

What is the Kingdom of God?

Mark's gospel makes it clear that Jesus came with a specific mission: to bring in God's kingdom (Mark 1:15). Matthew's gospel uses the equivalent term "kingdom of heaven". This term isn't meant to refer to a geographical place, but to a way of being in which God rules and life is lived accordingly. The kingdom will not be fully realised until Jesus returns - until that point there is still an ongoing struggle between God's kingdom and other ways of being - but Jesus' teaching, both verbal (in his stories and discourses) and practical (in his miracles and behaviour) gives tasters of what this kingdom looks like.

- What tasters of the Kingdom do we find in the way Jesus lived, and in what he taught?
- John's gospel has Jesus speaking of having come "that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). How do you understand life in all its fullness?

Tom Wright describes the Kingdom as being "about God's rescue and restoration of the entire creation as worked out in the context of Israel's covenantal history and God's action in the person and work of Jesus" ("Jesus and the powers" (SPCK: London 2024), p.8).

- How does this idea of "rescue and restoration" contribute to your understanding of the Kingdom?

Building for the Kingdom

The Church's calling is to build for the Kingdom: to live out the Kingdom in what we do and say, to be communities of the Kingdom living in contrast to the world around us. When we live out Jesus' teaching and example in how we relate to God, the world around us and each other, we are building for the Kingdom.

- What might this "building for the Kingdom" look like in our families, in our friendship groups, in our street, in our village, in our church?

Knowing who we are

For most of history the People of God have held a tension between belonging to the kingdom / empire in which they live, and their citizenship as members of the People of God. After years in slavery they were set free from their Egyptian masters and learnt how to live as the free People of God before moving into the promised land. After centuries of swinging between following and rejecting God, most of the Kingdom was exiled, with the remaining remnant exiled little over a century later. The faithful few returned from exile to live under occupation in Israel, having drawn on the history and stories of their faith to develop a clear sense of their identity as God's People. By the time of Jesus the People of God were practised at being a distinct group with dual citizenship: living under Roman occupation, whilst being citizens of the Kingdom of God. To call Jesus "Lord", and to put God first, was a direct challenge to Roman rule and was as countercultural as it was possible to be.

- What does it look like for us to live with such dual citizenship? What can we learn from the successes and failures of our ancestors in the faith?

Thy Kingdom Come

Read: Matthew 20:1-16

- As you read this passage, what do you notice?
What stands out for you?
- Are those who've worked all day right to complain at the pay they receive? – why / why not?
Why might the landowner's actions seem unfair?
- What is the relationship between generosity and fairness?
 - What does this parable tell you about the Kingdom, and about God?What might it look like, to live out this kind of Kingdom?



What does it mean to be part of the Kingdom of God?

Jesus taught – often in parables – about the Kingdom, and preached that the Kingdom is here, which is described as "good news". Three of the characteristics which make the Kingdom "good news" are:

Inclusivity: Jesus was clear that the Kingdom is for all. He was criticised for including – and often focusing his attention on – those seen as lesser in society, such as tax collectors, children, the disabled and "sinners". Membership of the Kingdom can't be earned and boundaries around how to live in God's Kingdom don't exclude from membership.

Wholeness: In the ancient world, with no great understanding of the complexities of disease and disability, illness was seen as a punishment for sin, either one's own or one's ancestors (see, for example, John 9:1-2). In addition to this stigma, illness cut people off from ordinary life: there were limits on who they could associate with, and they were not allowed to enter the Temple. Not only did Jesus refuse to reinforce these beliefs, but by healing people he also enabled them to rebuild relationships and to be welcomed back into society. His focus on forgiveness provided another dimension on the restoration of relationships and the importance of wholeness.

Grace: "You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). The generosity of God revealed in Jesus' parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt 20) is of an unconditional, abundant love, "love that comes and stoops and rescues" (John Stott), saving and bringing the whole of creation back into relationship with God, as a gift, not earned.

A further characteristic of the Kingdom is **sacrifice**: being a citizen of the Kingdom, living under God's rule, is costly. It requires a change in us ("repent" = to change direction), and a commitment to prioritising following Jesus. It doesn't work to have divided loyalties, and we can't belong by association, only by living under God's rule ourselves.

- From this, how would you explain to someone what it means to be part of the Kingdom of God?
- How can you show these foci of inclusivity, wholeness, grace and sacrifice in your dealings with others?

What does it mean to pray Thy Kingdom Come?

Praying "Thy Kingdom Come" means committing to both prayer and action. We are commanded to pray for our leaders and those in positions of authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4) and for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). We are reminded to wear the armour of God, which includes praying in the Spirit "at all times" (Ephesians 6:10-18). "In praying 'Thy Kingdom Come' we all commit to playing our part in the renewal of the nations and the transformation of communities" (Archbishop Justin Welby, <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>).

- Why does praying something also commit us to action?