

THE KINGDOM OF GOD [KINGDOM OF HEAVEN]

Reading: Psalm 89:14–15: Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne. Unfailing love and truth walk before You as attendants. Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of Your presence, Lord.

1* We have just begun our new teaching series on the Kingdom of God and up until Advent we will be looking at what Jesus said about the Kingdom as recorded primarily in the gospel of Matthew.

It should be noted that Matthew was a Jewish writer writing for a largely Jewish audience at the time. His gospel was written in Hebrew and starts with the genealogy of Jesus, but not one of the usual type! Matthew's genealogy includes women, and not all the women have a pedigree background. People like Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, and Ruth a Moabite, are included and could be thought to sully the patriarchal line. Those unapproved by Torah observance at birth [mumzers/mamzers] are included in Jesus' family line – how can this be? Matthew is making a shocking point to his listeners!

Although a Jew, Matthew himself knew what it meant to be an outsider. Collecting taxes for the Romans from the Jewish people, made him an object of derision and scorn in his community. Jesus brought him into a place of belonging and family, just as God had brought Rahab and Ruth before him.

2* Matthew's gospel account, and maybe the main point about Jesus and His Kingdom family, is that all are welcome; there are no outsiders in this New Kingdom! Those that don't deserve to be there, are there [and maybe some of those who think they are there by birth right, are not]. This is shocking indeed!

And this was just the tip of the iceberg because, quoting Brian McLaren from the Secret Message of Jesus: Jesus didn't come to start a new religion but a political, social, religious, artistic, economic, intellectual, and spiritual revolution that would give birth to a new world! Jesus invites us all to see, seek, receive and enter a new political, spiritual and social reality He calls the KOG. If we're part of this Kingdom, we begin to live in a way that some will say is stupid or naïve – turning the other cheek, walking the 2nd mile, defeating violence with forgiveness, sacrifice, and love. Others may see in our lives the courageous and wild hope that could heal and transform the world.

He continues: We need to live in this world with urgency, awareness, intensity, mission, direction, courage, hope and vigour. There is empowerment to wake up and live life to the full. The Kingdom has come, and it is coming, and we diligently pray for it, welcome it, seek it and receive it.

So, we will be delving into God's big story and His Kingdom, and our part to play, over the next few weeks and we will come to understand what a privilege it is to be invited and included in; and what it means to be a powerful Kingdom carrier in these days.

3* We may not presently have a building, but we carry the Kingdom everywhere we go, and the King is present every time we gather in 2s and 3s. The Kingdom is inclusive and transformational and there's never been a better time to express this in our present circumstances as a church, and in our world. Example of our little group, Eat, Pray, Love starting – small beginnings but it's Kingdom!

Today, I'm just going to make some overriding points about the KOG and I encourage you and your groups to delve into the resources to learn and incarnate more of what Jesus Himself taught us. These are available from the City Life website.

4* [Aslan] The first thing to note is there is no Kingdom without a King to rule and reign over it. Kingdom is an interactive relationship with a King and His other subjects [the Church]. We can often think of God as Father, Jesus as Saviour, Holy Spirit as our Helper/Comforter and find them circling around our lives, with us still firmly in the centre. We speak less often about God being Lord, or Jesus being King and on the throne of our lives.

Maybe, since our own monarchy has seemed less governmental, less influential, and less revered since we know they are as human as we are, [although many of us love and respect our Queen], we have failed to understand, and therefore appropriately honour, the majesty of an all perfect, all holy, all powerful, all seeing, all glorious God who sits enthroned over the Heavens and Earth that He powerfully created by His word and breath!

5* 1 Chronicles 29:10b–13: Praise be to You, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in Heaven and Earth is Yours.

Yours, Lord, is the Kingdom; You are exalted as Head over all. Wealth and honour come from You; You are the Ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise Your glorious name.

How often do we declare His majesty this way? How often are we in awe of Him? This is where appropriate fear of the Lord comes from, but we don't say too much about that these days do we?

6* Fear of the Lord has a strong connection to obedience to the King's will and secures blessing: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 111:10] and it unlocks the door to spiritual riches [Isaiah 33:6]: It keeps us from idolatry [Exodus 20:20] and opens us up to God's mercy [Luke 1:50] Fear of the Lord fills us with, and prolongs, life. It protects and provides for our children. It secures our friendship with God and draws Him to confide in us [Psalm 25: 13+14]. Appropriate fear of the One who sits enthroned over the Heavens and the Earth is expressed in humility, reverence, honour, and obedience to the King's words, commands, and purposes.

For myself, I know my mind and heart need to reawaken to the majesty and power of the King that I have given my life to, and who I've agreed to serve humbly and gladly. I want an appropriate fear of the Lord that upholds His grace and keeps Him at the centre of my life and me in His purposes every day.

With Jesus in the correct place in our lives, enthroned and reigning, His Kingdom can flourish in us and through us. So, what are the marks of Jesus' Kingdom?

7* Romans 14:17-19: For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of rules about food and drink, but is in the realm of the Holy Spirit, filled with righteousness, peace, and joy. Serving the Anointed One by walking in these Kingdom realities pleases God [and is beautiful to Him] and earns the respect of others. So then, make it your top priority to live a life of peace with harmony in your relationships, eagerly seeking to strengthen and encourage one another.

It's interesting that the passage begins with what the Kingdom isn't! Probably because when we think of Kings and Rulers, we think of rules! We can believe following and serving King Jesus is just about keeping the rules and dutifully

observing a few rituals. But this passage makes it clear, the Kingdom of God is about Holy Spirit-led living, and it's filled with righteousness, peace, and joy!

It's not so much about rules, duties, and tasks, as it is about right relationships: Righteousness is about right living with God and other people. Relationship with Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit made possible by the Holy Spirit in us; loving kindness and justice shown to others, made possible by the Holy Spirit in us and through us! This secures peace and joy for many! Serving God through loving kindness, just dealings, being peacemakers and bringing joy to others pleases King Jesus more than anything, and it earns the respect of other people – win, win!

Now people can think 'being kind' makes people 'good' and qualifies them to be part of God's Kingdom family. However, there is only one way to becoming a Kingdom person and a Kingdom Carrier! We've already heard that we need to be Holy Spirit led, but Jesus said we had to be Spirit-born!

In John 3, a well-known, Torah observant, Jewish Rabbi, Nicodemus, wanted to know how to become a Kingdom person and Jesus said this to him:

8* John 3:3–8: Jesus answered, 'Nicodemus, listen to this eternal truth: Before a person can even perceive God's Kingdom, they must first experience a rebirth.' Nicodemus said, 'Rebirth? How can a grey-headed man be reborn? It's impossible for anyone to go back into the womb a second time and be reborn!' Jesus answered, 'I speak an eternal truth: Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you will never enter God's Kingdom. For the natural realm only gives birth to things that are natural, but the spiritual realm gives birth to supernatural life! You shouldn't be amazed by My statement, 'You all must be born from above!' For the Spirit-Wind blows as it chooses. You can hear its sound, but you don't know where it came from or where it's going. So, it is the same with those who are Spirit-born!'

Jesus was letting Nicodemus know that God's Kingdom and salvation is not about adding something to all our efforts and devotions – it's about leaving all that behind and starting again. Nicodemus knew this was as impossible as re-entering his mother's womb and beginning again! No person can do that – and that was exactly Jesus' point!

Spirit and water are needed for a rebirth, a completely fresh start. This would have reminded Nicodemus of the OT scriptures from the prophet, Ezekiel, words spoken 600 years before the conversation they were having that day. Verses would have sprung to this rabbi's learned mind:

9* Ezekiel 36: 25-27: Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow My decrees and be careful to obey My regulations.

So being born again meant being born of water and Spirit. Rebirth is impossible for man; this is a work of God, and it's the fulfilment of His promises from long ago. Being born of water means being cleansed from every impurity and wrongdoing by God [through Jesus] and being born of the Spirit means being transformed through receiving a new soft, responsive heart to follow God, instead of the hard stony one we had before.

As we are totally dependent on God to save us into His Kingdom, so we are totally dependent on His Spirit to lead us to advance His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy everywhere we go.

However, while depending on the Spirit, it is important that we know we have been equipped to be Kingdom carriers, and we need to understand that we have been given keys to unlock Kingdom realities in our situations and communities.

10* Matthew 16: 15–19: 'But you—who do you say that I am?' Jesus asked. Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Anointed One, the Son of the living God!' Jesus replied, 'You are favoured and privileged Simeon, son of Jonah! For you didn't discover this on your own, but My Father in Heaven has supernaturally revealed it to you. I give you the name Peter, a stone. And this rock will be the bedrock foundation on which I will build My Church, and the power of death will not be able to overpower it! I will give you the keys of Heaven's Kingdom Realm to forbid on Earth that which is forbidden in Heaven, and to release on Earth that which is released in Heaven.'

11* This hints back to the OT scripture: Isaiah 22: 22+24: I will place upon His shoulders [speaking of Jesus] the key to the treasures of David's palace. He will open doors that no one can shut, and He will shut doors that no one can open...All the glory of His Father's house they will fasten to Him, including offspring and branches that will trust in Him.

The offspring or branches represent the Church; all those who trust Jesus, who know He is the Son of God and the One who cleanses us from every one of our impurities and sins, and who gives us rebirth and new life through the Spirit.

Keys are symbols of kingly authority and ruling power, and Jesus has put them into our hands to carry and use to advance His Kingdom on Earth, as it is in Heaven.

To recap: We enter the Kingdom of God as His sons/daughters born of water and Spirit: We carry the Kingdom of God as His legally commissioned Spirit-filled Church, with governmental authority and power to unlock and release His righteousness, peace and joy on the Earth, daily, and there is no power of darkness that can stop His purposes because Jesus has secured the victory already and sits enthroned as King over Heaven and Earth.

Now I'm not sure where we all stand on this? I'm pretty sure most listening will know Jesus' sacrifice made possible our salvation [and if we didn't then now is our opportunity to be saved!]. We know our good works will never qualify us for the Kingdom of Heaven and only Jesus' grace can. We know and appreciate the Fatherhood of God and the wonderful family we have within the Church.

But in the busyness, disappointments, and disasters of our lives, especially on a global scale, I'm not sure how secure we are in the majesty, sovereignty, and power of God. It's a Q I'm asking myself and it's a Q I'm asking of us.

12* [God is still on the throne]? If we are not fully appreciating and trusting in the majesty and omnipotence of our King, Jesus, we will not know the power of the Kingdom we carry and the authority He has given us to release His Kingdom in the situations we face and see. We will not fully believe we have power over the enemy and his works of darkness, and our interventions will be fewer. It will also become easier to lose the sense of Jesus being enthroned in our lives and we will fail to remember that we are here to honour and serve Him and Him alone. Q. Is Jesus still on the throne of our lives?

Many of us have recently been convicted and helped by listening to Bill Johnson's talk on the 'mountain of unbelief'. It helps us see if we have become mixed in our faith and unbelief [which he describes as seeds of faith and weeds of unbelief growing together in the garden of our hearts]. Some of us, myself included, need to get weeding, or at least ask the Master Gardener to help root them out. To have this mixture is to see God and ourselves as less, to be robbed of our authority and hampered in seeing impossible situations made possible in Him. I recommend listening and responding where we can.

This brings me back to the prayer that Jesus gave us and maybe, as we consider these things over the next weeks, we can be sincerely declaring these words and anticipating any Spirit-led changes He deems necessary in us! Let these words be our prayer, and our repentance if needed.

13* **Let's say this together:** Matthew 6:9+10 +13b: Our Beloved Father, dwelling in the heavenly realms, may the glory of Your name be the centre on which our lives turn. Manifest Your Kingdom realm and cause Your every purpose to be fulfilled on Earth, just as it is in Heaven...For You are the King who rules with power and glory forever. Amen.

DISCUSSION & PRAYER POINTS FOR INDIVIDUALS & CGs:

Q. Having listened to the talk and considered the scriptures, how secure in the majesty, sovereignty, and power of God are we?

Q. Are we confident in the authority and power that King Jesus has released to us and how can we use these more effectively in our lives and situations?

Q. Are we confident Jesus is on the throne of our lives and how are we living to advance His Kingdom each day?

Q. If needed, how might we become more aware and trusting of God's majesty, sovereignty, and power in us, and through us?

Q. What Kingdom realities is God asking us to unlock this week? Pray for opportunities!