

A Vast Kingdom

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Deep in the sand and the muddy waters half a man reflects off the surface of the Jordan River. With fists in the air and a loud voice announcing repentance for all, this prophet who would remind anyone of Elijah and his friends way back in history took people under the water, proclaiming at the same time, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” This strange creature who lived in the desert, eating the delicacies of the wilderness, locusts and honey, like a madman in the darkest night called for repentance because the Messiah had arrived.

Isaiah prophesied about this very event! Isaiah proclaimed that the way should be made straight for the Lord’s coming, for the Messiah. The way being made straight calls people to righteousness, which comes only by repentance and humility. John the Baptist did not fit the mold of the Temple priest, although his father was one. John the Baptist burned his own trail and had no institutional affiliations. He was not a fixed star, but a chaotic explosion. This in itself characterizes the Kingdom of God.

Another man, cut from the same kind of cloth as John the Baptist was not as strange, but still maintained enough of a uniqueness in His own ministry. One day as the wacky John the Baptist continued to shout about repentance and God’s Kingdom, a man he had never met came, and he immediately sensed the purpose of his life coming to its zenith. This man from Nazareth came out to see him and be baptized by him, but John understood that this man was inaugurating

the Kingdom. So in a solemn pool in the midst of the wilderness, Jesus was baptized by His forerunner, and the Kingdom of God began its move.

Taking this phrase as it stands, one might think that it is quite archaic. But a closer analysis of kingdom’s meaning brings clarity. Kingdom is a place of rule, where a sovereign or a king has jurisdiction and authority. This can be by force, as in the Medieval Ages, or by the people’s choice. A kingdom is a designated governance by someone over a group of people. It can become political, social, economic, spiritual, or whatever category humans enjoy making. But we must also be careful not to limit the Kingdom of God to these. For sure, God is the Sovereign King of His Kingdom, His domain. So where is God’s domain? Where does He rule?

The Kingdom of God is wrapped up in one Founder, but also in that Founder’s vision and work in each of His disciples. The Kingdom of God was inaugurated by Jesus. Jesus is the Kingdom, which is why He could proclaim that the Kingdom of God has arrived (Matt 4:17, Mark 1:15, where the verb for “coming at hand” is the Greek perfect tense, meaning that it has happened at some point with present, and in this case, everlasting implications). But what does it mean to be in the Kingdom? Is the Kingdom a place, a physical location? Is the Kingdom an idea or a dream? These are points discussed even today by scholars and theologians around the world. Many times,

as with studies of God's attributes, the Kingdom tends to look the way a certain group would like for it to look. It tends to take on that groups distinctive traits. But this is part of the reason I say the Kingdom is not tied to any institution, but rather a Person.

Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom by characterizing it as something that would have surprised the religious leaders in His time. The Kingdom of God viewed by them was synonymous with the Day of Judgment, the Day of the Lord. But this is not what Jesus preached in total. To be sure, the Day of the Lord will finalize the Kingdom, but it was not the Kingdom. Jesus read out of the Isaiah scroll, letting Isaiah proclaim the characteristics of the Kingdom. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Kingdom because through Him literally (His sacrifice on the cross) and through His ministry, the Kingdom of God would be released upon the whole earth.

But what did Isaiah say the Kingdom of God looks like? He says that first the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord will control the Kingdom. He will come upon people! He will anoint, which means to set apart for service to the Lord. The Kingdom comes through proclamation, both spoken and acted upon, of good news, the reversal of situations and life styles. The people who are influenced by the Kingdom are the poor, the captives, the people on the fringe. The Kingdom is for people who are humble enough to let God reign in them! That is the only criteria.

The Kingdom of God does not just rest in the Person of Jesus the Messiah. The Kingdom of God has characteristics, which Jesus outlined throughout His ministry. Everywhere He went, Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom has arrived and everyone who is humble can be part of it. One of His most

famous messages, the Sermon on the Mount, characterizes the Kingdom at its strongest. It is totally opposite what the world would label a kingdom.

The Beatitudes mark the character of Kingdom citizens. Further in the message, Jesus challenges the people who understand the subversive nature of this Kingdom that its power lays in human weakness and obedience. This is the time where God can fully reign in His people, when they humbly surrender to His will. When people learn not just outward holiness, but inward righteousness, to not follow the letter of the Law but the Spirit inside their hearts who glorifies and pleases God, then they are in God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God starts on the inside of the human soul and is enacted in our surroundings. The Kingdom is first internal, and then external through service out of love for our King.

The Kingdom of God's only dwelling place is the human heart. It is a work born out of God's influence in each soul and the obedience of that person. The Kingdom spreads the same way it spread through Jesus, by proclamation through word and deed. The Kingdom is an idea that is making its way, violently opposing wickedness and evil intentions. The Kingdom is concerned with attitudes and intentions, with motives and thoughts. These leak out into the deeds of our hands and the words of our lips. This is the Kingdom, an invisible army of God's righteous and desired rule in the lives of His people.

Since the time of Jesus' first coming, His incarnation, the Kingdom of God has been taking back people lost to the enemy. The subversion is through ignoring pride and arrogance, through choosing to openly love and serve God by one's own will, through

turning from one's natural will to God's supernatural light. It is spread by passing on the message of God's authority and goodness through word and through action. The Kingdom of God comes in a cup of cold water given to a parched soul in the name of Jesus. The Kingdom of God comes through a message of deliverance and the reversal of one's fortunes, in the breaking down of barriers that the enemy has used to separate us. The Kingdom travels faster than the speed of light in the midst of the devil's playground. It is the message of freedom for the captive, of sight for the blind, of the gifts God, our gift Giver wants to bring into our lives because of His great love and faithfulness. The Kingdom is here.

But the Kingdom has no physical home yet. There is coming a Day of the Lord's return in which this Kingdom will physically be fulfilled. When He returns in His second coming, our Lord Jesus the Anointed One will touch down upon this earth and administer the physical Kingdom of goodness and righteousness upon the whole earth. Although humanity will still in large numbers reject His rule, He will fulfill all that the prophets foretold, and the Kingdom will finally be everywhere.

So to those of you who are secret agents of an explosive message, I leave this challenge, this call to arms against the forces of wickedness around us. We are not alone. God has a greater army on His side. The message is more explosive than the propaganda of the enemy. From the moment you entered the Kingdom yourself, God has been calling you to rise up, to teach those who don't know grace, to show those who don't know mercy, and to proclaim to those who are steeped in evil the most powerful and life-changing message they will ever hear: The Kingdom has come!