

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

REGAINING THE
VISION

KEITH WARRINGTON

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REGAINING THE VISION

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FOREWORD

I came to this theme of the kingdom of God in 1975. We had been living in our Youth with a Mission (YWAM) centre in the Hurlach Castle in southern Germany for three years. There were about 60 people on the staff from a number of nations who were great people, all following a call of God to Christian mission. We had good leaders. First, Don and Deyon Stephens, who had led the 1972 Olympic Games Outreach and together with Loren Cunningham had led us in purchasing the Schloss Hurlach buildings. The Stephens then led this new centre for two years and got us well developed in our programs, with Schools of Evangelism and a growing range of evangelistic and teaching teams in Germany and in other nations. They then passed on the leadership to David and Carol Boyd who continued the growth and through their wisdom and strong relational gifts led us on into becoming a diverse community with a strong relational component. We were enjoying times of the presence of the Holy Spirit among us in our daily work and in our worship and community meetings and we were seeing success in our schools and outreach teams.

At the same time, however, a sequence of difficulties kept repeating itself among us. We had the „ministry“ people who were leading the schools and outreaches and communications and then the „support“ staff who were running the administration offices, kitchen, house maintenance, auto shop, printing shop, hospitality etc. Between these two groups misunderstandings and tensions kept repeating themselves. The reasons for this were partially because we needed to learn to communicate well with each other. But it became apparent that the needs lay deeper. We had developed a kind of two-class society in which the „ministry“ people were doing what YWAM Hurlach was there for, and the others were in the second row, supporting.

This led to sensitivities which in turn led to hurts and offences, often not even recognised.

Without knowing it, we had run into dualism: the classical split between spiritual and secular, between spiritual and practical. We also were facing issues of young families raising young children with differing styles but in the one community. There were many singles and some older families and we were learning not only worship, intercession, training and evangelism - but how to live together. Through our schools we had been trained to “know God and make Him known” (the YWAM motto), but we had not been trained in the wider issues of life. Of course we knew it was important to live honestly and openly with each other - to go to each other, talk the issues through and ask forgiveness. Sometimes in our worship times there would be moves of the Holy Spirit where spontaneously we would share our appreciation for each other and also bring up issues causing tension and deal with them. But weeks later the cycle would show itself again. We began to realise that it didn’t primarily lie in the attitudes of the staff but in our system. Something was wrong in our thinking.

Then my wife, Marion, and I made our first visit back to our native New Zealand in 1975. I had time and distance and went before God with this problem that had come up in Germany. This dualism I had learned myself as a new believer in New Zealand and it had affected my life, including the areas of sports and university studies. Our evangelical and charismatic and pentecostal churches were taught to see the world this way and I had seen some of the limitations this thinking brought with it, both in New Zealand and Germany, despite the commitment of so many genuine people. But now I had run into the effects of it in an existential way, in my own community. I began to wonder... *to what are we wanting to call the people in Germany?* Of course we were leading them to give their lives to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and some of them were experiencing a real change by the Holy Spirit. But how were they going to live after that? Were we leading them into the same limitations which were now becoming so difficult for us?

I asked God: *“Lord what were you wanting to establish on the earth in this phase of history. What is the goal?”* Up to this point of time I had an automatic answer: Salvation! Jesus had come to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and open the way back to the Father. We were to love God, live honest and holy lives as His disciples, love people and bring them to Jesus Christ for their personal salvation. We were to do this primarily through our

local church. We were also to care for the poor and needy in this world. So we were living according to this calling and now we had run into its limits.

So I decided to go back to the life and ministry of Jesus. I planned to read in an open search for the answer to my question, this time without having my automatic answer. I started with the Gospel of Matthew and very soon came across the theme of the kingdom of heaven. John the Baptist preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and then Jesus took this theme and preached and taught it in almost every village and town in the Israel of his time. He did this for all his public life. It is handled in nearly every chapter and the well known parables all illustrate this one theme. That was totally new for me! Of course I knew the phrase “the kingdom of God”, but that was for me a general statement referring to “God and the universe and heaven” and sometimes it meant “church and missions”. But Jesus had this as the central message that He strategically brought to all the people. Why hadn’t I known that?

I read further and discovered that Mark and Luke give reports of Jesus with this same central theme. They record it not as the kingdom of heaven, but as the kingdom of God. John doesn’t make this his central theme but the Book of Acts does. When I made this discovery I had been a Christian for 13 years and not once had I heard a message about this subject. If it was so central to Jesus and to the apostles and the early church, how come we knew nothing about it? I was dumbfounded at this great gap in our knowledge.

So I studied and reflected and prayed my way through the rest of the New Testament and then back to Genesis and through the Old Testament to try to understand what this kingdom of God is and what it has to do with us today. What I discovered changed my life. It opened a new paradigm. It gave a broad and holistic understanding of God’s goals for our life and mission on earth now. It retains evangelism and salvation and holy living, of course, but sets them in a broader framework for all of life. God is working to overcome evil and suffering and injustice and to restore heaven and earth. **Salvation is not the goal but the beginning of all of this.** And all areas of life are directly important to God; there is nothing that is secular. Thus there is no “split” in life.

We brought this discovery back home to our community in Hurlach and they were glad to find out what this could mean for us. As I taught it, our dualism vanished and we realised that all areas of our daily lives are directly

meaningful to God and spiritual. We realised that we could become a community of God's kingdom right there and discover a common life that we could then give to our nation and other nations through our YWAM calling.

Other factors came together at that time and our community became a centre of life locally and then further abroad in Germany, west and east, and parts of Switzerland and Austria. Many of us were then travelling in teams to teach and minister in the places where we were invited. Out of our intercession God gave prophetic vision and understanding of how He wanted to build, bless and bring new life to these nations.

Locally about one hundred people were coming on Saturday evenings to our special Love Feasts (Agape meals) and the worship services which followed. Many guests were coming to visit us through the week. Our seminars and schools were full and we were trying to direct all our teams to work with partners, groups and churches who were open for and on the same discovery of the life of the Holy Spirit as we were. Our evangelism became natural and fruitful. The discovery of this theme of the Kingdom of God was one of the factors that led to this special time of blessing and fruitfulness.

In the almost 50 years since this beginning I have had much time and opportunity to think and discover further the growth of the kingdom of God in our time and the practical consequences for us today. Together with others we have been following the Holy Spirit in working for the healing and the rebuilding of the German nation and we want to see it increasingly bless other nations. To see this happen, we are trying to help the Body of Christ in Germany to become God's priesthood in the nation. At about the turn of the century I understood that the ministry of the apostle was due to be rediscovered next and that an understanding of the kingdom of God needed to be spread through the church as a part of this next development.

Accordingly I have been teaching much on this subject and in 2011 I published this book in German. It has been widely sold and has contributed to making this theme known. I have had many requests to bring it out in the original English. I have been slow to respond as I thought there is enough literature about the kingdom of God in the English language. There is indeed, but I have so far found no book that develops the theme and shows the practical consequences in the way that I have done. I have decid-

ed therefore to publish it in English with the hope that it will make a good contribution.

The book is written in two parts. Part 1 is titled “The Kingdom of God: a biblical perspective.” I lead in an inductive and mostly chronological discovery of this theme through the Old and New Testaments. Of course Jesus as Messiah and founder of the kingdom of God on the earth is central. A picture emerges giving an understanding of biblical values and guidelines of how the kingdom of God can grow throughout the nations, in our time and on into the future.

Part 2 is titled “The Kingdom of God - consequences for us today.” On the basis of the biblical guidelines from Part 1, I have listed 8 pertinent consequences, together with an analysis of how we in the evangelical, pentecostal and charismatic churches are working and building today. Some important changes are called for with practical guidelines for implementation.

I wish all readers a renewed vision together with much encouragement and inspiration.

God bless you.

Keith Warrington
Berlin, Germany
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THE KINGDOM OF GOD: THE BASICS

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS THE RULE OF GOD AS KING.

WHEN JESUS PROCLAIMED TO THE PEOPLE, “THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME TO YOU,” HE WAS SAYING, “GOD’S GOVERNMENT, GOD’S RULE, GOD’S REIGN, HAS COME TO YOU.” THIS WAS NOT A METAPHOR OR AN ALLEGORICAL WAY OF SAYING “THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS NEAR,” OR “HE WANTS TO SAVE YOU.” IT WAS A STATEMENT OF FACT.

GOD’S GOVERNMENT WAS NOW COMING DOWN TO THE PEOPLE IN A NEW WAY AND BREAKING INTO WHERE THEY WERE LIVING. THE PURPOSE OF THE KINGDOM COMING DOWN AMONG THE PEOPLE WAS TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT OF THEIR LIVES. THAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ANY INCOMING GOVERNMENT.

DEFINITION

The kingdom of God was Jesus’ message and mission. Before we go any further, we need to be clear about what this term, ‘kingdom of God’ means. The New Testament Greek is “*basileia tou theou*”. **Basileia means firstly, kingdom: a territory, state, people or community ruled over by a king or queen.** (Collins Dictionary). It can also mean **royal power, kingship or reign – i.e. the right and authority to rule over a kingdom.** So it carries

both the meaning of the realm, i.e. the territory over which the reign is exercised, and the reign, i.e. the right and ability to rule.

FORM OF RULE

On a human level, we are familiar with various forms of rule or government: parliamentary democracy, dictatorship, military rule, tribal rule, monarchy, theocracy or empire. In a monarchy, a kingdom, all the powers - legislative, executive and judicial - are invested in one person, the king. The laws are not decided in a parliament by a majority, but they are decreed by the king as he sees fit. He runs the administration including the police and the military. He is also the final court of appeal. In addition he is the titular representative head of his people. He has the job of giving them a collective identity, confidence, culture and hope. This is a full-time job for any human!

In the kingdom of God, the king is God Himself. The phrase: 'the kingdom of God,' means, 'the reign of God,' 'the government of God,' or 'the kingly rule of God.' This rule takes the form of a monarchy.

When Jesus proclaimed to the people, *The kingdom of God has come to you, He was saying, God's government, God's rule, God's reign, has come to you.* This was not a metaphor or an allegorical way of saying "The presence of God is near," or "He wants to save you." It was a statement of fact. **God's government was now coming down to them in a new way and was breaking into where they were living. The purpose of the kingdom coming down among the people was to take over the government of their lives! That is the purpose of any incoming government.**

We know how human governments expand their rule over the lives of people in other lands. They do it by war, by direct conquest, colonialism, an ideological subversion or perhaps by bringing them into economic dependence. They will then bring them under their direct political rule or set up puppet governments.

HOW THEN DOES GOD GO ABOUT ESTABLISHING HIS RULE AMONG US?

He has the right and the authority to rule over us. This was established in Chapter Two. He is also the only one who has the ability to rule over us. He is all-knowing (omniscient), omnipresent, eternal, omnipotent. What about His character? God has the power and the right ... but, is He also good?

God's character can be seen in His values and in the way He goes about bringing His kingdom rule among us. He is not using war. He could if He wanted to and would certainly win. He could set up control systems to keep us in place. But He does not operate this way. He could use manipulation and subversion, yet He rejects that. He also refuses to bring us into the wrong kind of dependence. How then does His rule, His government come among us?

He comes with truth and grace. He comes with love, humility, strength and justice. He appeals to our minds, hearts and consciences with His truth. He calls us all to turn to love and follow Him. Each person or group must choose. The freedom of the individual is the most important. This is a rule of fatherhood and God aims to lead His people by relationship, by friendship and not firstly by regulations nor by religious ritual. He wants to lead those who love Him into wisdom, friendship, authority and greatness. We have many examples in the Old Testament of how individuals and groups discovered this. It is not a military, political or ideological system. It certainly has values, laws and governmental structures. But it is firstly a relational system based on truth, trust and love. **Every person is called to give up their own system, surrender to this God of love and learn to live under Him and by His ways.**

The freedom to obey also implies the freedom to refuse God's rule. This is indeed the case. God continues to love and care for all people, those who love Him and those who work against Him. As life goes on, each will live out their choices and begin to experience their own consequences. This will become final at the last judgement. But until then, God is committed to upholding this freedom among us all - with the resulting tensions between the righteous and unrighteous.

Jesus was the emissary of this government and His job was to found it on the earth. He began among the Jews in Israel as it was in His time. He was born into these people, into a good family but without riches or privilege. He came in under Roman rule with its political and cultural systems. He grew up getting to know His Father God, learning to interpret God's values and ways in the settings of His time. When He was baptised by John and at the same time baptised in the Holy Spirit, He was inducted into His public, messianic calling. His first act was a spiritual confrontation with Satan lasting forty days. Here He determined how, for whom and by which values He was to establish this kingdom. He then came out among the people proclaiming

the arrival of this kingdom. He healed the sick, drove out the demons and taught what God and His kingdom are all about.

When Jesus came to bring the kingdom, the Jews had already had over 1,500 years of living, in varying degrees, under God's rule so they had much prophetic revelation about His person and character. They had a good basis on which to build an understanding of God's goodness. Jesus spent much time on this issue. He portrayed God as the loving Father, the just and good king, the good shepherd and more. It was expressly on this foundation of truth, i.e. the necessity and rightness of God's rule and also on the basis of His character, that Jesus then called the people to turn to the Father and begin a life of obedience under His rule.

THE TERRITORY, THE REALM, THE REIGN

Every form of human government encompasses a given land area. This is its territory or country and is defined by its borders. If we want to visit one of today's kingdoms, e.g: the United Kingdom, Denmark, Spain, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Thailand or Tonga, we know where to go. They are on the map.

Where is the territory of the kingdom of God? Where are the borders? At this point, the comparison with human kingdoms breaks down and we begin to grope around. Is there territory over which God reigns? Presumably, despite the rebellion that took place there and still continues in some parts, heaven is such a place. That is where His throne is situated and the inhabitants of heaven obey God there as King. What about the earth? Is there a country or a territory of the kingdom of God on earth? We assume that in all countries some of the people try to live under God's reign, but there is no country where the nation as a whole is living under God. If we break it down further to look at towns, farms, businesses, churches and homes, can we locate the kingdom there? We will probably be getting closer but the difficulty lies in trying to apprehend the kingdom of God through geographical thinking.

This kingdom is founded, not on land, but in people! It is dynamic, not static.

It comes into operation when individuals and groups turn from their rebellion against God, submit to Him, cry out to Him to forgive their past and take them to be His subjects and children. As God receives them, His rule comes into effect over their lives; they begin to learn to live His way and according to His values.

This is a dynamic reign over those who acknowledge God as rightful King, submit to Him and love Him. This reign will then have an effect on the homes, farms, businesses, on the land these people live in. However, the kingdom of God is an active reign over willing people and not an institution founded on a piece of land.

Are there borders to the kingdom of God? Consider the parable of the wheat and the tares in Luke 13:36-43. By Jesus' explanation, the wheat represents the sons of the kingdom, the tares the sons of the evil one. These are two fundamentally different types of people. The difference is so categorical that at the final judgement, one group will be ushered into eternal joy with the Father while the other will be expelled into the lake of fire. Between these two groups is where the border of God's kingdom runs. Those who will love and obey the Father are on one side. Those who refuse to love and obey Him, who are prepared to do works of evil, are on the other side. **This is not a geographical border but one of the heart! It is determined by the motives of the heart, the will and the mind, by the corresponding choices and lifestyle. It is defined by the question 'Whom do I love, for whom am I really living? Who is my king?'**

Although this boundary is not visible like a geographical one, it is just as real and effective. In Matthew 24:40 we find Jesus teaching about His return. He will come suddenly. There will be two men in the field: one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken, and one left behind. What separates these people is clearly not geography, as they were expressly doing together the same thing at the same time. They were separated by whom they were serving. This is the boundary of the kingdom of God. It runs through our lands, towns, neighbourhoods, places of work and even through families.

Matthew 10:34 Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother and a daughter in law against her mother in law and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

Jesus claims the first allegiance in our lives. We must love Him and His Father first; even more than family - which the Bible values highly. Also more than our own lives. It is all about who is the ruler in my life. **This is not firstly**

a message about redemption or salvation from sin, it is about Lordship. It is about whom we want to love and live for.

It defines us now, right where we live. We must seek God and cry out to Him to show us how we might cross over into His kingdom, then live under His reign. Jesus taught that this is the first priority in life.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

The borders of the kingdom of God are of the heart and will, they're spiritual, not geographic because of the nature of the kingdom in its present phase.

Something of this is brought out in Jesus' discourse with Pontius Pilate. He was brought before Pilate on the political charge that He had claimed to be the King of the Jews. The Jewish priests had to make the case political in order to bring it under Pilate's jurisdiction.

John 18:33 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, summoned Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" v. 36: Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm (not from here)." v. 37: Pilate therefore said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

"My kingdom is not of this world" means it does not originate from here on earth – it is not headquartered here. Does this mean it is without substance, mystical, unfathomable, an ethereal idea? Not necessarily. It can simply mean it is a real, concrete, kingdom which has its centre of government, its headquarters somewhere else. This is indeed the case since the headquarters are in heaven. It also means that because it is not earth-bound, it is not limited to the usual rules of an earthly, geopolitical kingdom. It is free to function differently.

Again, from John 18:36: If my kingdom were of this world then it would function "normally" - my servants would fight that I might not be delivered up to the Jews.

Jesus delivers a sentence of simple logic and a statement of fact. Every geo-political kingdom or government of any sort must have a police system to enforce the law internally, plus a military to wage war externally where neces-

sary. When the king is arrested, the very heart of the kingdom is under attack and the citizens either fight or give up the kingdom. This they should do in the case of Jesus' arrest, but because this kingdom functions differently, they don't.

John 18:37 I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.

This was a personal appeal to Pilate. It was heaven breaking into Pilate's world, signalled to him also by his wife's dream, calling him to face the truth. Jesus was innocent and Pilate knew it. However, he was under pressure to be again the politician he had always been and act expediently, to sacrifice Jesus for a short-term solution. At the end, he asked cynically, "What is truth?" But he had been facing it all the time and then decided against it, once again putting expediency before principle.

Jesus' sentences are also a concise description of the purpose of the kingdom. He came from another world, from heaven, to live the truth and to proclaim it. Men and women 'of the truth', those who were basically wanting to know the truth and do it, even in the face of their own failures, those who were teachable, would be drawn to Jesus. The truth would resonate in their hearts when they heard and saw him. They would be drawn to Him. As they submitted to Him and to the Father, so His kingdom would grow further. This is the employment of truth, love and other spiritual means to build a spiritual kingdom. It was not invisible - Jesus and His followers were there for everyone to see. It was however, not a group being trained for short term political goals. The group was being trained for an apostolic mandate.

In this encounter the two men standing vis a vis represented these two types of kingdoms. The one was commissioned by Caesar to further the rule of Rome in Israel at that time. He had his infrastructure, including his military and civil administrations, to do the job. The other was the Apostle and Messiah of the incoming kingdom of Heaven. He was commissioned by God His Father to bring His rule into the earth, beginning in Israel among the Jewish people.

It is important to understand the nature, purpose and ways of operation of both. The existence of geopolitical kingdoms is legitimate. The Bible affirms them. There are many examples of God directly intervening to speak to rulers, to remove some and usher others in. God has personally moved to raise up nations and empires, worked with them and, at times, judged them. Accord-

ing to Paul, God has set us in nations and allotted us borders and times (Acts 19). This is God Himself working in the geopolitical field. In Romans 13, Paul teaches that God has instituted governmental office and that we therefore need to work constructively with it. Peter affirms this in 1 Peter 2:12-18.

The kingdom of heaven affirms geopolitical government, but has itself a much broader program. It begins elsewhere: with the heart, with every person's free moral choice. From there, this rule goes into personal life, into family, friendships, professions, social interests and commitments, politics and international affairs - all areas of life and creation. This will include politics but goes much further. This rule claims first allegiance in our lives: before any allegiance to a geopolitical government, to our ethnic grouping, nation, or social class. It even comes before family. All of these allegiances are important, they are of great value to us and the Bible affirms them in their right place. The allegiance to God and to His rule takes first place. This is the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 10:34) and is the claim the kingdom of God makes on us.

So although the kingdom of God may seem somewhat elusive, since it is a kingdom of the heart, will and spirit and not yet a geo-political one, its claim on our lives is immediate and stronger than any other.

THE SUBJECTS

It follows that the subjects of God the King are those who embrace this rule, submit themselves to it and are accepted under His reign. Each person decides personally whether they will submit. Groups can decide as groups. It is a matter of free moral choice. Yet two parties are involved: the ruler and His subjects. Both must agree to this arrangement. It requires a serious commitment from both. As God discerns our hearts and motives, He sees whom He can accept under His rule and who not.

It is independent of class, race, culture, gender or previous religion.

He will accept all who acknowledge Him as Lord and want to live under His rule. The first general commandment of this rule is:

Luke 10:27 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

God alone is capable of establishing such a spiritual, moral kingdom. He is able to discern the motives of the human heart. He can discern who fulfils

the conditions for acceptance into His kingdom and who doesn't. He treats all people equally, wanting everyone to come to Him and be under His rule. He calls everybody. His love to all people is unconditional, but His acceptance into His kingdom is not. Should an individual or a group not yet be willing to fulfil God's conditions then He will refuse them acceptance - often with the exhortation to keep seeking. Those who refuse until their death, exclude themselves from God's kingdom in this life and, at the final judgement, will be banned forever. Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:15.

When God sees the willingness in a person to meet His conditions He is able to lead them to the entry point of His kingdom and to Himself. **This is a personal meeting with the King Himself. It is an embrace of love, forgiveness and acceptance - a great privilege. This is being born of the Spirit, born of God. Once He has taken us to Himself we then belong to Him. We become more than simply subjects; we become children and heirs of all that He is and has. He restores our creation inheritance back to us. We become both children of this king and citizens of His kingdom. We may now begin to learn how to live under His leadership and to discover the plans He has for us. These we discover in concert with others living the same way.**

This discovery of God's restored inheritance is the exciting central theme of the Bible; of both the Old and the New Testaments. We have seen briefly how some Old Testament figures became great in their partnership with God. This inheritance was opened up for the people of Israel but they only partially entered into it. The kingdom of God now opens it up for all peoples and nations in a more immediate and dynamic form than was available in the past. Both the Old and New Testaments tell us how to enter in. Now it is our turn. Now is our chance. This is our privilege, our first priority in life and our fascinating calling.

PRESENT AND FUTURE

In the previous chapter, we saw that Jesus followed the lead given by John the Baptist and proclaimed: "The kingdom of God is at hand." Mark 1:15 Most translations use, "is at hand". Some say "has drawn nigh", or "has drawn near." These are older English terms and, for some, the meaning is unclear. How near is "at hand" or "nigh"? I understand the message to be saying in modern English, "*The kingdom of God has now come to you*" or "*It is now here.*" There is no gap, no distance, no further waiting.

He went on to teach many aspects of the kingdom He was ushering in. Many of them have to do with how we are to live in this kingdom now. Others, however, talk about future developments and a future age of the kingdom. To make the distinction and to give a basis for how these two ideas work together, some of the scriptures that mention the kingdom now, and others mentioning the kingdom in the future are listed below.

a) The kingdom of God now, in the present

Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9 and 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." This was a direct proclamation - revolutionary at the time - that the kingdom they had been waiting for, had now arrived.

Matthew 12:28, Luke 11:20 *but if I cast out demons by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* The Pharisees had claimed Jesus was operating by demonic power. He reasoned with them as to why this could not be so and the alternative, namely that He was operating by God's power, was therefore the obvious conclusion. If this was true, then the kingdom had come among them.

Luke 17:20-21 ... *He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look here it is!" or, "There it is!" For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."* The Pharisees had asked when the kingdom was going to come. They were thinking about the future, with godly signs. Jesus brought them back to the present reality.

Colossians 1:13 *He has rescued us from the power of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son whom He loves.* Here Paul briefly refers to the foundational experience of all believers: namely, **we are transferred by God out from under the reign of Satan and into the reign of Jesus. This is redemption and rebirth. It is a real experience of the kingdom of God in the lives of all believers. This is the kingdom working here and now.**

See also: Matthew 3:2, Matthew 11:12, Matthew 16:19, Matthew 16:28 (Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27) 1 Corinthians 4:20, Revelation 1:6, Revelation 5:10.

b) The kingdom of God in the future

Matthew 8:11-12, Luke 13:28-29 *Many shall come from east and west and sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

This obviously refers to a future age.

Matthew 25:31-34 *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, ... then the king will say to those on His right, "Come you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

After the return of Christ comes the judgement and, for the righteous, entry into the kingdom. This refers to the kingdom in a future phase.

2 Timothy 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to His heavenly kingdom. Glory belongs to Him forever and ever! Amen.*

Paul wrote these sentences at the end of his life when he knew death was imminent. He saw the kingdom as a hope, a place to be brought to after death. This is yet another aspect of the kingdom. See also 2 Peter 1:11 and Acts 14:22.

Revelation 11:15 *When the seventh angel blew his trumpet, there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will rule forever and ever."*

This refers to the hour when the rule of Jesus will take over all the earth and includes a political rule. This is one of God's goals with the development of His kingdom and part of what we mean when we pray the Lord's Prayer. This is in the future.

See also: Matthew 13:41-43, Matthew 26:29 (Mark 14:25, Luke 22:16-18) Luke 21: 31, Luke 22:30, 1 Corinthians 15:24, 1 Corinthians 15:50, Revelation 12:10

Even these few scriptures basically make the idea clear. Jesus introduced the kingdom to the earth. He will come again to culminate this age, sort the righteous from the unrighteous and lead the righteous into a glorious new age of the kingdom. This will include Jesus' direct rule over the earth. **So the kingdom is already here and working. It is expanding and growing throughout the earth. But it is not complete. There are future phases to come.**

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The prophecy in Daniel Chapter 2 declares that the kingdom of God was to come like a stone uncut by human hand that would knock down the

last empire. It would start small, yet powerful. Then it would grow until it became a huge mountain that filled the earth.

At least four of Jesus' parables teach the growth of the kingdom from a small beginning into a significant and impressive final stage. They are firstly the parables of the mustard seed and the woman who kneaded the yeast into the dough (Matthew 13:31,33). The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds. Jesus emphasises the smallness of the beginning. But the end is impressive. *"When it is full grown it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."* The amount of yeast relative to the size of the dough is small. But, as the yeast permeates the whole loaf, so the kingdom of God goes everywhere and "permeates" everything.

Then there is the farmer who planted his field (Mark 4:26). This is a little-known parable which talks simply about phases of growth. The farmer sows the seed and day by day, over months, he watches it grow in stages; first the shoot, then the stalk, then the ear, then the growing grain in the ear. When the grain is ripe, he harvests the field. The message is about a small beginning and gradual growth. The growth is by stages up to a culmination, there is direction and purpose to it. The harvest is sudden and radical. The process is finished.

The well-known parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), says a similar thing with great clarity - because in this case Jesus Himself gives the explanation:

Matthew 13:37-43 The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom. The tares are the sons of evil. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age. The reapers are angels. Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Note in this explanation that the field is the world. The place where all this is played out is on our planet. Jesus is the One who sowed the seed - He began the kingdom on earth. Then comes the phase of growth. This parable emphasises the growth of the righteous and the unrighteous side by side.

There are two spiritual powers vying for the hearts of men and the control of the world. It will remain this way until the harvest - which signifies the return of Jesus, the end of this age, and the beginning of the next.

The growth depicted in Daniel's prophecy and in these parables is the growth of the kingdom of God in its present phase, in this age. It begins small and ends up large, effective and mature. This is taking place now, in our age, therefore it is important we understand what it means. Probably the one verse stating it most simply is Matthew 24:14

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

This is one of the foremost conditions which will determine when Jesus will be able to return. This gospel of the kingdom has to be preached to all peoples. The final commissioning Jesus gave to His disciples was, Matthew 28:18-20 ... *go into all the world (geography, the whole planet), and make disciples of all nations (ethnic groups and nation-states), and teach them to observe all that I commanded you (all content).* This kingdom has to enter every people and nation on the earth. Then it has to work and achieve all the redemption, healing and transformation that is possible among them. When the kingdom has developed worldwide, to this extent and in terms of quality, then Jesus can come back to bring this phase to an end.

THE RETURN OF JESUS AND THE COMPLETION OF THIS AGE

During His lifetime, Jesus taught significantly about the subject of His return, about judgement and separation, and the new age of the kingdom. Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 are chapters devoted to it. They are three accounts of the same teaching. The parables of the dragnet, (Matthew 13:47), and the ten bridesmaids, (Matthew 25:1) also deal with it.

The second coming of the Lord Jesus will be dramatic, deafening and visible to all mankind. He will appear in the clouds with power and great glory. This will be completely different from His first coming in humility, away from the public eye. **The first time He came to begin the process, to found God's kingdom on the earth, He brought Himself down into our circumstances and under our guilt, bondage and death. The second time He will come to complete this age of the kingdom and to bring in the next. He will come as king and God over us and all creation. This completion will be triumphal and full of glory.**

Jesus describes it as follows Matthew 24:27 and 30-31:

For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.... and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

In these chapters, Jesus also teaches that towards the end of this age, evil in the earth will greatly increase. There will be lawlessness, false prophets, apostasy and strong worldwide persecution of the followers of Jesus. At the same time, God's kingdom will grow everywhere to its full extent. In this latter stage of development, the kingdom of God and unrighteousness will be in great conflict. All of mankind will be polarised and will have to choose sides. Nature itself will be greatly shaken. It is as if both the wheat and the tares will have grown to maturity; it is time for harvest!

At His coming Jesus will reap this harvest, He will judge mankind, separate the righteous from the unrighteous and lead both groups into their ultimate destiny. For one group it will be a moment of fulfilment and boundless joy, but for the other, a final tragedy.

Matthew 25:31-46 But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This is the future age of the kingdom and these people are welcomed into their fantastic inheritance.

Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." This is the future age for the unrighteous; eternal existence in a place prepared for those who have persisted in their rebellion against God.

Our society firmly resists this teaching of life after death and a final judgement with eternal consequences. This theme has its foundation in the Old Testament but it was not until Jesus and the gospel of the kingdom, that it was

developed with clarity and firmness. The rest of the New Testament follows the same line and sets a clear standard. The fact that this is not wanted or believed in our time has no effect on reality. God declares what is real and therefore true.

The sobering reality is that we will reap what we sow. Our lives will go on forever with eternal consequences. The boundary of the kingdom of God which defines us now while we live on earth in this phase of time, will define us permanently after we have stood before God.

The English author C.S. Lewis expressed it this way: In the end there are only two classes of people; those who say to God now: “Your will be done!” and those to whom Christ will say on the day of judgment: “Your will be done!” (C.S.Lewis *The Great Divorce*, Chapter 9).

SUMMARY

- **The term ‘the kingdom of God’ means the rule or government of God.**
- **This government takes the form of a monarchy where God Himself is King.**
- **God’s rule is not political but refers to our hearts, wills and spirits.** It is based on God’s initiative and He calls each human being to love Him and to love truth. This is what we mean by a heart rulership.
- **It is also spiritual, being administered by the Holy Spirit.** He speaks to us, loves us, comforts and convicts. As spiritual beings we are able to understand and respond to Him. He leads us into truth.
- **His rule makes the principal claim on our lives before any other relationship or commitment.** He teaches us how the Father wants us to live and what He wants us to do. He teaches us the values, responsibilities, authority and rights of the kingdom of God.
- **There is a principle distinction between those who have submitted themselves to God as king and those who are living for themselves or for some other power.** This distinction is the boundary line, the border, of the kingdom of God.
- **This kingdom may be found wherever people are willing to submit themselves to the Father and love and obey Him.** Therefore it can go into all people groups, nations, political systems and social groupings. It

can cross all boundaries and go everywhere. It is more dynamic than any political kingdom or other human organisation.

- **The kingdom of God is both present and future.** Jesus introduced the kingdom of God on earth during His lifetime. He trained the apostles to further develop the kingdom. Since then it has been growing from generation to generation and reaching new nations one by one.

People are entering the kingdom of God, experiencing His love and power. They are learning to live God's way, to help reform their towns and nations, and to bring the kingdom to others. So it is expanding through the earth.

This is the growth in stages emphasised in the parable of Mark 4:26. The growth must continue until the kingdom has reached its full development on the earth. This means both geographical expansion and also quality; it must go to all peoples, bringing about all the redemption, healing and restoration possible among them.

Then comes the sudden harvest! At that time Jesus will come again to judge all mankind. He will separate the unrighteous and send them with Satan and the rebellious angels to their final eternal destination. (Matthew 13:41-42; and 49-50). Those from all generations who have loved Him - His saints - will be led into a new age of the kingdom of God. There they will live forever with Him and with each other in joy and great glory. This is the future age of the kingdom.

Note: So far in investigating the kingdom of God we have drawn only from the teachings of Jesus. Part One is developing a Biblical perspective of the kingdom of God by following the developments through the Old and New Testaments in their chronological order. One of the reasons for this is that we may learn what the subject means by stepping out of our personal theological systems and putting ourselves deliberately into the learning path the followers of Jesus trod, step by step.

For the first years they had Jesus as their teacher. After His resurrection He went over it with them again and then defined to them what their mission was to be. (Acts 1:3 and Luke 24:44-49). He promised the Holy Spirit would come in His place to lead them on in their understanding. *He will lead you into all truth.* Consequently, there is more in the letters of the apostles about the development of the kingdom, the end of the age, the return of Jesus and the age to come. Some of these future events we have in dramatic prophetic "movies" which are found in The Revelation of John.

“Your kingdom come!” - How often do we Christians around the world speak this out as part of The Lord’s Prayer? Are we aware of the implications of what this *“Kingdom of God”* is all about?

Keith Warrington explains basic biblical concepts concerning the kingdom of God and offers a perspective on how it is at work and taking shape among us in our time. He deals with the calling of the individual and the church community, as well as with the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which should never be seen only from the perspective of a “personal salvation”. Instead, all areas of life - family, work, science and culture, industry, technology etc. - should be guided and shaped by the values of the Kingdom of God.

Some important changes are called for with guidelines for implementation. For this, the author gives practical tips - surprising, challenging, feasible suggestions and plenty of real-life examples.



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