

Kingdom Architecture: *Defining the Kingdom of God*

In our study last week, we read about the dimensions of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. John says it measures six hundred miles high and is as long and wide as it is high. Today, we could probably care less about the dimensions. We are really more concerned about the quality of life in the city.

Which raises the question – what does the Kingdom of God look like now? Some Pharisees once asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come – more like *where is the kingdom you keep talking about?* Jesus replied, “The Kingdom of God will not come with our careful observation, nor will people say, “here it is” or, ‘there it is, because *the Kingdom of God is among you.*” Jesus' very own presence constituted the reign of God on earth (Luke 17:20, 21). Jesus also described the kingdom in its present form as a mustard seed – the tiniest of seeds– (Mark 4:30-32). In another private description to his disciples, Jesus actually referred to the inauguration of his Kingdom as a secret that only a few were beginning to unpack (Mark 4:10, 11).

This means that the Kingdom of God could actually be all around us yet invisible to those not spiritually in tune (as portrayed in the C. S. Lewis's children's book series about the land of Narnia). Jesus, in fact, once told a Pharisee named Nicodemus that he would never see the Kingdom without being born again. The present manifestation of God's Kingdom is apparently a spiritual dimension that can only be spiritually discerned.

Journey Together:

1. What's a difficult thing you have ever had to explain to a child?
2. What do you find the hardest to understand about heaven?

Road Map:

Spirituality, unfortunately, can be rather vague. What else did Jesus say about the nature of his Kingdom already growing and taking shape on earth? This week, we are going to look at three very important and tangible aspects of the Kingdom life that is even now sprouting and growing through the work of Christ.

Authority:

In Luke 10:17-20, Jesus talked about how the establishment of his Kingdom is bringing down the rule of Satan. We see this very thing happening in many people's lives, but perhaps none more clearly than in the life of the demon-possessed man discussed in Mark 1:21-28.

1. Have you ever seen someone that you thought might be possessed by a demon? How would you describe this person?
2. Have you ever been enslaved to a bad habit that you just can't seem to kick? What is the worst part about addiction – the habit itself or the frustration and impotency of knowing you just can't break free?
3. Jesus came to deliver us from our sin and painful addictions. Has Jesus ever helped set you free from a bad habit? Describe how it happened and share a bit about the freedom you have experienced through him.

Forgiveness:

In John 8:1-11, Jesus forgives a woman brought to him caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus is launching his new Kingdom where every citizen will know and enjoy the blessing of God's forgiving love.

4. What is the first thing you remember being forgiven for?
5. What is the most difficult forgiveness you have ever had to offer?
6. When and how did you finally accept God's forgiveness in your life?

Justice:

Justice is an often-repeated theme in the Old Testament. It was because of Pharaoh's unjust treatment of the Israelite slaves that God intervened for their deliverance. Jesus also demonstrated God's justice on many occasions, but perhaps none more dramatically than with the cleansing of the temple (John 2:12-17).

7. Why was Jesus so angry here?
8. In another story about caring for the poor and imprisoned (Matt. 25:31-46), Jesus links acts of justice for the oppressed with caring for himself. How does

this parable help you understand justice and mercy and their close connection with God?

9. In the ancient story of Robin Hood, Robin steals from the rich and returns money to the poor. How is this story a helpful comparison of the work of God's Kingdom in the ministry of Jesus?

Note: When Jesus says that his Kingdom is at hand, we should expect some tangible evidence. As we embrace his Kingdom, we discover a new authority in our life, forgiving grace, and appreciation for God's justice. Extending these to others reveals and advances his Kingdom to them and us. These are some of the tangible manifestations we can expect of God's Kingdom now.

10. How can your group pray for you this evening?

My Journey:

1. How is God using this last week's large group study and discussion in your life and witness to others this week?

2. Where have you seen the Kingdom of God at work this week?

3. In the light of this week's study, what does it mean to seek first the Kingdom?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

Backstory: In this week's journey, we focus on the tangible aspects of the Kingdom Jesus came to establish. If the Kingdom of God has already come, as Jesus proclaimed, then where is it and what does it look like? John the Baptist once asked Jesus the same thing: *"When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"* (Matt. 11: 2, 3).

As we have already seen, people were expecting great things with the coming Kingdom of God. They believed that the Messiah would rise up on their behalf and help them defeat the Romans. They were looking for action and political change, but Jesus seemed to have a different agenda. Still, as Jesus answered John's disciples - *"The blind were receiving their sight, the lame were walking, lepers were being cured, the deaf were hearing again, the dead were being raised and the poor had good*

news brought to them." Rome was not being overturned, but the powers of darkness were being shaken. Jesus said this was the evidence that the Kingdom of God was at hand – Satan's kingdom was being overturned!

The good news of God's Kingdom took on new meaning as the disciples began to comprehend Jesus' message. In this week's study we look at three very tangible ways that the Kingdom of God is making an impact in our world.

1. The authority of God in our lives – an authority that Jesus has extended to his followers. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples..." (Matt. 28:18). It is only in the authority of Jesus that we can dare advance against the Prince of Darkness. We operate under the authority of Christ. The nature of his Kingdom is the exact opposite of the world's way of doing things. Power is manifested in weakness in Jesus' economy. We operate from the authority of the Cross, where Jesus gave up his life for others instead of destroying his oppressors. The first evidence we have of the presence of God's Kingdom in our own lives is the presence of God's peace ruling in our hearts and taking authority over our own troubled spirit.

2. Forgiveness is another current and tangible aspect of God's kingdom. God's Kingdom is manifested by God not holding our sins against us. Forgiveness is ours right now. We do not have to wait to know that God forgives us. We live in a new state or relationship with God while we await his glorious return. We also know the wonderful favor of God – he is for us and not against us. This is the wonderful condition of the forgiven child of God. God has freely loved us and forgiven us in his beloved Son. All debts have been cancelled in his forgiving love.

3. Justice is another clear and tangible aspect of God's Kingdom. Jesus spoke up for the lost and the hurting – those most damaged by the bondage of sin. He opened his arms to little children, to prostitutes, tax collectors, and the poor. God's Kingdom was for the poor in spirit, the ones who had been forgotten and put down. Whenever we see people acting in compassion, we can be sure that they are not far from the Kingdom. Jesus even once told a lawyer that when he understood that

loving God and loving others as we love ourselves, he was not far from the Kingdom (Mark 12:34).

One day, the skies will split open and Jesus will return with the host of heaven. This world will be over and all that will continue is God's Eternal Kingdom. Until then, the Kingdom of God has begun and we, who believe Jesus, accept his message and his ministry and have entered into the Kingdom he has prepared for us. We are waiting for the culmination of that Kingdom in his return. But for now, we are experiencing a new authority in our lives: The forgiving grace of God for all that we have done in opposition to his Kingdom purpose. We work for justice along with him as we pray for the coming of the Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven. We are strangers here and we have embraced a new homeland.

For more insight into the nature of God's economy Jesus gave us a detailed account in his Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7. This is what it means to have moved from being a citizen of this world into the glorious reign of God as we await the final manifestation of his kingdom reign!