

## The Kingdom of God – Part 5

### Seeing The Kingdom

1. I know I have been away for three weeks and you have had some great preaching while I have been gone. But the longer I was away, the more I became convinced that we need to become “Kingdom People” who are on Kingdom assignments.
  - a. Frederick Blumhardt, one of the founders of the Bruderhoff Movement, said in the late 1800’s, “Nothing is more dangerous to the advancement of God’s kingdom than religion. But this is what Christianity has become”
  - b. Folks, Jesus didn’t come to establish a religion with His name on it...He came to establish the Kingdom of God. We are Christians but we better not be religious!
  - c. For far too long we have been church attenders, loyal to our denominations – and have ignored what God is doing all around us...as if somehow we had the monopoly on God’s work. I have been guilty of this. It has made us all more religious than effective as a result of the spiritual pride associated with the attitude that believing the right things makes us right with God.
  - d. I have seen a movement among pastors over the past 10 years that has been trying to undo the damage of this religious spirit that focused upon doing the right things instead of having a right relationship with the God who made us.
    - i. **Think about the past and how we focused upon the outward instead of the inward:**
      1. Don’t wear jeans or shorts to church.
      2. Guys shouldn’t have long hair.
      3. Movies and dancing are taboo.
      4. Just come to the front of the church during the invitation and you’ll be saved.
      5. Raising your hands during worship is being weird.
    - ii. And then when we finally did get the thing about a right relationship with God, we didn’t fully understand what it meant!
      1. We thought it meant that we could now get our prayers heard and sometimes answered...as long as God was agreeable and we hadn’t sinned or ignored God recently.
      2. We didn’t realize that **when Jesus made us right with the Father, Jesus made us AS RIGHT with the Father the same as He Himself was right with the Father. Perfectly, rightly related to the Father.**
        - a. Now of course, we didn’t feel very holy, and our conduct rarely matched up with what the Word of God said about us...so we tend to interpret life through our experience rather than through the Word of God.
        - b. So while the bible SAID we were perfectly related to God, since our conduct didn’t match it, we choose to believe that we aren’t rightly related to God unless we DID something else!
        - c. What is wrong with this picture? It is a flawed view of the Kingdom of God and the redemptive work that Jesus accomplished on the cross. **If we have to add anything to what Jesus did in order to be right with God, then Jesus died in vain!**
2. God sent His Son to make us perfectly and rightly related to Himself.
  - a. We are rightly related not based on how we feel or act, but rather based upon the action of Jesus and what the Father says about us in the Word of God. It is when we trust God’s action on our behalf is when the change takes place.
  - b. **Faith isn’t the absence of doubt, it is the presence of action.**
    - i. When I believe that God’s Son Jesus died on my behalf and that it was sufficient to cover every one of my failures (sins), past, present and future, and that I don’t need to prove my worthiness, and I don’t need to impress God, but rather I can let Him love me...my life changes.
    - ii. I become a brand new creature – a miracle occurs in my life.

- iii. I want to clarify one thing: We aren't "saved" by making a mental assent to the right truths, like agreeing with a statement or praying a prayer. **We are saved when our heart is changed because by faith we have connected to the Savior of the world!**
- 3. Let's look at our key passage this morning, from John 3:1-18 – It is one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament, one that everyone of us think we understand what it says.
  - a. *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*
    - i. This meeting between Jesus and a religious man of God was at night. The Pharisee was afraid of being seen with Jesus because Jesus was on the "fringe" and he didn't want to lose his respectability. Yet he had a question he didn't ask that Jesus knew was burning in his heart.
      - 1. So while he makes the observation that Jesus is indeed a RABBI (explain how) – he also acknowledges that Jesus is a TEACHER/rabbi sent by God!
      - 2. **Rabbi Studies:** (preface with note that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, we divorced our faith from the culture in which it was created, Hellenizing it so that we extracted the teachings of Jesus from his history – Platonizing (Greek Philosophy) our faith!)
        - a. Every Jewish Christian, who would have read the Gospels in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century would have understood the context which I am about to share with you. They didn't write it in the bible because it was assumed every reader would know this about Jesus and his culture.
        - b. **Every** Jewish boy would enter religious studies at an early age (6-10) "**The house of the Scribe**" – (*Beth Sofair*) he would memorize the entire Torah, the first 5 books of the bible. Jesus did this.
          - i. (How do you think Jesus knew the bible? Did you think he simply assimilated it because in His divine nature He "wrote" it?)
        - c. Between ages 10-14 they would then enter "**The House of Study**" (*Beth Talmud*) – they would study the Psalms and Proverbs and many would memorize the entire Old Testament. Every Jewish boy would spend hours studying and reading and learning the bible at the feet of a rabbi. We don't know who Jesus' teachers were. The bible doesn't tell us...and I think it is because we probably would have made "saints" of them and built statues to them as well.
          - i. Remember when Jesus was "left behind" in Luke's gospel at the age of 12? What the bible assumes we know is that children from the ages of 10-14 would gather every year at the temple to ask questions of the rabbis of the Sanhedrin. The fact that the bible says they were "amazed by him" tells us that he had been tagged or identified for the next stage of study. This is the writer's way of telling us that Jesus was not only exceptional but also that he would enter the next stage of studies that was reserved for only a few.
        - d. At the end of this study, at about age 15, not many would make the cut: It was called the *Beth Midrash*, or the "**House of Investigation**," where the disciple would go beyond intellectual study and be "covered with the dust of their Rabbi" as they followed him closely. Those who didn't have what it took would then be trained in the profession of their fathers.
        - e. Jesus would have spent 18 years by the time he was 30 studying and learning in rabbinical school. A Jewish man would spend most of his life learning from his teacher(s) until at the age of 55 or 60, he would be able

to start his own school, be his own master, and call his own adult disciples (who incidentally, were often the ages of 14-16).

- f. Do you recall when the Pharisees asked him where He got his authority to teach? They were upset that a 30 year old was teaching apart from his teacher! This was scandalous that a man would be a rabbi and call his own disciples at such a young age!
- g. As you read the reactions of the religious leaders toward Jesus, this is the context of the culture and learning that they were in. **They expected Jesus to still be a student not a teacher...yet Nicodemus calls him a Rabbi – quite an acknowledgement of who He was!**
- h. Are you getting this? Is anyone having trouble with this concept?

Moving on:

**b. Jesus understood that Nicodemus wanted to know how to enter or see the Kingdom of God.**

- i. It was the hope of every Jew to see the Kingdom of God unveiled, of throwing off the oppression of their invaders and to see the glory of the Davidic Kingdom restored.
- ii. But Jesus wanted to communicate that the Kingdom he was ushering in had a different characteristic to it. It was unique and different. **And it would be invisible to all unless they experienced a second birth, a rebirth in their spirit.**
  - 1. So Jesus says to him, “, *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. ”*
  - 2. I heard a well known pastor recently say “Many folks repent enough to get their sins forgiven but not enough to SEE the Kingdom of God.”
    - a. I disagree...you can’t have your sin’s forgiven unless you are born again. But the point is well made...many folks are content to only have their sins forgiven and don’t give a thought to being a part of the Kingdom of God.
  - 3. The criteria for SEEING (and entering) the Kingdom of God is a spiritual rebirth. It is a complete, radical revolution that begins in a decision to lay down what you know and step into that realm of faith of what you don’t know.
- c. *“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*
  - i. Jesus begins to explain himself – it is an act of the Spirit of God – and Jesus is explaining that the spirit of man is lifeless until the Spirit of God breathes life into it.
    - 1. You and I cannot be alive spiritually without a move the Spirit of God upon us. The bible says that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him.
  - ii. Wind is also a consistent NT symbol for the Spirit of God – recall Pentecost and the “mighty rushing wind” that blew into the upper room? Here Jesus equates the movement of the Spirit of God into a believer’s life that not only brings new life to them, but also is audible to the believer even when the believer cannot distinguish the direction of the voice of God. When you are born again you get “ears to hear God.” You can hear the wind of the Spirit of God...even though you can see its effects.
    - 1. **Can you see wind? No. But you can hear it. You can see its effects upon everything it touches. You can feel it. This is the parallel Jesus tells us exists with the Spirit of God.**
  - iii. **God’s voice is available for every believer to hear.**
    - 1. I recall when I first became a Christian, the morning after I surrendered my life to Jesus – I opened the bible and it seemed as if God were speaking wonderful things directly to me. I began to perceive His voice through the arrangement of circumstances, and then as I began to listen more and more carefully, I even

would sense the impressions of His Spirit upon my spirit “go there.” God hasn’t stopped speaking...I had my first “prophetic word” about a month ago...I don’t speak of these things publicly lest you think I am some sort of special...the truth is, everyone of us is some sort of special! And God desires to speak to every one of us.

2. This past week, while on the drive back to Ohio, I had the first vision I have ever had. I believe it was meant for me personally, so I am not going to tell you about it. Again, don’t hold me up as special. God is progressively speaking to every one of us in ever increasing measures if we are willing to listen. That is the nature of the Spirit of God. He desires to communicate with you!
  3. God wants to speak to you – He is always speaking but are we hearing?
- d. *"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?(for which there is no earthly parallel?) No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*
- i. Jesus equates eternal life with the Kingdom of God and belief in Himself. He also tells us that there are earthly things that have heavenly realities – so that we can understand heavenly things by looking at earthly representations.
    1. Things like “sowing and reaping,” “harvests,” “fishing”, “wind”, the “temple” as a figure of the heavenly pattern for worship, etc. Jesus used parables to make these truths evident.
    2. **Parable principles are things which have their parallel in the natural world.**
    3. We must learn to understand these things, Jesus says. If we can grasp the heavenly realities represented by earthly things, then we can someday begin to grasp things that have NO earthly patterns.
      - a. According to Jesus, these parable principles must be lived out (mastered) before we can enjoy and understand the principles that have no earthly parallel.
      - b. **Spiritual principles are things which have no natural parallel.**
        - i. Healing, supernatural overrides of natural laws...are the intrusion of the superior (heavenly) into the inferior (natural). They really don’t have an earthly law to represent them. In fact, they often defy earthly laws and truths.
        - ii. They aren’t new truths, but rather they are truths that cannot be apprehended until we are able to establish the foundation of basic truth. We cannot move on to more until we are faithful with what we have!
        - iii. He who has will more be given, but he who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”
- e. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*
- i. God loves you so much that He desires that you have eternal life. What is eternal life?
  - ii. **Most of us would say “eternal life is going to heaven when you die.” But Jesus didn’t say that.** He said eternal life is broader than that. It is deeper than that.

1. John 17:3 “*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*” (experientially knowing God).
    - a. Funny, how some folks think they will “go to heaven” when they die even though they haven’t wanted anything to do with God their entire life – when eternity will be filled with the worship and knowledge of God!
    - b. Remember that the Kingdom of Heaven means that tastes of heaven are readily available on earth to its inhabitants.
      - i. We will exp. God in fullness in heaven, but we get to exp. God in the here and now in the Kingdom!
  2. We will see this statement “eternal life” a lot in our studies in the weeks ahead. Almost everyone who talked to Jesus about it wasn’t talking about heaven after they died. They were talking about the Kingdom of God!
4. Want in? Here is an illustration:
- a. Imagine you are living in a polluted land, one filled with lousy air, terrible water, there is no scenery – in fact, trash is piling up everywhere. The economy really is bad too – and the people that live in your land...well, most of them are pretty selfish, self centered and angry. Some are just down right mean. There seems to be crime everywhere and you can’t seem to ever feel at home or safe here. You know in your heart that there has to be more to life...but you just don’t know how or where.
  - b. Then one day you get a visit from a friend who says that she has seen a land that is really beautiful, where there is no trash, the air is fresh and the water is pure. There is always enough work for everyone. And the people are different...they are thoughtful and seem to think of other folks first. They are different from all the folks around your current home. Crime is pretty much absent and you can feel safe and secure. As you listen to her tell you about this wonderful land, you get interrupted by a telemarketer selling gas masks so you can breathe better while you sleep. Something inside of you snaps “That’s it, I’ve had it, I am leaving! I want to start a new life in this new land my friend has told me about.”
  - c. But as you sit in your lumpy recliner, you wonder...is it real? Is it worth it? I will have to leave everything I have and everything I know. What if my friend isn’t telling the truth? I will lose all I have. So with apprehension but determination, you and your friend head off toward the new land. At the gate, they ask you one question, “Do you wish to leave your past behind and start a new life in our kingdom?” When you say yes, they give you your passport and recommend you take a bath to wash off the soot and smell of your old kingdom and have a clean start in the new life. As you take a deep breath you can scarcely believe that this land is so pure!
  - d. As you make your new home in this new land, you meet your neighbors. You hear a new dialect, a new language being spoken. It isn’t the old familiar one of pride, judgment, bragging, misleading, insulting and lying but has the accent of gratitude, encouragement, truth telling, fault admission, and celebration.
  - e. You also notice people are neither lazy or workaholics. They live with a rhythm that seems to weave worship, work rest and play together. You feel like you have been born again!
5. Folks, that is what the Kingdom of God is like. Living under His rule, His life, and it requires that you come to the place where you are no longer satisfied with the way life has been in the past. It requires you make a clean break – that you leave the old behind and surrender your life to the King! He’s paid the entry fee and all the fees actually. Won’t you let Him transform you?
  6. Are you desperate yet? Are you tired of the lousy, self run life and the dead end street you are on? Are you ready, desperate for a change? God wants to provide it for you! If you have had religion, God is inviting you to a relationship...one that will change your life from now into eternity. Won’t you let Him?