**What did Jesus say about the Kingdom?**

Last week we started a series on the Kingdom of God and started off with the questions “What is it?” and “why is it important for us to know about?”

Today I want to look at what Jesus thought and said about it.

We know that the Kingdom of God was important to Jesus because he used the phrase “the Kingdom of God” or its equivalent a hundred times in the Gospels.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) present Jesus from the start as being focused on one message: the message that the Kingdom of God was at hand. The long-promised kingdom of God is about to appear and the hour of decision had come.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Right from the start of his ministry, Jesus chose a Scripture that unmistakably announced the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Luke 4:16 *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

He was reading the passage Isaiah 61:1&2

Isaiah 61 speaks of the rebuilding of the ancient ruins and restoring the places long devastated; of renewing the ruined cities.

And the listening Jews understood that in this particular message of Isaiah, the one speaking that prophecy is the messenger – the Messiah, who ushers in the Kingdom era.

To those in that synagogue, Jesus’ words could only mean that he was claiming to be the messiah. And if that was true, the Kingdom of God had become a present reality.[[3]](#footnote-3)

That brought a wide range of responses, but mainly they wanted to kill him.

In all that Jesus did and said, the Kingdom of God was the centre and the circumference of it all, it was total.

The Kingdom of God was the master-conception, the master-plan, the master-purpose, the master-will that gathers everything up into itself and gives it redemption, coherence, purpose, goal” writes E Stanley Jones, the American Methodist Christian missionary, theologian, and author who wrote *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person.*[[4]](#footnote-4)

If we look for specific examples of Jesus’ speaking with a Kingdom focus, let’s start with the Kingdom of God being the central topic in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6) that he taught his disciples.

“*Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.*

May God’s Kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

For Jesus, the Kingdom of heaven is not about people going to heaven. It is about the rule of heaven coming to earth. When Matthew has Jesus talking about heaven’s kingdom, he means that heaven – in other words, the God of heaven – is establishing his sovereign rule not just in heaven, but on earth as well.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Jesus also made the kingdom the bookend (first and last) statements of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3 &10)

3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

10 *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The Beatitudes are explanations and illustrations of the present availability of the kingdom through personal relationship to Jesus. They single out cases that provide proof that, in him, the rule of God from the heavens truly is available in life circumstances that seem beyond all human hope.[[6]](#footnote-6)

And it was his theme of the whole of Matthew Chapter 13 in which he told parables. I will speak on those parables specifically next week

So how important was the kingdom of God to Jesus? All important!

Let’s focus on some ways Jesus related to the kingdom.

1. Jesus establishes the kingdom.

With the coming of Christ, the kingdom begins not in the coronation of a mighty king but in the birth of a crying baby. That is why the Jews missed it, they were looking elsewhere with blinkers on. God came from left field.

Luke 2:8 *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*

And as he commenced his ministry, he made it clear. Mark 1:14 *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

Israel had long awaited the Kingdom, Christ had now inaugurated the Kingdom. “Here I am, I bring the Kingdom to earth.”

The purpose of God coming incognito in as Jesus and the purpose of this Jesus dying on the cross was – so the gospels are telling us - in order to establish God’s kingdom, his justice, on earth as in heaven.[[7]](#footnote-7)

2. Jesus IS the kingdom.

Where the king is, there is the kingdom.

Jesus was himself the evidence for the truth of his announcement about the availability of God's kingdom, or government, to ordinary human existence [[8]](#footnote-8)

This is precisely why Jesus says to the Pharisees in Luke 17:20, *“The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; 21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”*

The kingdom is in your midst, or other translations report it as “here with you” or “within you”.

Remember I left this piece of scripture unfinished last week. This the ending: “The Kingdom is among you”

He was referring to himself.

As Graeme Goldsworthy, the Australian evangelical Anglican theologian specialising in the Old Testament and biblical theology, teaches, “Jesus embodies the kingdom motif of God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule. Jesus is both the faithful ruler and the righteous citizen of the kingdom”.

3. Jesus’ purpose was the kingdom.

Jesus revealed that his purpose was to proclaim the kingdom.

Luke 4:43 *But he said to them, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.” 44 So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea*.

4. And to declare the kingdom.

Luke 8:1 *Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.*

Through his words, Jesus explained the kingdom and invited people to enter into it.

5. Jesus demonstrates the kingdom.

Through his works, Jesus showed the power of the kingdom and his authority over the prince of darkness.

As Jesus explains when challenged about the source of his power said, “*But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”* (Luke 11:20).

C H Dodd answers his own question: in what sense then did Jesus declare that the kingdom of God was present? [he replied] Our answer must begin with his own answer to John’s question (Are you the one or should we wait for someone else – Luke 7:20): “*The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.”*[[9]](#footnote-9)

The existence of the kingdom of God is evidenced by the actions he performed. Jesus not only declares the kingdom in his words but also demonstrates the kingdom in his works.

6. Jesus deploys the kingdom.

Jesus sends his followers out as ambassadors of the kingdom to herald its arrival. This deployment happens in Luke 10 as Jesus sends out the 72:

Luke 10:8 *Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.*

In the great commission, Jesus issues his discipleship battle plan to the church because he possesses “all authority in heaven and on earth”

Matthew 28:18 *Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Jesus sends his Kingdom soldiers to the front lines to engage the kingdom of darkness with the kingdom of light.

7. Jesus transformed their concept of kingdom.

Israel’s messianic hopes focused on the coming of a military conqueror who would rescue them from their geo-political enemies. That is why they sought to make Jesus king (John 6:15).

But Jesus reorients their vision by declaring, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Jesus transforms the concept of kingdom, showing it is holistic in its nature, redemptive in its mission, and cosmic in its scope. My kingdom is not of this world. My kingdom is different, greater than your greatest imagining.

8. Jesus purchased the kingdom.

Through his victorious death and resurrection, Jesus redeemed the kingdom. As he satisfied the wrath of God poured out for those who rebel against his rule, Jesus defeated Satan, sin, and death.

Colossians 2:14 *God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.*

He overcame the world, the flesh, and the Devil by destroying the power of the kingdom of darkness. By purchasing a kingdom people at the cross, Jesus proved himself to be the rightful ruler of the restored kingdom.

In his final words to his people, Jesus concludes his earthly ministry by clarifying the kingdom. Just before his ascension, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Even at the conclusion of his earthly ministry, Jesus resolved confusion about the kingdom.

Acts 1:7 *He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

So the kingdom was key to the start of Jesus’ earthly ministry and its culmination.

In the second coming of Christ, Jesus will return as a triumphant warrior king. When he returns to achieve final victory, the name scribed on his body is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16). At that time, he will place all his enemies under his feet as he launches a new creation kingdom that fully reflects his righteous reign. He will complete the conquest that began with his birth.

The theme of the book of Revelation is the Kingdom: The words Reign, rule, kingdom, power, glory, honour, righteousness are words which occur frequently.[[10]](#footnote-10)

To bring all of that information down into a nutshell:

The kingdom of God is presented by Jesus in three ways: it forms the heart of Jesus’ teaching and it is confirmed by his mighty works. And it is inseparably connected with Jesus’ person as Son of Man[[11]](#footnote-11)

His ministry was one of both demonstration and extension of the Kingdom of God.[[12]](#footnote-12)

If the kingdom of God was central to Jesus’ life and ministry, then it should remain crucial to our theology and ethics today.[[13]](#footnote-13)

To be his disciple is to be a disciple of the kingdom of God. He identified himself and the Kingdom so completely that to be a disciple of one was to be a disciple of the other. What God has joined together, men have separated.

Stanley Jones complained that we have called people to be disciples of Jesus but not disciples of the kingdom of God – to take the King but not his kingdom. [He claimed that] This has weakened the impact of Jesus upon the world.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Jim Wallis complained that we ask how Jesus might fulfil our lives, not how we might serve his kingdom.[[15]](#footnote-15) We need to change our focus from ourselves to the wider concept of kingdom.

When we are accepted by Christ, through our confession and repentance, then we enter the Kingdom of God. That is not a minor change, it is a change of affinity, allegiance and address, a change of post code and a change of passport.

As I said last week, the kingdom is not just a little bit of our lives, it IS our life. Not just our religious bit, but the whole of our lives.

When we preach that all people need to do is accept Jesus, then people get the idea that Jesus is an add-on to their lives, but what Jesus said was that we are in the kingdom and we cannot have a foot in both camps.

If we are in the kingdom, then the kingdom is in the very breath we breathe every minute of every day of our lives.

Totally sold out to Jesus means exactly that. That is why Paul speaks of dying to our old selves and becoming a new person. We do not die just in bits but die completely.

We are reborn into a new kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

But more on this our response to the Kingdom in a few weeks’ time.

1. E Stanley Jones *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person*  27 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* 648-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Charles Colson *Kingdoms in Conflict* 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Brian Hathaway *Beyond Renewal – the Kingdom of God* 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tom Wright *How God became King* 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Dallas Willard *the divine conspiracy* 121 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wright 217 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Willard 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Quoted in Willard 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hathaway 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *IVP* 648-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hathaway 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-connections-between-jesus-and-the-kingdom-of-god/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Jones 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Tom & Christine Sine L*iving on Purpose: finding God’s best for your life* 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)