**The kingdom of God part 1 what is it?**

Last week we looked at our Christian response to war and conflict in the world and found that there has been only 292 years of total peace since 3600BC. [[1]](#footnote-1) Nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom.

Today I want to speak on our everlasting kingdom.

Matthew 6:33 *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

We sometimes hear that the Kingdom of God is coming, and the Kingdom is here; the kingdom is like this or that

We have a hope in the Kingdom of God and expectation in the Kingdom of God but actually what is the kingdom of God.

I want to speak on the concept of the Kingdom of God over the next 5 weeks, with topics of:

* what it is
* What Jesus said about it
* Parables about the Kingdom of God
* the Kingdom being already here or being a future event
* And finally, our responsibility in the Kingdom

So, let’s start with the first question.

What is it?

The Kingdom of God is a unifying theme for the whole of Scripture[[2]](#footnote-2) so to fully understand the gospel, we must try to understand the Kingdom of God.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The kingdom of God is a central theme of the Gospels as well as other New Testament books. It is the message that John the Baptist declared in preparation for Jesus (Matt 3:2), It is the good news that Jesus preached (Mark 1:14–15), It was what Jesus taught the disciples in the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3), and it is what Paul is recorded as proclaiming at the conclusion of the book of Acts (Acts 28:31).[[4]](#footnote-4) So it must be important.

If Jesus made the kingdom of God the centre of his message and the centre of his endeavour, our greatest need is to rediscover the Kingdom of God.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Canadian author Sebastien Richard comments that “Unless we come in full agreement with what the Kingdom of God is, says, and how it operates, we cannot possibly enjoy its fruit in our lives.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

That is the challenge before us.

Frederick Buechner, American author, Presbyterian minister, preacher, and theologian wrote that the Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it.”

We know we want it but don’t really have a grasp on what it is.

We are not used to the concept of kingdom in this day and age. Tonga is a kingdom, Brunei, Nepal and some other Muslim states are absolute kingdoms, but in NZ, we are not. Even if we have a King Charles, we are not a kingdom. Even with our Maori queen Kuini Nga wai hono i te po, we are not a kingdom. We do not experience the absolute power of a King in a place called a kingdom. In most so-called kingdoms of the world, there is only a titular or limited role for the king. We don’t really know from experience what a kingdom is.

So we need to go back to a time where there were kingdoms, including the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites. The times of the Old Testament. It is filled with kings and kingdoms. Even Israel which started off as a theocracy (not king but God), became kingdoms of Judah and Israel because the people wanted one.

When the people called out for a king, the prophet Samuel tried to dissuade them by explaining what a king in a kingdom would do:

1 Samuel 8:11 He said, *“These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. 15 He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”*

And we know what a mess they created in their dual kingdoms. But the Kingdom of God is not like that.

Jewish thought in that time was that the Kingdom of God would be a physical theocracy in Israel (the chosen land of the chosen people under God). And often they referred to the time when the Messiah would come to set up this new kingdom.

Their thought is not too far from our thought. Like the Jews, most of us think of kingdoms as geographic entities, physical realms with boundaries and defences and treasuries. But the Kingdom of God not that, it is the declaration of God’s absolute sovereignty, of his total order of life in this world and the next.[[7]](#footnote-7)

To focus our thoughts on the topic I want to focus on the NT talk of the Kingdom of God. The Gospels use 3 terms: the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven and just the kingdom, almost interchangeably.

The terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of heaven mean the same thing.

Matthew used the term Kingdom of Heaven more frequently than the term kingdom of God because he was writing for Jews for whom heaven was a common first century synonym for God among pious Jews who regarded the name as too sacred to pronounce, but Jesus used both phrases[[8]](#footnote-8). Mark and Luke used the term Kingdom of God because it was more readily understandable by Gentiles.

So first, it is not a geographic domain with set boundaries and settled decrees, but a set of relationships in which Christ is Sovereign. [[9]](#footnote-9)

It could be described in terms of a reign and a realm.

A reign implies that the Kingdom of God is an activity, an activity involving the rule and authority of God throughout the whole of creation.

The Kingdom of God implies God’s lordship, the manifestation of his glory, God’s Godhead.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It has a dynamic rather than static sense. It denotes an activity more than a territory, a power more than a place. God’s kingdom is not a piece of real estate; it is God’s activity in ruling.[[11]](#footnote-11)

A realm implies the extent of that rule.

Some have also suggested that the Kingdom of God is creation healed and restored. This thought gives an even greater appreciation of its scope and extent.[[12]](#footnote-12) A restoration of what was lost in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned.

The character of the kingdom is seen in the character of Jesus – the kingdom is Christlikeness universalised. We will talk more on this next week when we see that Christ is identified with the kingdom.

While the Kingdom comes on earth in the time continuum, it is eternal and is the same rule which is in heaven and because it is Christlikeness.

The Kingdom of God is that the Kingdom is totally and exclusively God’s doing. It cannot be earned by religious or moral effort, imposed by political struggle, or by international mandate or projected in calculation.”[[13]](#footnote-13) We cannot create it.

That is why we sing “Build your kingdom”, we have a part to play, and I will come to that in a later week, but it is God’s doing.

Frederick Buechner writes on this: We cannot make the Kingdom of God happen, but we can put out leaves as it draws near. We can be kind to each other. We can be kind to ourselves. We can drive back the darkness a little. We can make green places within ourselves and among ourselves where God can make his Kingdom happen.

Just like a physical kingdoms like Brunei or Tonga, the Kingdom of God embraces every aspect of life: ethical, spiritual and temporal. [[14]](#footnote-14) The kingdom of God is in all things and everywhere and not segregated and parcelled up in the way we like to segment and treat life.

And while the kingdom is a total order demanding a total obedience, it also brings total freedom.[[15]](#footnote-15) Here it differs from the physical kingdoms we have on this earth.

Think back to what Samuel warned about the consequences of human kingdoms – slavery, forced labour and so on.

Yes, the Kingdom of God has laws, but the laws of the kingdom are hedges put up along the precipices of human living to keep us from hurting or destroying ourselves. The only cramping they bring is cramping from self-destruction. Their primary purpose is freedom. They are called the perfect law of freedom.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Stanley Jones described it this way: A railway engine is made to run on tracks, and if it remains on the tracks it finds its freedom, pulls its loads, and gets to its destinations. But if, in order to gain its freedom, it jumps the tracks, the result is not freedom, but ruin to itself and everybody concerned. There is a track to freedom, to efficiency, to full living, built into your being and mine. It is the kingdom of God; it is within you.[[17]](#footnote-17)

There is a difference between worldly and godly kingdoms. The kingdom of God is concerned primarily with what we are. The kingdoms of this world are concerned with what we do.[[18]](#footnote-18)

As I said earlier, it is not a geographic domain with set boundaries and settled decrees, but a set of relationships in which Christ is Sovereign. [[19]](#footnote-19)

Luke 17:20 *Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, “When will the kingdom of God come?” Jesus answered, “God’s kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you will be able to see with your eyes.* [those who know the verse will know that I have not finished it. I will go there in later weeks]

Paul identified that *‘The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit’* (Rom 14:17), that it is more a matter of values, qualities of character and authority against Satan and sin.[[20]](#footnote-20)

And we do not need to fear the King or kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not a threat to human beings. It is only a threat to Satan and his kingdom. Living within its jurisdiction people find their highest fulfilment.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Brennan Manning in his book “The Ragamuffin Gospel” writes that the kingdom is not an exclusive, well-trimmed suburb with snobbish rules about who can live there. No, it is for a larger, homelier, less self-conscious caste of people who understand they are sinners because they have experienced the yaw and pitch of moral struggle.[[22]](#footnote-22)

It may surprise some, but the Kingdom of God is not the church. It is a much larger identity than the church, but it does embrace the church.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Also, the Kingdom of God is not just the inner reign of Christ in a believer’s life. It is more than that. Jesus demonstrated that there was a public dimension to the Kingdom of God by casting out demons, feeding the hungry, healing the sick and raising the dead.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Although it transcends the world’s political, military, legal, educational and financial systems:[[25]](#footnote-25) the Kingdom of God is not a blueprint for some new social order; nor does it merely set the forces of radical cultural change in motion. Rather, God’s kingdom promises radical changes in human personalities.[[26]](#footnote-26)

So, all this sets the scene for our discussion on the kingdom of God over the next few weeks to whet our appetite for the hope and expectation at the Kingdom of God promises for us who believe.

Let me finish this sermon with a poem entitled On the Kingdom of God by Bettina Van Vaerenbergh

God's Kingdom doesn't come with study, or careful observation.

It's not just some idea to be 'grasped', or a political nation…

God's Kingdom can only be perceived, if a person is born again -

If a person has received spiritual eyesight; then, and only then.

God's Kingdom is all about heavenly, and not earthly, treasures.

The poorest in spirit is greatest here, that is how God measures.

God's Kingdom is all about love, joy, and seeking His righteousness.

About being thankful and content, be it with more or with less.

God's Kingdom is about having peace with God, in the Holy Spirit.

About trusting in God's grace, and not in one's own merit.

God's Kingdom can only be entered by becoming humble and small.

By coming to Jesus like a little child, when we hear Him call.

God's Kingdom is within us; it grows slowly, unseen, in our hearts.

With a tiny mustard seed of faith, that's how true Life starts.

In God's Kingdom, one's own 'goodness' is not what's esteemed -

Only humble dependence on Christ, by whose blood we are redeemed!

1. Today in the Word, June 19, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Brian Hathaway *Beyond Renewal – the Kingdom of God* 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hathaway 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Goldsworthy, M “The Kingdom of God: Already but Not Yet” *In Faithlife Study Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. E Stanley Jones *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sebastien Richard, Kingdom Fundamentals: What the Kingdom of God Means and What it Means for You [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Charles Colson *Kingdoms in Conflict* 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bruce Milne *Know the Truth* 310 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. E. Stanley Jones *Abundant Living: 364 Daily Devotions* - Highlight Loc. 269-70 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Walter Kasper *Jesus the Christ* 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Christopher Marshall “The Kingdom of God: doing God’s will on earth as in heaven” *Reality* Aug/Sept 2004 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hathaway 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Kasper 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Colson 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. E Stanley Jones *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jones *ibid* 220 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. E. Stanley Jones *Abundant Living: 364 Daily Devotions* - Highlight Loc. 664-67 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Jones ibid 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Jones *ibid* Highlight Loc. 269-70 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hathaway 90 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hathaway 159 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Hathaway 91 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hathaway 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Colson 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)