

Leadership TODAY

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What is the Gospel of the Kingdom?

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Tired of religious cliches, men cry out, 'Tell it like it is'. Life must have a goal, a journey must have a destination, the race must have a prize.

Knowing this, we look at the Bible for the issue that presses itself firmly to the fore in these considerations, and in doing so are confronted with the kingdom of God.

Our task as leaders is to bring the people of God understanding in the mysteries of the kingdom and into an experience of its power.

The Kingdom – Root Meaning

To 'tell it like it is' we must 'know it like it is' and so ask ourselves, 'What does the word kingdom mean in its biblical use?' Both the Hebrew word **malkuth** and Greek term **basileia** have the same essential root meaning – 'the authority and sovereignty exercised by a king'. The emphasis lies more on the rule than upon the territory ruled over. 'The Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all' (Ps 103:19).

A Present Reality

This kingdom is a present reality to

be received and entered here and now.

Jesus said, 'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone enters it violently' (Lk 16:16).

Paul stated as a matter of present experience that God '**has** rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son of his love' (Col 1:13).

Who Rules?

Bewildered by the endless tensions in contemporary society, people are asking, 'What's behind it all?'

Paul reminded the Ephesians, 'You were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient' (Eph 2:1-2).

That same spiritual ruler is elsewhere called 'the god of this age' who has 'blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ' (2 Cor 4:4).

Some have misread these scriptures as saying the essential wickedness of this age proves Satan and his emissaries to be the supreme government of our

time. We reject such a view. Whereas Satan has been permitted an exercise of limited power throughout this period, nevertheless God is still in supreme control. At no time has he surrendered his governmental authority. He is 'King of the ages' (Rev 15:3). And that includes this present age as well as the age to come.

Present Calamities

Meanwhile our generation continues to be racked with the pains of a collapsing world system refusing to yield itself to the government of God. We are witnessing global conflict, social upheaval, economic collapse, as the god of this age desperately seeks to stave off his inevitable end.

It is our task as leaders to unfold the mystery of the kingdom of God, to help Christians understand the tragedies of human history. It is the key that unlocks both Old and New Testaments. It will help them see their own life experience in new perspective and give them the clear goal to which God by the Spirit is urging them forward.

Great Events That End This Age

1. Worldwide Testimony of the Kingdom.

Jesus clearly stated that the end of this age will not come until the nations of this world have been confronted with a visible testimony of the kingdom of God, preached in word and in power by a redeemed community, in whom the theology of the kingdom has become the practised lifestyle. 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come**' (Matt 24:14).

2. The appearance of Jesus Christ. The return of Jesus and the end of the age are one and the same thing, the preceding signs of which are outlined in details by Jesus himself in Matthew 24.

These signposts to his coming were given in response to the questions of his disciples, 'Tell us, they said, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' (Matt 24:3).

3. The Resurrection of the Dead. Jesus said, 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die, for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection' (Lk 20:34-36).

The preaching of resurrection provoked the persecution of Christians in the first century. Such preaching was a continuous confession before satanic forces that this present age of darkness is going to end with the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom.

We have in Scripture examples of some of the ways Satan sought to obscure this truth:

- a) Some denied the resurrection altogether (Col 15:22).
- b) Some declared it was past already (2 Tim 2:18).
- c) Some made it an occasion for trick questions (Matt 22:28).
- d) Some mocked (Acts 17:32).
- e) Some postponed any consideration of resurrection (Acts 17:32).

4. The Judgment.

This age will close with an awful finality for the wicked as opposed to the eternal joy of God's people. 'This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth' (Matt 13:49-50).

5. The submitting of all things to God.

The final universal state of things is not in doubt. The triumph of the kingdom

in this present age will permit Jesus to submit everything joyfully to his Father: 'Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must remain until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-25).

The age to come will be the uncontested Rule of God over the nations

Then nothing will remain at variance with his will nor in rebellion against his government. As God's people we will hear the King say to us, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world (Matt 25:34).

Meanwhile a Foretaste

Essentially what has happened to us as Christians is that the 'powers of the age to come' have penetrated backward into this present evil age. We are those who have 'tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age' (Heb 6:4-5).

We continuously triumph in this present age, by the power of his resurrection life. This confession has provoked great wrath and enmity against the Church throughout the centuries. Jesus prophesied this saying, 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would have you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you (Jn 15:18-19).

Life's Centre

The kingdom of God was central to the life and ministry of Jesus. It was the focus of his instruction in the beatitudes, the burden of the prayer he taught us to pray and the subject of his greatest command with promise: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (Matt 6:33).

Until men realise that the kingdom of God is their centre of existence, life for them is a struggle without explanation. Christians will never know their place in the purpose of God until they

understand that his purpose centres in his kingdom.

Kingdom living is fully manifest in King Jesus. For God's kingdom to fill the earth means Christlikeness being universalised by God's people.

The obedience, compassion, strength and peace which characterised the life of Jesus are just the same qualities of kingdom living which we too are called upon to demonstrate. It is in these attitudes and qualities that Jesus brought the Father out where men could see him. God's nature and life were totally manifested amongst men in Christ.

For me to receive the kingdom is to receive God's will into every area of my life

When we pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven', we are really saying the same thing in different words, because the coming of the kingdom in the now is the doing of the will of God here on earth.

This is what we mean when we say that the kingdom of God is 'within us' (Lk 17:21). It is written in the very laws of our being. It is not something externally imposed upon us, a rule or standard that we struggle to keep, but it is the internal law of our existence.

Sons Of The Kingdom

In the parable of the weeds in the field Jesus said, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom'. Here we are introduced to the kingdom expressed in the corporiety of God's people in the earth.

Just as the kingdom written in the very laws of our being is the kingdom 'within us', so the kingdom expressed in the interaction of God's people is the kingdom of heaven demonstrated 'amongst us'. It is not a law of our inner being confined to ourselves but an inner law that governs our relationship with others also.

The word of the kingdom is the axe to the root of independence and individualism. There can be no powerful impact of the kingdom of God in this

age except through the people of God living in covenant together under his government.

The Law Of Liberty

To speak of the kingdom in terms of a law written in our inner being and expressed in our relationship with others may sound strange at first, for many have not equated law with liberty. Whereas in fact, whether within myself or in my relationships with others, it is only the government of God that produces total freedom for me. It is living in submission to the government of God, submitting myself to the laws of his kingdom, that I discover true freedom (Jas 1:25, 2:12).

'Seek Ye First'

The leaders must lead before the people can follow. We are the pace-setters in kingdom living and power. We must lead them in fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24:14 – 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come'.

It will require the total giving of ourselves to 'seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness'. In practice this requires:

- **Learning the ways of God.**
Every area of life is covered in the Word of God. Here, we are taught right attitudes as a husband, wife, parent, child, employer and employee. We are shown what kind of relationship we should enjoy with God, with this world, with enemies and friends.
The wisdom of God in his Word brings understanding and explanation as to God's desire in every field of life. In obeying these principles we are discovering the way of the kingdom.
- **Doing things God's way.**
Knowing the ways of God is one thing but it is by our **actions** that we will be judged.
It is important to do God's will in God's way. The wisdom of his Word not only shows us what to do but how to do it. The gospel of the kingdom is good news producing good works.

Doing things God's way requires us to:

- **Submit our minds to his rule.**
Not entertaining thinking or reasoning contrary to faith. We will live and act in the confidence that whatever is the will of God in kingdom interests, we have the enabling to carry out.
- **Submit our emotions to his rule.**
Not allowing our faith to be governed by our feelings, which are so subject to change according to circumstance. Fulfilment does not come by following feelings but by doing the will of God.
- **Submit our will to his rule**
Jesus epitomised this aspect of God's kingdom when he prayed in the garden, 'Nevertheless not my will but thine be done'. We will find that our will is never in conflict with God's will once we have decided that we will do his will!

It was this demonstrated life of the kingdom in the early disciples that

provoked people to call them 'people of the way' (Acts 24:14). Knowing and doing, then, are the keys to extending the rule of God in our lives and through us into the world around. The kingdom of God is **righteousness** in every relationship. This is the way of God which, in its turn, produces **peace** in mind and church and fills God's people with the **joy** of the Lord, which is our strength.

Ours is the dual task of proclaiming the way of the kingdom to God's people and provoking them to live this way by the example of our lives, in character and charisma, in disciplined living and dynamic faith.

In doing this we shall not only see the release of God's **blessing** upon us but the **works** of God being manifest amongst us to an increasing degree. And so amid the shaking of the kingdoms of this world, the kingdom of God, which cannot be moved, will be clearly manifest in the church of Jesus Christ.

Hints for Housegroup Leaders:

Mike Stevens: Let me share with you some things I have learned about cultivating a happy and fruitful relationship with –

THE MAN WHO IS OVER YOU

Brrr – Brrr – the telephone rings – at 11 pm! The pastor's wife picks up the receiver.

Pastor: 'Who is it dear?'

His Wife: 'It's brother Jim, darling asking for the third time when are you going to get together with him again?'

Whether he is the pastor, one of the elders, or some other leader, your relationship with the man to whom you are accountable is a vital 'joint of supply' for you both. Here are four things that you, for your part, must do to keep it healthy:

1. Learn to Serve

Not the approach of, 'How much can I get out of this relationship?' – that's always counter-productive, – but 'How

much can I put in?' – that's always rewarding. With such an attitude he will not always be worrying about how you are, in good or bad attitude, coping or flopping. You will not be a constant drain on him. Instead, his faith will be strengthened by your faith, and his confidence in you enhanced with each encounter. Your relationship will then be one of joy. I know of a housegroup leaders whose greeting is always, 'The King's ruling and coming soon, Mike! It's good to see you, brother'. So much better than, 'It's been such a long time since you contacted me', or straight away 'fussing' about some minor detail.

2. Learn to Obey

'O, there you go again! The authority