jesus say the kingdom of God is like?

Luke 13 vv 18-21: “Jesus asked, ‘what is the *kingdom of God* like? What can I compare it to? It’s like a mustard seed that someone planted in a garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds nested in its branches.’ He asked again, ‘what can I compare the *kingdom of God* to? It’s like yeast that a woman mixed into a large amount of flour until the yeast worked its way through all the dough.’” Both these illustrations show that something very small can become very large when used in the right way.

A lifestyle

Luke 17 vv 20-21 – “And when the Pharisees put questions to him about when the *kingdom of God* would come, he gave them an answer and said, ‘The *kingdom of God* will not come through observation and men will not say, see it is here! Or there! For the *kingdom of God* is among you.’”

A kingdom must be ruled by a king. Although Jesus has won the victory, Satan is still the ruler of this world until Jesus returns, but we can choose to be in God’s kingdom by following Jesus, rather than Satan’s. In John 17 vv 14-16, Jesus prays for God’s protection on Christians as He knows he will be crucified: “I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray for You to take them out of the world, but for You to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” He did not call us to be *of* the world but He called us to be His representatives *in* it. The Kingdom of God that Jesus speaks of is a way of life. The time is now. The choice of which kingdom you want to be in starts in this life and carries on throughout eternity. Although you will still go to heaven if you make a commitment to God on the day you die, like the thief on the cross next to Jesus did, that is when you will experience what it’s like to be in the Kingdom of God. By making that decision as soon as possible, we can experience a piece of heaven on earth.

When we recite “The Lord’s prayer” and say “your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”, we are asking God to work in our lives and show us that little piece of heaven on earth.

If we accept what God has told us through the Bible, a seed is planted in us; we become born again. We are baptised and receive the Holy Spirit, who waters the seed, causing it to grow. All the time we are living in God’s will, our seed is growing. In time, it will bear fruit (Galatians 5 vv 22-23).

When Jesus was on the cross, He took upon Himself the sins of the world and the *kingdom of God* was forced out of Him. After Jesus went down into hell and conquered death, he returned to the disciples, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Before this there was no way for their seeds to grow properly, which is why we are told they were waiting for the *Kingdom of God* to come. Without Him, the disciples couldn't understand the parables that Jesus told. This is implied in Mark 4 vv 10-12, where Jesus tells them that they have been given the secret of the *kingdom of God* but they don't yet understand.

Romans 14:17 – “For the *kingdom of God* is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

The Kingdom of God does not satisfy our physical needs by feeding us or giving us water, but being part of it will satisfy our spiritual needs. Interestingly, Jesus calls himself the bread of life (John 6:35) and says that he who believes in Him will never be thirsty. So Jesus has already covered the need for food and drink!

Righteousness: "the state of him who is such as he ought to be" (Thayer – US biblical scholar). The Christian idea of righteousness contains both a permanent and a changing element. The fixed element is the will to do right; the changing factor is the conception of what may be right at different times and under different circumstances. This can be achieved through complete obedience to God; a good measure of this being the Ten Commandments. The teachings and truths in the Bible direct us to the unchanging elements of righteousness. By being in communication with God, through prayer, we will know how to apply these truths to the situations that we face. We should be continually checking our thoughts and actions with the Holy Spirit within us to make sure they measure up!

Peace: the sense of silence and the opposite to conflict.

If we love our enemies (and everyone for that matter), our attitude and our actions will be that of peace, not war. This includes forgiveness and repentance, mercy: refusing to judge and making sure our words bless others, not bring them down. We should also be courageous and stand up for justice in situations we are made aware of such as human trafficking, persecution for being a Christian and cases of abuse. Galatians 5 vv 16-18 recognises that our human nature is to almost do the opposite of these things but by the power of the Spirit we can live a preferable life.

Joy: not the same as happiness but a response that causes us to rejoice.

Circumstances will make us happy or unhappy. Christian joy is not based on our circumstances but is the result of the triumph of faith over adversity, which, instead of hindering, actually enhances it.

Conclusion

So although at the moment, the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom where Jesus is the King, there will come a time where it is a physical kingdom and Satan is not the ruler of the world any more but God is. As we do not know when that time will be, it is far better to choose to be part of God's kingdom *now*, or will we not get to be a part of it *then*. God is challenging our priorities and we have to make right decisions.

The kingdom of God is not about materialistic things, but about our relationship with God, others and ourselves.

From the Word for Today:

What does it mean to put God's kingdom first in your life? It means 12 things. Read them carefully then ask, 'How do I measure up?' a) obedience to God. "...anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:19 NLT) b) love. "...love your enemies! ...If you love only those who love you, what good is that?" (Matthew 5:44,46 NLT) c) justice. "God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for justice..." (Matthew 5:6 NLT) d) peace. "God blesses those who work for peace..." (Matthew 5:9 NLT) e) holy living. "...let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:16 NLT) f) integrity. "Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will' or 'No, I won't'..." (Matthew 5:37 NLT) g) generosity. "When you give a gift to someone in need...Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you" (Matthew 6:2,4 NLT) h) spiritual wholeness. "...Is anything worth more than your soul?" (Matthew 16:26 NLT) i) biblical knowledge. "Your problem is that you don't know the Scriptures..." (Matthew 22:29 NLT) j) Faith in God. "...if you had faith as small as a mustard seed...Nothing would be impossible." "...But with God everything is possible" (Matthew 17:20; Matthew 19:26 NLT) k) blessing people. Jesus not only taught this, but His constant healing of, training, and serving others demonstrated how to do it l) disciple-making. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations..." (Matthew 28:19 NLT). According to Jesus that's the only agenda worth living for - and if necessary, dying for!

As you read the following nine qualities, ask yourself, 'Are these things evident in my life today? Am I developing these fruits so that I may be entrusted with greater responsibility for the advancement of God's kingdom?' a) merciful and grace-giving. "God blesses those who are merciful..." "Stop judging others, and you will not be judged" (Matthew 5:7; Matthew 7:1 NLT) b) reconciliatory. "If...a friend has something against you...go and apologise and be reconciled to him..." (Matthew 5:23-24 TLB) c) teachable. "Anyone who listens to My teaching and obeys Me is wise..." (Matthew 7:24 NLT) d) courageous. "Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves...don't be afraid..." (Matthew 10:16&26 NLT) e) submitted. "Anyone who does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother!" (Matthew 12:50 NLT) f) surrendered. "If any of you wants to be My follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24 NLT) g) repentant. "...unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3 NLT) h) humble. "But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12 NLT) i) servant-minded. "But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26 NLT). If you're willing to make Jesus Lord of your life, make His Word the last word on all issues, and seek the fullness of His Spirit - you can live this lifestyle too!

Mark 10 vv 13-15: "Some people brought little children to Jesus to have him hold them. But the disciples told the people not to do that. When Jesus saw this, he became irritated. He told them, 'Don't stop the children from coming to me. Children like these are part of the *kingdom of God*. I can guarantee this truth: whoever doesn't receive the *kingdom of God* as a little child receives it, will never enter it.'"