

# The Kingdom of God - now but 'not-yet'

Luke 13:18-21 He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened."

## 1. The centrality of the Kingdom

- There are over 100 references to the kingdom in the first 3 gospels (45 in Luke alone)
- Both Jesus and John the Baptist began their ministries with the call to 'repent for the kingdom of God is near' (Matt 3:2, Mark 1:15)
- Jesus spent the last 40 days of his earthly ministry speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3)
- The apostles continued this kingdom theme with over 30 references to the kingdom in the rest of the NT
- When preaching ministry is summarised, many times it uses the phrase 'preaching about the kingdom' or similar

*Acts 19:8 And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God'*

- The importance of the kingdom cannot be overstated!

*"The kingdom is to have far greater priority in our lives than concerns about material things or anything else. It has to be top priority for the church in its mission today"*  
*David Devenish*

## 2. Understanding the Kingdom

### A) The church is different to the kingdom

'Church' (ekklesia) means 'a calling out' where 'Kingdom' (basileia) means 'a rule, realm or reign'

*George Ladd "The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men" ("The Kingdom and the Church")*

### B) The church carries the message of the kingdom

*Luke 9:2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.*

### C) The church carries the secret of the kingdom

*Luke 8:10 he said, "You been allowed to know the secrets of the kingdom of God*

*meaning the form, the mode of growth, the entry point, the value etc - see Luke 13 above*

**E) The kingdom is ‘performative’ - God’s performance in which we (the church) actively participate (eg Mk 4:26-29 secretly growing seed)**

*“the kingdom of God is not about what God does while humans stand by passively; nor is it about our effort to build the kingdom while God passively watches. The kingdom of god is performative; it is God's performance in which we actively participate.” Kingdom Ethics Stassen & Gushee pg 21*

**F) We’re to pray for and proclaim not the increase of the church but the increase of the kingdom**

*Luke 11:2 And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.”*

*The mission of Christ starts and ends **not just** in the announcement of forgiveness of sins or in the removal of condemnation—although both of those things are certainly true. The mission of Christ starts and ends with an announcement that God has made Jesus emperor of the cosmos. Christ is king. That king, through his Spirit, invites all men to believe by faith what they’ll someday see by sight—what everyone will someday see by sight: Jesus is Lord. Jesus forgives. Jesus is king. And his reign will extend to the corner of every galaxy, forever. Russell Moore*

**3. The clearest ‘manifesto’ of the kingdom are found in Luke & Isaiah<sup>1</sup>**

*Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (referencing Isaiah 61)*

*In total 17 Isaiah passages indicate that God will reign and deliver his people.<sup>2</sup> The following table outlines the key seven themes that we can see from these passages and their outworking in the life of Jesus & the early church.*

Kingdom theme	Luke 4/Isaiah 61 reference	Number of Isaiah passages	Jesus’ ministry	The early church’s ministry
Deliverance or salvation	“liberty to the captives”	17 (Is 61:1 etc)	Demonic deliverance, forgiveness of sin	Demonic deliverance, forgiveness of sin, unjustly imprisoned being released (Peter, Paul etc)
Righteousness & Justice	“Liberty to the oppressed, good news to the poor”	16 (Is 32:1 etc)	Jesus’ judgements (eg healing on sabbath, woman in adultery, taxes etc). The cross!	Declaration of what was achieved on the cross (rom 3:21) and the identity of the new man (eph 4:24)

<sup>1</sup> Mark, the earliest gospel, also points in the direction of Isaiah as the foundation of kingdom teaching in that it cites Isaiah more than any other book and more than the other OT Prophets combined.

<sup>2</sup> They are Isaiah ch9:1-7; ch11; ch24:14- ch25:12; ch26 ; ch31:1- ch32:20 ; ch33 ; ch35 ; ch 40:1-11 ; ch42:1 - ch44:8 ; ch49 ; ch51:1-52:12; ch52:13 - 53:12 ; ch54 ; ch56 ; ch60 ; ch61; ch 62

Peace	“bind up the brokenhearted” (Isa 61:1)	14 (Is 9:6 etc)	Calming of the storm (Mk 4:39), Emotional healing (Mk 5:34 ‘go in peace’) Peace on the mission (John 20:21)	Release of peace to worthy household (Matt 10:13), Proclamation of peace with God (Acts 10:36)
Joy	“the oil of gladness (Isa 61:3)	12 (Is 9:3 etc)	Joy in reception of the kingdom (Mark 4:16), Joy in persecution (Luke 6:23), Joy in ministry success (Luke 10:17), Joy in prayer (John 16:24)	79 mentions in the non-gospel letters! Mass Joy in Samaria (Acts 8:8), Joy after persecution (Acts 13:52), Paul’s normative description of the kingdom (Rom 14:17)
God’s presence	“the spirit of the Lord is upon me/ anointed me”	9 (Is 60:1 etc)	Jesus’ baptism (Matt 3:16), on return from wilderness (Luke 4:1), on ministry success (Luke 10:21) etc etc	Pentecost (Acts 2:4), Prayer meetings (Acts 4:31), Deacons (Acts 6:3), mass fillings (Acts 8 & 10) etc etc
Healing	“recovery of sight to the blind”	7 (Is 35:3 etc)	Every person that Jesus ministered to was healed.	Many, many that the church ministered to were healed.
Comfort	“to comfort all who mourn” (Isa 61:2)	6 (Is 51:3 etc)	The promise of the comforter (John 14:26), Jesus’ comforting words (John 14)	Comfort in affliction (2 Cor 1:3) comfort from one another (2 Cor 13:11)

Once we have understood these ‘signs’, the opposite of these things becomes a target for our attention.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. The now but not-yet of the Kingdom.

- Jesus taught that the kingdom is imminent (Mark 1:15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”)
- ..that it has arrived...(Luke 17:21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”)
- ...but also that it is still future...( Luke 22:18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”)

*With the first coming of Jesus we have it's introduction. With the second coming of Jesus we will have it's consummation. We live between the times, in the presence of the future. George E Ladd*

*The tension and mystery of the kingdom is critical to a proper theology and praxis of healing. We cannot dictate or control healing yet we cannot accept or surrender to sickness. We pray with confident authority and expectation of healing for everyone, yet we are humble and honest, trusting God with the results as only God can heal. We do*

<sup>3</sup> Further confirmation of these themes comes from Paul when he declares “The kingdom of God does not mean (judgementalism about) food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” Rom 14:17. Here we see 4 of the themes from Isaiah clearly represented in one statement - righteousness (or justice), peace, joy and the presence of God by the Holy Spirit see Kingdom Ethics Stassen & Gushee 25-28

*both at the same time. Too much "kingdom now" leads to arrogance and presumption, demanding healing as if on tap. Too much. "kingdom then" leads to pessimism and fatalism, leaving healing to "if it is God's will". "Balance leads to a neutralizing of the radical edges, loss of risk-taking, a passive middle road and theologically correct approach to healing. We too easily explain lack of healing by kingdom tension when we ought to push through in faith. Embracing both the "already" and "not yet" of the kingdom, makes us living paradoxes. It is learning to live and minister in the overlapping of two ages: the power of the kingdom and the resistance of this age. It leads to persevering faith, optimistic realism, dependence on God, discerning the moment, honouring peoples dignity, respecting the unknown, and leaving the results with God. Alexander Venter "Doing Healing"*

## **5. Pressing into the 'not-yet' while living in the 'now'**

### **A. Have a clear understanding of the kingdom**

- Our role of faith in 'standing in the gap', calling for 'your kingdom come'

### **B. A healthy model for those who most painfully experience the 'not yet'**

- Laying down the right to understand in order to have the peace God promises
- The principle of perseverance ('pray and don't give up...')
- Learn how to have 'optimistic realism' - realists with boldness and faith!
- Model love & honour for the individual 'what would you like me to pray for'
- Talk about your own disappointments and how you are (have) handled them

### **C. Use stories to raise expectation**

- Repetition of 'your' stories
- Bringing in stories from outside that are 'outside your current experience'
- Learn to celebrate as a community, focussing first on what God has done rather than on what he has not done
- Redefine success as faithful obedience rather than impressive results

### **D. Follow the Spirit into the unknown**

- The possible of tomorrow is viewed as impossible today; shift your thinking.

*"Is there nothing to sing about today? Then borrow a song from tomorrow; sing of what is yet to be." (C.H. Spurgeon)*

- Follow the Spirit onto the front line. Wheel chairs are emptied by those who minister to people in wheelchairs. Government is changed by those who run for office.