Let me welcome you once again to Core Sessions at Metro City Church! Core Sessions are where we explore the Core beliefs of the Christian faith. This is session #10 in the series. We started last fall with four sessions, then we did three sessions in the spring of this year, and now we are in the third of four sessions this time around.

For the past couple weeks, we have been exploring what we believe about Jesus Christ. In the first week, we asked the question: “Who is Jesus?” And we saw that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the 2nd person of the Trinity. He is the eternal object of God’s love. He has always existed and has always shared His Father’s glory. He is the creator of all things, and worshipping Him is the goal of creation. He is the image of God, and humanity was created in His image. We were created to love Him and be like Him. We, however, have fallen away from Him and rejected the purpose for which we were made. We are sinners who need to be rescued. But the best news in the world is that Jesus is the promise of salvation! That was two weeks ago.

Last week, we went beyond the question of who Jesus is, and we asked the question: “Why did He come?” What was His purpose in coming to earth? What did He want to accomplish? We learned that Jesus, while remaining fully God at all times, came to Earth to be fully human. He came to represent humanity before God. He came to die for us! He came to live for us! His death paid the penalty for our sin, and His sinless life makes us accepted and righteous in the eyes of God! He not only came to rescue us from the penalty of sin, but He also came to rescue us from the power of sin – to cleanse us, to give us new hearts, and to put His Spirit within us! Above all, the most fundamental reason Jesus came is so that we would love Him! Jesus is the object of God’s love, and God wants everyone to love Him, follow Him and become like Him. That is the meaning of the universe, it is the reason we exist, and it is the reason Jesus came to Earth. That was last week.

Now this week, we are going to ask the question: “What is His message?” Of course, His message is directly related to the reasons that He came, but we want to dig deeper and explore more fully the things that Jesus actually said and taught. So are you ready?

The first thing we need to understand about Jesus’ message is that, although it was obvious to 1st century ears, it is not obvious to 21st century ears. This is because Jesus came to announce:

**The Gospel of the Kingdom of God**

Look at the very first words Jesus spoke after his baptism: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel!” (Mark 1:15).
There it is. Jesus came to ANNOUNCE that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Notice that this is an announcement, not a topic for discussion. He called it the Gospel – which means “Good News.” So Jesus’ message is first and foremost NEWS! Like a town herald making a big announcement, Jesus came to announce the Kingdom of God.

Here is the way Matthew describes Jesus’ ministry: “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...” (Matthew 9:35).

This Gospel of the Kingdom of God was Jesus’ central message at the beginning, middle and end of his ministry. It was even His message during the 40 days on earth after He rose from the dead: “To them he presented himself alive..., appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

This message about the Kingdom of God was the burden of Jesus’ ministry. It was, and continues to be, the basis of His global mission. In fact, then end of this age will not come until this message is proclaimed in every nation on Earth! “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

This little phrase “The Kingdom of God” or its counterpart “The Kingdom of Heaven” appears well over 100 times in the New Testament, most of them coming from the mouth of Jesus Himself. When the writers of the Bible wanted to summarize the message of Jesus, this was the phrase they used. This phrase is so important to Jesus that I do not believe it is possible to understand His message without understanding what He meant by it. So what does it mean?

To answer this question, we have to get inside the mind of 1st century Judaism. Jesus assumed that the Jewish people knew what He was talking about when He talked about the Kingdom of God.

The Jewish people believed that their God was the maker of Heaven and Earth and that He was the rightful King over all creation. In addition, they believed that they were His chosen people, and that all the other nations on Earth were in rebellion against Him. Because of this, they believed that God Himself was going to come down one day, judge the nations, deliver the world from evil and set up His Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven. They believed this because this is what God had promised He would do.

**Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?** The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. “Let us break their chains,” they say, “and throw off their fetters.” The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them
with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:1-12).

The word used in this passage for the Anointed One is the Hebrew word for Messiah. God had promised a Messiah whom He calls His Son. The Messiah will represent God as King over all the earth and will express His rule. He will deliver His people from evil and set them free. This is what a Jewish person heard when he heard the phrase “The Kingdom of God.” The Kingdom of God represents the fulfillment of all of God’s Covenant Promises.

**The Fulfillment of God’s Covenant Promises**

We have looked at these promises in some detail over the past two weeks, because they are the framework for understanding the whole flow of the Bible. Let’s take another look at them in light of Jesus’ announcement that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

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<tr>
<th>Covenant Promises</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The First Promise:</strong></td>
<td>God promises an offspring to crush Satan’s head. (see Genesis 3:15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noahic Covenant:</td>
<td>God promises to show us GRACE, and not treat us how our sins deserve. (see Genesis 6:7-8, 8:21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abrahamic Covenant:</td>
<td>God promises LAND, a great NATION from the offspring, and a BLESSING that will bless every nation on earth – FOREVER! (see Genesis 12:1-3, 17:7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mosaic Covenant:</td>
<td>God promises ATONEMENT for sin and a PROPHET who will bring God’s message. (see Leviticus 17:11, Deut. 18:18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davidic Covenant:</td>
<td>God promises His SON as an eternal KING who will bring deliverance from enemies, prosperity and blessing, and the presence of God to dwell with His people. (see 2 Samuel 7:8-13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Covenant:</td>
<td>God promises to CLEANSE us from sin, give us a new HEART, and put His SPIRIT within us. (see Ezekiel 36:16-28)</td>
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These were the promises people had in mind. At the time Jesus was born, Israel had been oppressed and enslaved for most of the past 600 years, with brief periods of deliverance that
never lasted very long. Most recently, in 63 BC, the Romans had taken control of Jerusalem and were ruling with tyranny and dominance. The Jewish people were weary and desperate for deliverance and freedom. The longing for Messiah to come was at its peak. It was into this world that Jesus of Nazareth, at the age of 30, stood up and announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand. And everyone who heard Him knew what He was talking about. He was saying that God was about deliver them from their enemies, fulfill all of His Covenant Promises, become King on earth as He is in heaven, and dwell among His people forever!

**The Kingdom on Earth as in Heaven**

When Jesus announced the Kingdom of God, He was announcing that another world had broken into this one. He was announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven had come to Earth. “Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Notice that Jesus’ mission is not to take people out of earth and into heaven. Rather, His mission is to bring heaven to earth. One of the biggest misunderstandings of Jesus’ message is that He came to teach people “how to get to heaven” when they die. N.T. Wright, in his book Simply Jesus, comments on this:

> The whole point of Jesus’s public career was not to tell people that God was in heaven and that, at death, they could leave “earth” behind and go to be with him there. It was to tell them that God was now taking charge, right here on “earth”; that they should pray for this to happen; that they should recognize, in his own work, the signs that it was happening indeed; and that when he completed his work, it would become reality. – N.T. Wright, Simply Jesus

Of course, this does not mean that believers in Jesus won’t go to heaven when they die. They will. But, what it does mean is that believers in Jesus don’t have to wait until they die to enter the Kingdom of heaven and experience the blessings of heaven. Through the ministry of the Messiah, God is now becoming King on earth, just as He is in heaven. Through the ministry of the Messiah, God is now taking charge.

Another misunderstanding of Jesus’ mission is that He was announcing a military revolution where He would lead people into a physical battle with Rome and other enemy nations. Jesus had no interest in establishing this kind of Kingdom. Listen to what he said to the Roman governor Pilate after he was arrested near the end of his life:

> Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” 34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” 35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” 36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” 37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born,
and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:33-37).

Jesus makes clear that the Kingdom of God will not advance through physical force. Rather, the Kingdom of God will advance as Jesus testifies to the truth. In other words, Jesus did not come to for a physical FIGHT, but to SPEAK the truth.

**The Weapon of the Kingdom – God’s Word**

Over and over again in Jesus’ life, we see that His words are His only weapon. He is not fighting for physical land or material wealth like earthly kings. He is fighting for the victory of TRUTH over LIES, and the battleground is the HEARTS of men and women.

Jesus came to continue the battle that began in the Garden of Eden. It was in the Garden where we see how the battle is fought. It was in the Garden where the rebellion against the Kingdom of God began. It happened when Satan whispered lies to Adam & Eve and they believed them.

The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.” 4 “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:1-6).

The rebellion against God began when the man and the woman believed Satan’s lies and doubted the goodness of God. Lies and doubt are the source of all rebellion against God and are to blame for everything that is wrong in the world. They are the reason for the curse we are under and are the cause of all sickness, suffering, pain and death. “Whatever does not come from faith is sin…. The wages of sin is death” (Romans 14:23, 6:23). The battle for faith is where the battle is fought – it is a fight for FAITH in the goodness of God.

Look carefully at the way Satan tempted Adam & Eve:

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<td>Lie #1 “You must not eat from any tree in the garden.”</td>
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The basic lie is that God is not good and He is holding out on us. Satan wants us to believe that there is something better than God – something more satisfying, something more pleasurable,
something more fulfilling, something more exciting. He wants us to believe that God cannot be trusted, that He does not keep His Word. He also wants us to think that we don’t need to fear God, because we can be like God.

These are the lies that led to the ruin of the world. But Jesus came to announce that there is a way to be rescued. And the weapon that rescues is the Word of TRUTH. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

When lies are replaced with truth – when doubting God’s goodness is replaced by faith – then the curse is lifted and people are set free. The TRUTH will defeat the enemy, deliver the world from evil, and set people free. “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

**The Enemy of the Kingdom – the Devil**

Understanding where the battle rages clarifies who the enemy is. The Jewish people thought their enemy was Rome, but Jesus saw behind Rome to the real enemy. The real enemies are Satan and his demons. “The devil...is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). The first step of Jesus’ public ministry was to do battle with the devil.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11).

This is a monumental moment in the history of the world. In a very profound way, it is the re-writing of history. It is a replay of the Garden of Eden. Jesus is the New Adam who battles temptation on behalf of all humanity.

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Where Adam & Eve doubted and sinned, Jesus was victorious! “He has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was able to resist the devil’s temptations and cause him to flee. How did He do it? The only weapon He used was truth. He fought Satan’s lies by faith in God’s Word, and Satan had to flee.

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Jesus’ only response to temptation was: It is written! Jesus wielded the weapon of God’s word and slit the throat of Satan’s temptations. This was a major victory. From this moment on, Jesus’ own words had power over demons. Demons literally fled at His command. This was evidence that the Kingdom of God had come to earth. God was taking charge! “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28).

Notice Jesus’ statement about where His power comes from. He says that the source of His power is the Spirit of God. His weapon was the Word of God, and the power behind that weapon was the Spirit of God.

**The Power of the Kingdom – The Spirit of God**

Jesus, as the Messiah, was the Anointed One. His anointing happened at His baptism immediately before he went into the desert to be tempted by the devil. “Jesus was baptized...and the Holy Spirit descended on him...” (Luke 3:21-22).

This anointing with the Holy Spirit was the power behind everything Jesus said and did for the next three years. Here is the way Jesus described His mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

In the ministry of Jesus the Messiah, Heaven has come to Earth! This means that: The Word of Heaven and the Spirit of Heaven are breaking into this world with the power of Heaven to deliver from evil and bring the blessings of Heaven to Earth! The time of these blessing is both now and later.
The Time of the Kingdom – NOW and LATER

With Jesus’ announcement that the Kingdom is at hand, the process of God taking charge had begun. Evil was being defeated and people were being set free. “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them... ‘Behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.’” (Luke 17:20-21)

When the Word and the Spirit came with power in the ministry of Jesus, the Kingdom became NOW! It is in our midst!

However, even though the Kingdom has begun, the final victory is not yet. The final victory is FUTURE. The Kingdom is already present, but not yet completed. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:31-34).

Many of Jesus’ parables show that the Kingdom will steadily progress through history until the final victory is won in the end. One of the clearest of these is the parable of the mustard seed: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31-32).

The Progress of the Kingdom – a Seed that Grows

The progress of the Kingdom began at the baptism of Jesus when He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. It continued as He defeated the devil in the wilderness and resisted temptation. It moved along throughout His ministry as He and His followers proclaimed its message and brought its blessings. “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:7-8).

Jesus’ likened the progress of the Kingdom to a farmer who scatters seed. Wherever the message of the Kingdom is preached, the seed is being sown and the battle against Satan is being waged. “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received
the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 13:18-23)

The process of producing a crop in the Kingdom of God takes time. It requires the planting of seed and the watering of seed. It requires the tilling of the ground of people’s hearts. It requires patience. The Kingdom will grow like a mustard tree – almost imperceptible at first, but eventually becoming the largest of all the trees. As Jesus’ life moved toward the cross, only a handful of people had actually entered the Kingdom with Him and were living in it. But all of that was about to change. The Price of the Kingdom was about to be paid.

**The Price of the Kingdom – The Cross**

As the excitement over Jesus’ miracles started to subside, it became clear that Jesus’ mission was about to take a very dark turn. There was a price that needed to be paid. The wages of sin is death, and people can only inherit the Kingdom of God if this debt is paid.

A consistent theme of Jesus’ Kingdom parables is God’s desire to forgive sinners and cancel their debts. “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents [millions of dollars] was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.” (Matthew 18:23-27).

This is an incredible story! The message is clearly that we owe a debt to God that we can never pay because of our sins, but that He is going to CANCEL our debt! How can this be?

When the devil hears this, he bristles with anger and hurls accusations against us and protests to God. “[The devil is] the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10). The devil says to God: “You can’t just cancel their debt. That would be unrighteous of you. It would be unjust. The punishment must fit the crime. Their crimes are infinite crimes. The wages of sin is death and they must pay forever!”

What the devil doesn’t realize is that there is a divine conspiracy going on. The Son of God became a man to die for the sins of the people. The Son of God Himself is going to pay the infinite debt! The Messiah will satisfy the justice of God in order to justify the mercy of God! “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:25-26).
When Jesus died on the cross, He completely disarmed the devil and his demons. They no longer have any basis for accusing us. **He forgave us all our sins,** having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. **And having disarmed the powers and authorities [the devil and his demons], he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15).**

When Jesus died on the cross, the oldest promise in the Bible was fulfilled! **The LORD God said to the serpent, “...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15).**

Jesus is the promised offspring. As He died on the cross, Satan bruised His heel while Jesus crushed His head! The cross DESTROYED the devil and his work! **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8).**

The price of the Kingdom has been paid in full! The ultimate victory of the Kingdom is sure! The devil and his demons are defeated and disarmed!

**The Certainty of the Kingdom – the Resurrection**

The infallible evidence that evil has been defeated and the curse has been lifted is that God raised Jesus from the dead! **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25).**

It is now just a matter of time before Jesus returns to judge the wicked, eliminate evil once and for all, and set up His eternal Kingdom on earth! **“He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31).**

In the meantime, we live in the time of the already and not yet of the Kingdom. Heaven has come to earth in a very real way. The decisive victory has already been won. The Kingdom of God is present and available. But the FINAL victory is still in the future. The Kingdom is progressing and growing like a mustard seed. More and more people are entering. Billions have already entered. Many more are still to come. The end will not come until the Gospel of the Kingdom is preached throughout the entire earth as a testimony to all nations. There will eventually be a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people and language gathered around the throne to worship the Lamb who was slain and raised to life!

But every person who enters the Kingdom comes through the same door. There is only one way.
The Entrance to the Kingdom – Faith in Jesus

Jesus is very clear that HE is the only way to enter the Kingdom of God. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

You must be united to Jesus to inherit the Kingdom, and this happens by faith in Him alone.

And Jesus does not leave us to wonder what faith looks like: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44-46).

Faith in Jesus means seeing Him as a treasure, as a pearl of great value, worth selling everything in order to have. Repentance is the flip side of this kind of faith. To repent means to turn away from other treasures and turn to Jesus instead. The way into the Kingdom is to “repent and believe in the Gospel.” Here is the way the Apostle Paul described it: “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

Having faith in Jesus means seeing Him as the satisfaction of every desire you have. He is the satisfaction of your desire for love, your desire for joy, your desire for peace. There is nothing more satisfying, nothing more pleasurable, nothing more fulfilling, nothing more exciting than a relationship with Jesus. Is this what you see when you look at Jesus? Do you see the treasure? Do you see the pearl of great price?

This is what Jesus called being born again. This is the new heart that was promised by the prophet Ezekiel, and it happens when you see the glory of Jesus in the Gospel. When you hear the message of the Kingdom – that the Son of God has come into the world to live for you and die for you – do you see His glory? Do you see the glory of His love? Are you drawn to Him and is your heart moved to love Him? If so, you have entered the Kingdom and have received the down payment of your future inheritance.

The Down Payment of the Kingdom – the Holy Spirit

The most breathtaking truth about the Kingdom of God is that everyone who enters is adopted as the child of God! We become part of His family! “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God…” (John 1:12).

Jesus becomes our brother and we are given the family Spirit as the down payment of our inheritance. “You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” (Ephesians 1:13-14).
We are going to spend a full four weeks on the Holy Spirit when we do the next round of Core Sessions in the spring, but for now suffice it to say that the Holy Spirit is the presence of the Kingdom today. He is the deposit. He is the engagement ring who guarantees that the wedding feast is coming. Through the Holy Spirit, all the blessings of the Kingdom are available to us in varying degrees today.

**The Blessings of the Kingdom – NOW and LATER**

Through the Holy Spirit, we are given a foretaste of the future. Heaven has come to earth! I want to spend the few minutes we have left creating a longing inside each of us to experience MORE of the Kingdom on earth today as it is in heaven. I am just going bullet point some of the blessings we should expect to enjoy as we wait for Jesus to return.

**The Kingdom overcomes physical misery and brings healing.** (see Acts 3:16, 4:10, 4:30, 5:16, 8:7, 14:9, 28:8). Jesus commissioned His disciples to heal with the following instruction, “Heal the sick...and say to them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:9).

**The Kingdom overcomes death and brings resurrection.** These were Jesus' words in Matthew 10:7-8, “Preach this message: 'The Kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead ... “ John Piper’s words are insightful in dealing with these miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit:

"Notice something very important. To our knowledge Jesus raised only three people from the dead during his earthly ministry (see Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:38-44). In the book of Acts, the apostles raised two people from the dead (Acts 9:36-43; 20:9-10). Contrast this with the countless people that Jesus healed. Why do you suppose Jesus healed people by the hundreds, or even thousands, but raised only three from the dead? Ultimately it comes down to this: in the overlap of this age and the age to come – in the "already" and the "not yet" of redemption, in the time of the mystery of the Kingdom – God wills that some blessings of the age to come be experienced more fully than others. And he chooses as he wills which blessings we will have now and in what measure.... Sickness and death were not abolished with the coming of Jesus. His healings and resurrections were signs that in the final Kingdom they would be abolished."

**The Kingdom overcomes demonic oppression and brings deliverance.** (see Acts 5:16, 8:7, 19:12). Again, in Jesus’ own words: “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20).

**The Kingdom overcomes rebellion and brings conversion.** This is clear in many of Jesus' parables. In the parable of the net, the Kingdom is the power that gathers fish. In the parable of the wheat and tares, the good seed means the sons of the Kingdom. In John's Gospel, it is the
Spirit that brings rebirth and enables a person to see the Kingdom (3:3-8). The Spirit prepares people to inherit the Kingdom of God by washing them, sanctifying them and justifying them (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Without the Spirit's work, it is impossible for people to be saved (Mt. 19:23-26).

**The Kingdom overcomes condemnation and brings forgiveness.** As we saw, Jesus taught that the Kingdom is like a king who called his debtors to account, and when one of them pleads for mercy concerning a million dollar debt, the king has pity and forgives him everything he owes. We know from this side of the cross how the King did it! Indeed, all of the Kingdom gifts were purchased on the cross. Because of the cross, tax collectors and harlots go into the Kingdom of God (Mt. 21:31).

**The Kingdom overcomes wrongdoing and brings righteousness.** Where the Kingdom of God comes the will of God is done: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done" (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom changes the way people live by changing the things they desire and enjoy: "The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

**The Kingdom overcomes sadness and brings joy.** This is the inevitable fruit of the Kingdom when it brings life, healing, deliverance, conversion, forgiveness and righteousness. The Kingdom is "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

**The Kingdom overcomes aimless futility and brings purposeful ministry.** In Revelation 1:6, John says, "[Jesus] has made us a Kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." What the Kingdom creates when it draws men and women into its power is a priesthood of believers. And priests are above all ministers. If you belong to the Kingdom of God, you belong to a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Your calling is to draw near to God with the burdens of people, and to draw near to people with the blessings of God – and the Holy Spirit is the power to accomplish the task!

As we talk about the presence of these blessings of the Kingdom in the world today, it does not mean that they are all equally common, only that they are all possible because the Kingdom is present. The Kingdom has been inaugurated, so these blessings of the Kingdom have also been inaugurated in deposit form. When the Kingdom reaches its consummation, these blessings will also reach their consummation. In the meantime, we should eagerly seek them and pray for them with great expectation. The presence of these blessings is at least part of what Jesus meant when he said that we shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us! The powers of the Kingdom will be at work in and through us by the Holy Spirit!

Perhaps the reason we do not see more of the Kingdom's power in the world today is that we are not being obedient to seek and pray for the Kingdom to come - not just in the age to come, but here and now. It seems appropriate to close with three charges given to us in the Scriptures: This, then, is how you should pray... "Our Father in heaven, ...your Kingdom come..." (Matthew 6:9-10). "...seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness ... “ (Mt. 6:33). "...eagerly desire spiritual gifts...” (1 Cor 14:1).