

Talk Notes

Title: The Kingdom of God 1

Meeting: Freshwaters

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Introduction

This morning I want to introduce a theme that I will be returning to throughout 2017, it is a theme that Jesus spoke about more than anything else in His ministry on earth, and in fact he referred to it over 100 times in the gospels – can anyone tell me what you think it is? Yes, the Kingdom of God.

The same Aramaic phrase of Jesus translated ‘Kingdom of God’ in Mark, Luke & John is translated ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in Matthew.

In the rest of the New Testament the phrase ‘Kingdom of God’ or ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ is rarely used but the same theme is pursued but with different language. **So the Kingdom of God is expressed in terms of salvation**, when people accept God’s free gift of salvation it is equivalent to entering the ‘Kingdom of God’ through Jesus who is the ‘gatekeeper’. Paul puts it like this in **Romans 14:17 ‘For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’**

Through the year we are going to explore what Jesus had to say about the Kingdom of God, how Jesus Himself was the best model of what it is to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God and how the Apostles applied the Kingdom of God in their teaching and lives. For today we are going to limit ourselves to what the Kingdom of God is and is not, and to **why it is so important for us to seek God’s Kingdom as our very highest priority.**

What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God is the sovereign rule or reign of God. It is perfectly realised in heaven, but it is extended here on earth wherever the will, purposes or plans of God are realised.

The principles of the Kingdom are built into the very fabric of creation, as God spoke, His will was realised in creation and He looked upon it with pleasure declaring it as good.

On an individual level the Kingdom grows as the will and purposes of God are realised in increasing measure in people’s lives. The Kingdom makes significance advance through every person who enters the Kingdom through faith in Jesus and acceptance of His Lordship – or reign in their lives. However as I have spoken about a number of times before, it does not start there, as the influence of the Kingdom in an individual’s life can begin long before a person consciously becomes a follower of Christ. It also does not end there but continues to grow as each person yields more of their lives to God’s reign. We don’t just enter the

kingdom and then get on with our lives as before. **Nor do we become perfect citizens of the Kingdom just because we have entered.** That would be like someone moving into a new country with different language, laws and customs and immediately becoming 'naturalised' as they step off the plane.

The truth is that having entered the Kingdom, we then learn to follow the King and He, alongside His other followers, teach us, encourage us and correct us. **His reign extends at the pace and to the depth that we are willing to let go of our own control and allow Him in to do what He wants to do.** You will remember the picture of Jesus standing, not just at the front door of our lives (when He first invites us to enter His Kingdom) but at a myriad of other doors which we can choose to open to Him, or keep locked.

The influence of the Kingdom of God also extends to every area of nature and human existence where His will is brought into being. Let's take a very imperfect example – on US soil the direct reign of the government of the United States is experienced, but the influence of the US extends throughout the World to a greater or lesser extent. So the direct reign of God is fully realised in heaven, is growing within every individual who is influenced by or who has become a 'citizen of heaven' but it's reaches throughout the earth effecting every sphere of human life and activity, and every sphere of nature.

What the Kingdom of God is not!

Now would just be a good time to stop and reflect upon what the Kingdom of God is not! Can anyone tell me some of the things people may think the Kingdom of God is that are not true?

- A geographical area
- A nation or group of nations
- A political system
- A religion or religions
- The Church

Probably the most common misunderstanding is to equate the Kingdom of God to the Church. The church (which remember consist of those who are part of it, not the institution or building's) must be part of the Kingdom but is by no means the full extent of the Kingdom. **The problem with equating the church to the Kingdom is that we focus inwards upon the church, rather than outwards upon the communities we are part of.** We become obsessed with the size, shape and internal affairs of the church, whereas **God has given us a much bigger vision, the Kingdom of God is about all of life in all of the earth.** It includes politics, economics, health, religion, nature, the past the present and the future.

If your focus and priority is church then you may well have difficulty relating the rest of your life to your discipleship journey. **Church seems 'spiritual', work 'unspiritual' and perhaps family and leisure somewhere in-between.**

We are not told to seek first the church but to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33). If our focus and priority is the Kingdom of God, then we can see this includes work, home and family, leisure and, yes, the gathering of the church.

Now I am not saying that the gathered Church is not important, of course it is. **It is the place where the Kingdom of God should be most clearly seen, it should be the place where we encourage, support, teach, challenge, correct and inspire one another.** It is a place where our **love for one another** should be so clearly seen that people recognise we are disciples of Jesus. (**John 13:35**). It is a place where we can experience **prayer and worship with others** which is a vital part of our Christian experience. It is a place where **our gifting can grow and develop**, complemented by the gifts of others. Look throughout the New Testament and see if you can find any examples of healthy vibrant Christians who were not part of the gathered church. It was taken for granted that as a disciple of Jesus you would be part of a community that regularly gathers for prayer, worship, teaching and Fellowship.

The gathered Church, however, should not take away from but instead strengthen **the dispersed church which is building the Kingdom of God in every sphere of society.** We have recently come through a financial crisis which at least in part has been due to poor ethical standards within the industry. How can the Kingdom of God have the most impact upon this area of life? Yes representatives of the Church can speak out and lobby for better moral standards – **but far more is achieved by Christians working in the financial markets who feel empowered and supported to express the values of the Kingdom of God in their everyday work.**

Although the financial markets is one example, over the last 10 years or so almost every area of society has faced some sort of a scandal. **Politics** with the expenses scandal, **newspapers** with phone hacking, the **BBC** with Jimmy Savel, the **Police** with responses to historic child abuse allegations. These are just a few things that I have been reminded of, I am sure you can think of many others. The Church itself has been implicated in scandals and cover-ups. In all of these cases **the most effective protection against corruption and solution to corruption is that people involved in them apply the values and principles of the Kingdom of God** – in so doing the Kingdom grows and our society become healthier.

Conclusion

So today I have laid the foundations for the coming year as we explore the vital importance of the Kingdom of God to us, the Church and our communities.

The Kingdom of God is not a geographical area, a nation, a political or religious system, or the Church, but it is the reign of God in every sphere of life and nature, it should be best represented by the disciples of Jesus who together form the church, but it is not limited to them, the vision of the Kingdom of God is much bigger.

As we explore through this coming year the attributes, vision and values of the Kingdom of God, let's consider the implications yes for church, but also for family, friends and workplaces, for our town and nation and world – and let our constant prayer be **'Your Kingdom Come Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'**. **AMEN!**