

The Kingdom of God-Pt 2.

In our last talk I shared with you that there are two realms or dimensions: God's Kingdom and ours. Sometimes God's Kingdom is called the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. The common reference to man's fallen attempt at ruling is "the World", the "Kingdom of the Air", etc. God's Kingdom, or Heaven, is the place where God's will is done. Earth is the place where our will is done.

Scripturally, it was part of God's intention all along that humanity would choose to submit their Kingdom's to His. However, humanity has refused to do that and it has resulted in death for us—the absence of real life. Ever since humanity's fall in the Garden, God has been acting in His creation and through time to redeem or bring the world back into harmony with himself. He has given opportunities to humanity to pursue his Kingdom.

The Nation of Israel

In the Old Testament God gave the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the people of Israel—the opportunity of establishing His Kingdom *as a nation* (Exodus 19:5-7). If they were willing, He would be both their God and King. He gave them guidelines for living in community with each other within the context of a national Kingdom of God. He asked them to submit to his guidelines or will for them.

The guidelines given by God through the Torah were to ensure that the community of Israel was centered on the love of God and the love of others. Compared to other ancient law documents (such as the Law Code of Hammurabi), the Torah was amazing in its demand for equality for the poor and foreigners. So much so that years of Sabbath and Jubilee were given in order to provide for a forgiveness of debts (which would go as far as freeing indentured slaves) and all production in those years went to the poor (Leviticus 25). The laws concerning the tithe made sure that those who had no inheritance in Israel were given the proper care and concern (Lev 27; Deut. 12).

However, Israel repeatedly rejected God's offer to be the representatives of His Kingdom as a nation, beginning with their desire for a king of "flesh and blood" in 1st Samuel 8 and continuing down through their worship of idols during the entirety of Israel's monarchy period. Israel as a nation never fully pursued or kept God's

instructions concerning community and concern for each other. Completely opposite from God's guidelines, Israel and Judah (after the splitting of the Kingdom) both fell into a history of idolatry as well as injustice and oppression of the poor. As a nation they rejected both God's desire for them to love Him and His desire for them to love others.

Because of this (and God's promises of deliverance to His people) the oppressed and righteous men and women during the Old Testament and inter-Testament periods began to understand and hope that the Kingdom of God would finally appear with the coming of the Messiah—God's chosen savior and leader. The promises of God spoken through the prophets pointed to a day of when "good news" would be proclaimed to the poor and the oppressed...the good news that the anticipated Kingdom had arrived.

The Call of Jesus—The Kingdom Is Here

Of course God knew all along that the nation of Israel would reject His opportunity for them to live in harmony with His Kingdom (Deut. 17:14-20). God's ultimate plan was for the Kingdom to be *trans-national* (Isaiah 2:2; Galatians 3:26-29). His Kingdom is not even a part of this world's fallen system...including the boundaries of nations. His Kingdom is a super-national, super-natural Kingdom. What Israel couldn't do as a nation, however, God would do through His Son (Isaiah 9:6-7). When Jesus begins His earthly ministry, He declares boldly that the prophecies concerning the Kingdom were being fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:17-19, cf Isaiah 61:1-2), and He goes from location to location declaring that people should repent (turn around) and embrace the Kingdom because it was now "at hand" or within reach. Note the following Scriptures:

[Luke 4:43](#)

But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." –NOTE John 20:21

[Matthew 4:23](#)

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. See Also: [Matthew 9:35](#); [Luke 8:1](#);

[Matthew 3:2](#)

and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

See Also [Matthew 4:17](#); [Mark 1:15](#); [Luke 10:9](#); [Matthew 12:28](#); [Luke 11:20](#); Luke 21:31

[Luke 17:20-21](#)

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within[17:21 Or among] you."

A Limited View of Salvation

It is unfortunate that modern Christianity has placed so much emphasis on a cerebral, or head knowledge, version of salvation. For many Christians there is a mental assent to the concepts of Christianity, but it doesn't affect their lives or lifestyles. Christians talk a lot about being saved...but what are we being saved *from*? And *to what* are we being delivered? For example, if I was drowning in a river and someone saved me, I would be saved from the river to the safety of the bank. For many Christians the good news is simply that if we "believe" in Jesus we will be "saved"—which usually means that we will go to Heaven instead of Hell.

It is unfortunate because such a limited view of salvation is rarely (if ever) found in the Scriptures. Jesus called people to follow him in the here and now. The rich young ruler asks how to have eternal life, and Jesus answers by telling him what to do in the present. Faith and action in this world are inseparable (James 2). Certainly the promise of eternal life is given repeatedly and is an important aspect of salvation, but *when does eternal life really begin*? In the Biblical framework, and definitely in Jesus' teachings, it begins now. He came to give us life and life to the full (John 10:10) beginning in this world and continuing in the world to come. Most of Jesus' teachings deal with practical issues faced in this world—someone being your enemy, giving to the needy, disputes with others, etc. His call to his followers was to begin living in harmony with the Kingdom of God *now*. In the Biblical picture, we are being saved *from* the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of God declared by Jesus ([Colossians 1:12-14](#)).

There will be a day when the Kingdom is completely fulfilled, when the King returns. For now, the Kingdom consists of pockets of faithful followers living under God's rule. C.S. Lewis gives a great picture in [Mere Christianity](#) of the Kingdom of God being like groups of resistance fighters in a conquered territory holding out until the full victory. Like France in World War Two, this world has been taken captive and the Kingdom fights against that captivity.

The limited view of salvation held by many Christians also misses the point that God's plan for salvation in the Scriptures is communal. He

desires for group of people to live out the salvation message together in His Kingdom and Body. In the Hebrew Scriptures it was the *qahal* and the Christian Scriptures it was called the *ecclesia*—both of which refer to a “called out” group of people. This contrasts with the popular view of salvation which only focuses on the “me” aspect; that it is *my personal belief* in a *personal savior* that matters. For the most part, very little emphasis has been placed on the Christian’s need for community with other believers as they follow Christ. One of the first things God said about humanity in Genesis is that it is not good for us to live alone, and being in harmony with His Kingdom will result that we are in community with others. Salvation is not just a personal issue. We see this concept strongly in the Old Testament where sin resulted in separation not only from God but the community of Israel as well. Please not that separation could be both literally and figuratively a form of death in the Middle-Eastern landscape. (We will discuss more on this later...for now see Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Corinthians 12; [2 Samuel 7:22-24](#))

So What’s So Good About The Kingdom?

Jesus came preaching the “good news” of the Kingdom of God. The logical next question is, “Okay...so what is so good about the Kingdom of God?” To answer that question we should probably look at some of the values of the Kingdom that are expressed in the Scriptures. What we will find is that the Kingdom of God offers us the kind of life we were created to experience.

In the Kingdom We Find Fulfillment Of God’s Purpose and Plan for Us

It is not an accident that God made any of us. He sustains all of creation by his very thought. [Psalm 3:5](#) says “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.” Which could be interpreted to mean that if you or I exist God must be thinking about us. The Psalmist wrote that we are fearfully and wonderfully made ([Psalm 139](#)). God took great care and concern in our planning and construction—not just the physical but the spiritual aspects as well. If you can imagine, the unfathomable creator God was *in awe of us* when he made us. In other Scriptures God has shown that He chose certain individuals (such as Jeremiah) before they were even born to carry out his calling and plan ([Jeremiah 1](#)). It is conceivable that God has a plan and a purpose for *each of us*.

As I mentioned in my previous talk, the question of meaning is one with which every person eventually deals. Whether it’s the year before

college, during a mid-life crisis, or on the deathbed, most people ponder what their life is all about and to what it amounts. For humans life needs to mean *something*. We need purpose. Whether it's playing football, doing a good job, getting good grades, being a good friend, etc, we need a reason for living. When life becomes meaningless the result for many is apathy, depression, despair, and even death.

One part of the great news is simply: "You have a purpose." What is that purpose? According to the Scriptures we were created in God's image (Gen 1). What does that look like in a fallen world? Basically we're "to do good works"...to do good stuff ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). Jesus put it in these words: "Do your good deeds so when people see them they will honor God." ([Matthew 5:16](#)) Our whole purpose is to bring honor to God by doing good things for others and creation.

Unfortunately, in the legalism of modern Christianity this purpose doesn't always bring the excitement with it that it should. When we think of "good deeds" we think of service projects and checklists of spiritual competence. But really, how great is it that we can find fulfillment by simply going around doing good things for others? Doing good things just because it's good and it's what we're made to do?

My wife and I have decided that we're going to embrace frivolous giving. We like to be kind of hit and run givers. It's more fun that way and the Bible says to be a cheerful giver, so that's what we do. This first came to us when we were at a hamburger restaurant and we got excellent service from our waitress (basically she took great care of serving our oldest daughter, who was two at the time). I had just gotten paid for a web-site I did, and we weren't going to a church so we didn't know where and how we should tithe...then it clicked with us at the same time: the waitress! Suddenly we were so excited and secretive. "Okay...how much?" "I don't know...the whole tithe?" "Wow! The whole tithe? That would be great!" "Okay, you get the cash ready and leave it while I go pay...then we'll leave all at once." "Okay." So Amy went and paid, I took care of the tip and our daughter and then we were gone...out the door and away. It was so great. We were fulfilling our purpose to do good works, and it felt like being a jigsaw puzzle piece being placed in the right spot. Not in a self-righteous "pat-ourselves-on-the-back" sense, but in a simple, "Man, that's the right thing to do" sense. When you start giving that way, it becomes contagious. You want to do it more, and you're looking for opportunities. That's Kingdom living.

The Kingdom is also a place where God wants us to use our talents and abilities in the purpose of doing good works. He doesn't want us to simply use them; He wants us to *risk* them (Matt 25:14-28) The Kingdom is a place of risk and adventure. It's those that don't risk the talents given them that are punished in the end of the parable. The Master wanted his servants to gamble with His gifts. So the Kingdom of God is also a place where people's talents and gifts are embraced and risked. In the Kingdom we should be encouraging each other to develop talents and pursue dreams. Nothing is as exciting as a risky life!

(Note: Okay, usually when people talk about using their talents for the Kingdom they talk in light of "church". For example, if your talent is singing, you should sing at church. Or if your talent is administration you should help administer things in church. To me the Biblical picture is much different. The talents are most often meant to be risked in the world. When Jesus came He did not spend all His time in the synagogues, but it appears he spent most of his time with normal people in normal settings...many times with risky people in risky settings. God wants us to be right in the middle of those situations, risking with the talents he gave us. The example would be normal occupations for abnormal reasons.)

In the Kingdom We Are No Longer Slaves To the System

Jesus made clear to Pilate that His Kingdom was not grounded in this world's system ([John 18:35-37](#)). In the Kingdom of God the values of the world are turned upside down. The values Jesus taught on both Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6 alone are mind boggling in their reversal of world's standards of both attitude and action.

In the Kingdom of Jesus, one is not concerned about personal possessions, or even anxious about life itself (Luke 6 and 12). Completely opposite from the world's values, Jesus' Kingdom has very little to do with self at all ([Luke 17:33](#); [Matthew 10:39](#); [Matthew 16:25](#)). While this might not necessarily sound appealing—death to self—Jesus promises that true life is found in sacrificing for the Kingdom (which makes sense, since that is our purpose) (Luke 12). Real life is found not in the superficial and empty pursuits centered on selfish ambitions, but in the reality of serving in Christ's Kingdom ([Luke 9:25](#)). It is *eternal* and therefore *more real* than the dying fallen reign of humanity.

The movie the Matrix is a modern myth that conveys the truth of the message of the Kingdom. Whether on purpose or by accident, it has many great tie-ins to the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom.¹ One of the reasons I feel that movie series was so popular is that it speaks to something deep inside of everyone. That our very struggle is with forces that cannot be seen ([Ephesians 6:12](#)). There is indeed a truth there, even if people are unaware of it...there is a need for another reality and a need for a savior. Christ's Kingdom is the answer to that need. But it isn't some "pie in the sky" kingdom, it's gritty here and now.

In Christ's Kingdom the least are the greatest, the last are first, the disrespected are esteemed, and the humble are lifted up. This is a direct contrast to the competitive, "be number one" world that we live in. The world's system is built upon one-up-manship and self-glorification. In the world the motto isn't just "Be the best you can be" but "Be *the* best." Christ's Kingdom is about serving and the glorification of God ([Matthew 20:24-26](#); [Luke 22:24-26](#)). In the Kingdom we are even encouraged to view others as *better* than ourselves ([Philippians 2:2-4](#))

In Christ's Kingdom people are not judged or valued by how successful, rich, powerful, good looking, intelligent, what they do for or against us, or pious they are (James 2). The only value is that which Christ gives...which he paid with His life. We each have incredible worth because we were made worthy by Jesus. He was willing to lay down His life for us—which makes each of us of unbelievable value ([Romans 5:7-9](#); 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; [Matthew 10:30-32](#)). That is how everyone is valued in the Kingdom.

Even the world's religious systems (Christian and non) are turned upside down in Christ's Kingdom (Colossians 2:20-22). We don't earn our entrance to the Kingdom by our goodness or religiosity, *Christ qualifies us for entrance into the Kingdom*. By His sacrifice He qualifies everyone who is willing ([Colossians 1:11-13](#)). Therefore, in many cases the "sinners" enter the kingdom before the "righteous" ([Matthew 21:31-32](#)). Sinners who are completely aware of their own fallenness and the brokenness of their lives are more than willing to trade an empty life for the grace and value offered in the Kingdom. In their honesty and desperation, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain in Christ's Kingdom. In Christ's words, when they hear the good news they press into the Kingdom forcefully—ahead of

those who hold onto their own self-righteousness and therefore their own empty lives ([Luke 16:15-17](#); [Matthew 23:12-14](#); .

In The Kingdom We Can Be Honest and Find Forgiveness

Because the Kingdom is a place where we're not enslaved to worrying about how others view us. The Kingdom of God is a place of brutal honesty. It is a requirement for membership. Honesty with God, honesty with ourselves, honesty with each other and the world is the expectation in the Kingdom. Our first entrance into the Kingdom is due to an honest appraisal of our own lives and our need for change. Christ's message is "repent and believe". It is unfortunate that the world's value system has invaded the Church to such a degree that we start out on our walk with Christ in such honesty...with admission that we are addicts to sin...but then we learn to wear the masks of saints. We pretend to be someone we are not.

In the Kingdom a person can share his sins without fear of judgment (it could be said that another requirement of the Kingdom isn't just honest repentance but offering forgiveness to others as well—see James 5 & [Matthew 6:14-16](#)). In the Kingdom we are not defined by our mistakes, but by what God says about us. The book of James says clearly that we should confess our sins to one another, and that when we do this we will find healing and forgiveness. One of the greatest things about the Gospel (like the Scriptures) is that it is no namby-pamby fantasy game spirituality...it meets us in the harsh and joyful realities of life. It speaks to the here and now. The Scriptures do not gloss over life, but they present it in its full scandal and beauty. It records kings who chased God's heart and women's bodies, prophets who cried out in warning to their people and in anger and despair to their God, disciples who swore they would give their very lives and abandoned their friend and the Lord of Life to death. Members of the Kingdom can be honest because they find themselves in the great company of history's sinner saints (Hebrews 11).

Most importantly the Scriptures reveal to us a King who is willing to meet us where we are in the midst of our brokenness. Our King is a rescuer who is willing to be born in a barn and embrace dirty humanity (Phil. 2). Like the Father of the prodigal son in Luke 15, He doesn't stand far off expecting us to rise to Him, but he runs to us and offers us everything He owns...knowing we may reject Him again. Because of this we don't have to hide from the light because of our sins, but we can embrace the light because only as our sins are revealed do we find both forgiveness and life ([John 3:18-22](#); [1 John 1:6-8](#))

In God's Kingdom we are also free to honestly question and wonder. To be like Abraham, Job, Jeremiah, and Thomas who asked God hard questions. Sometimes their questions were answered and other times they were not, but God always responded...and in form of grace. He did not punish them for asking. In God's Kingdom we admit that we see the truth dimly now and some things are hard to understand ([1 Corinthians 13:11-13](#)). We are taught by Jesus that by seeking for answers we will find them (Matt. 7:7-9; [James 1:4-6](#)). In God's Kingdom you don't have to hide the fact that you are seeking.

In the Kingdom People Find Healing

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He proclaimed that He came to bring good news to the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, and the lame (Luke 4). The Kingdom provides a place of healing for spiritual, physical, and social disease and suffering. Jesus cast out demons and declared that it was evidence that the Kingdom of God had arrived ([Luke 11:19-21](#)). In answer to John the Baptist's questions about if Jesus were "the One", Jesus gave healing as evidence that he was the anticipated King and Messiah. (Luke 7:18-23). The Kingdom provides a place for hurting people to become whole.

Those Who Are Poor

Poverty is an issue that touches the heart of God. There are over 2,000 Scriptures referring to God's concern for the materially poor. God feels so strongly about those in material need that He identifies Himself with them and says several times in Scripture that whatever is done for those in need is an act done towards God himself (Matthew 25; [Proverbs 19:16-18](#); Jeremiah 22:16). Jesus takes it a step further in Matthew 25 and says whatever *is not done* for them is an act of apathy towards Him (see also Deut. 15:4-11). It is clear from a Scriptural perspective and definitely a Kingdom perspective that loving God will naturally lead to an active love for those in need. Perhaps it could even be expressed stronger terms: No one can love God and not be actively involved in meeting the needs of those in poverty.

Jesus tells His followers to sell their possessions and give the money to the poor ([Matthew 19:20-22](#); [Luke 12:32-34](#)). This is a way we seek the Kingdom of God first. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the early church held everything in common and even sold houses and land to meet the needs of the poor believers in their midst (Luke 2:42-47; 4:32-37). In the Kingdom those in poverty are brought into fellowship and material healing.²

Those Who Are Physically III

A large part of Jesus ministry was the healing of physical ailments—too many occasions to list. This ministry continued in the lives of the disciples as they followed Christ's example. While the records of these healings are of a miraculous nature, that does not mean that healing using medicine and care was not a part of the ministry of the early Church. The Scripture tells us that Luke himself was a physician, and Timothy is told by Paul to use wine for medicinal purposes to help in dealing with a stomach ailment. Some scholars believe that the use of anointing oil in the early church may have had medicinal purposes as well. Whatever the case may be, one of the callings of Christ's followers in the Kingdom is that they offer healing—in whatever fashion—to those who need it in whatever way they can.

Those Who Are Spiritually III

Jesus drove out demons and provided for people's spiritual and emotional healing as well. He opened spiritual eyes to see spiritual truths and brought freedom from the bondage of sin. He offers a release from guilt, shame, and anxiety. Jesus refocused people's life goals towards wholeness rather than brokenness and emptiness. The Kingdom is a place where people are spiritually healed and brought into that wholeness.

Because the Kingdom is a place of healing, it should be viewed as a hospital—there should be a lot of sick people around. Jesus said that it isn't the healthy who need a doctor but the sick ([Mark 2: 16-18](#)). The Kingdom is not a pristine place where everyone is okay. It's a place where everyone is in different stages of remission of material, physical, spiritual and emotional disease. Like many people who survive or battle terminal diseases, we serve others in their battle because we ourselves have been or are in various stages of un-health. Perhaps part of the healing is helping others.

In the Kingdom things like Prayer and reading the Bible Makes Sense

For many people the Bible is a confusing book. We're not really sure how we should approach the Bible...is it a rulebook? A history book? A play book? What do we do with it? In light of the Kingdom, a lot of things in the Bible can start to make sense. We begin to see it as a history of the Kingdom in all the glory of God and the fallenness of its members. We begin to see many of the commands not simply as lists of things we are "supposed to do" but as instructions for living in the new reality of the Kingdom. We see in them examples of how we can

be honest, offer healing, receive grace, and value people in the context of the community of God's people. The Scriptures open our eyes to Who God is and reveal to us his heart for people. We see areas where others have struggled with living in God's Kingdom, struggling not against flesh and blood, but unseen powers. And ultimately we realize that *we* are part of this struggle and this wonderful story that we are reading about in the Bible. That is the amazing thing: God's work is not yet done, and *we get to participate with Him* in this great work of which He is the author (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:2).

In God's Kingdom prayer becomes as natural as breathing. When we are participating in *tikkun olam*, the healing of the world, it is easy to be overwhelmed and *need* God's intervention, guidance, support, and power. Prayer becomes a cry of brokenness, a hope for wholeness, and expressions of happiness for pockets of the Kingdom when we see them.

An Invitation

The good news about the Kingdom is it is the kind of reality that at some level we all want. It is the kind of reality for which we were created. Everyone wants purpose. Everyone wants to be free from systems of comparison, guilt, and shame. Everyone wants a place they can be themselves without fear, and where they are not defined by their mistakes. Everyone wants a place where they can find wholeness instead of brokenness.

The really good news is that we have all been invited to be a part of such a reality. We are invited to experience it in pockets of the Kingdom *now* where groups of people are living according to these values, praying for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven"; and ultimate totality when the King returns to marry heaven to earth.

The unfortunate reality is that often times that invitation is turned down or ignored. Jesus tells two parables that talk about the good news of the Kingdom. One is in Luke ____ where the King throws a party and invites everyone to come and the temporary cares of their own kingdoms keep them from participating. The other is the parable of the sower, where sometimes the good news of the Kingdom is stolen or choked from peoples hearts and lives by Satan and the same temporary concerns.

The question for you is are you willing to accept the King's invitation to the kind of reality for which you were made?

To Be Continued in Part 3...

¹ We could spend much time looking at Ancient and Modern Myths, and what if any Truth can be found in them. For the Matrix the Warchowski brothers intentionally added elements of many different myths, philosophies, and religions. There are definitely Messianic tie-ins found in the Matrix. Look at just some of the comparisons:

- We are born in bondage (Galatians 3:21-23)
- We live in world system that blinds us to our bondage ([2 Corinthians 4:3-5](#))
- We feel that something is wrong with the world ([Ecclesiastes 3:10-12](#))
- We need someone or something to set us free and bring us to the reality
- Sometimes the false system based upon deception seems more appealing than reality
- A choice has to be made about which world one wants to live in—to live with the knowledge of the truth or to live in the deception.

² This is such an important topic in Scriptures that it is amazing that it isn't often mentioned in our churches. For example, we don't think of having no concern for those in poverty as being a major sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, but God says in Ezekiel 16:49 that "...this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."