

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

A Christian Guidebook 4



T. M. Moore

A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *What Is the Kingdom?*

Jesus understood that the idea of the Kingdom of God would be difficult for folks to grasp.

Which is why He taught about the Kingdom so frequently and from so many different angles. And why He spent forty days following His resurrection shoring-up His disciples' understanding of this central Gospel idea.

Because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just Good News about salvation. It's Good News about the Kingdom of God.

But what is the Kingdom of God? That's the question we'll explore in this section of *A Christian Guidebook*.

This *Guidebook* is designed to help us be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us by reviewing essential Christian doctrines and shoring-up the Biblical foundations of each. Our goal is to lead you into the Word of God so that you can gain a clearer and more lively understanding of what we as Christians believe.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Kingdom of God Is Real

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matthew 6.33

The Kingdom defined

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is Good News, as we have seen. It’s not just the Gospel of salvation, although salvation—in Kingdom terms—is what Jesus has accomplished for all who believe in Him and are His disciples. And it’s not just the Gospel of going to heaven when we die—spiritual “fire insurance”, as many have put it.

The Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Good News about a new reality, a new realm, a new economy, and a new way of life, presided over by a King Who cannot be defeated, Who is making all things new, and Who will soon return to complete His Kingdom work.

We may offer a succinct definition of the Kingdom of God: The Kingdom of God is the *rule* of God over all things, *by* our Lord Jesus Christ, *for* and *through* His people, *in* the power of His Word and Spirit, *unto* righteousness, peace, and joy. The Kingdom of God was the focus of every aspect of Jesus’ ministry, because He came to bring near the eternal Kingdom of God and light and to supplant, replace, and destroy the bankrupt kingdom of darkness and the devil. And He unloosed that Kingdom on earth on the first Christian Pentecost by the powerful gift of His own Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom of God is real. And it is real now. Let’s unpack the specifics of it a bit more.

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is the rule of God over all things. Before the Kingdom came the world was ruled by the father of lies. His house of lies, deceit, destruction, and sin pervaded the earth, until Jesus came, bound him, and began the work of plundering his domain. Upon His being exalted to glory, the heavenly Father gave Jesus an eternal Kingdom, which He, in turn, is giving to His saints—all true Christians—to replace and overthrow the domain of darkness and lies (Matt. 12.22-29; Dan. 7.13-18; Ps. 110.1, 2; 1 Jn. 2.8).

Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and He upholds the cosmos and everything in it by His Word of power (Rev. 17.14; Heb. 1.3). He is the anointed King by God and rules according to the Law and covenant of His Father (Ps. 2.1-12).

The Kingdom of God comes to the saints in the Person of the Holy Spirit, Who begins working in the disciples of Jesus according to the power of the Kingdom, to transform them, soul and body, individually and as congregations, into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Eph. 4.11-16). The work He does in them, bringing the rule of God into all their lives, overflows from them to spread the making-all-things-new grace of Jesus to more and more people (Jn. 7.37-39; 2 Cor. 4.15). Wherever the disciples of Jesus manifest the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31), there the Kingdom of God has come on earth as it is in heaven. Seeking the Kingdom is the believer’s proper response to God having called us to His Kingdom and glory (Matt. 6.33; 1 Thess. 2.12).

The progress of the Kingdom on earth as it is heaven is seen by the increase of righteousness, peace, and joy, according to the Word of God and by the working of His powerful Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18; Jn. 17.17; Phil. 2.12). Realizing more of the Kingdom’s presence, promise, and power is thus the proper vocation and pursuit of every true Christian.

Christians are called to the Kingdom of God, to pray for its coming and seek its advance for the praise and honor of Him Who has called us, that the knowledge of His glory should cover all the earth (Hab. 2.14).

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Now, and not yet

The Kingdom of God is here. Now. Deposited in the souls of every true Christian. We must make sure that the Kingdom is the defining priority of our lives, lest we be like those benighted believers of old who never truly entered the Kingdom and, by their teaching and lives, barred others from entering as well (Matt. 23.13).

The prophet Daniel envisioned the coming of the Kingdom as a stone, cut without hands, that advanced over all the earth, breaking in pieces and consuming all other kingdoms and being established forever (Dan. 2.44). Isaiah declared that the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace would increase on earth without end, bringing judgment and justice to the world (Is. 9.6, 7). Jesus likened the Kingdom to leaven that transforms, light that illuminates, seeds that grow and bear fruit, and trees that fill up the space of the earth. That Kingdom is here, now, and the only thing that keeps it from realizing more presence and power is the unbelief and disobedience of those to whom it has been entrusted.

The Kingdom will continue coming on earth because God has declared that it should. But the full realization of the rule of God in Christ Jesus is beyond our present frame of time and space. Only in the new heavens and new earth, where righteousness dwells, will the Kingdom realize its full promise and all sorrow, sadness, and sin will be done away. Then the perfect peace and infinite joy of the righteous Prince of Peace will pervade the new cosmos, and we will realize more of it with each passing moment.

Christians are called to the Kingdom and glory of God, to pray for it, seek it, proclaim it, embody it, and advance it into every aspect of human life and interest. Our oath of citizenship in this Kingdom must be recited every day: All that the Lord has spoken, we will do. The progress of the Kingdom of God is the defining calling and work of every true Christian.

Let us be sure to be about the work that is appointed to us in everything we do.

Search the Scriptures

1. Meditate on 1 Thessalonians 2.12. What does it mean to be “called” to the Kingdom and glory of God?
2. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 4.20. In which aspects of your life do you most consistently experience the power of the Kingdom of God?
3. Meditate on 1 John 2.8. As the Kingdom of God advances on earth, what should we expect?

Next steps—Preparation: Knowing you are called to the Kingdom, to seek and advance in all your ways, how should you prepare for each day's work?

2 The Kingdom of God Is Spiritual

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." John 18.36

The spiritual world

Jesus explained to Pilate that He is indeed a King, but not one such as Pilate might have imagined.

Of course, to help us understand the great beauty and power of the Kingdom of God, and to give us some sense of its workings, Jesus frequently used material and temporal terms to explain it: sown seeds, growing trees, kings and realms, armies and vineyards, and more. All these metaphors and images show us what the Kingdom of God is *like*, and we should nurture our understanding of the Kingdom by meditating often on the Kingdom parables of our Lord.

But Jesus also wanted us to know that His Kingdom is "not of this world." That is, His Kingdom is of *another* world, the *spiritual* world, which, together with the world we live in is part of the total, overall creation of God. God does not live in our worlds, either the temporal/material or the spiritual. He is beyond all and above all and over all and in all and through them all. In Him we—and the angels and departed saints—live and move and have our being.

The Kingdom of God is first and most fully realized and expressed as a *spiritual* domain. Yet it does not exist beyond the world we know, but rather intersects with it, expands throughout it, works transforming power within it, and one day will completely pervade, transform, and reconstitute it. The Kingdom of God is *spiritual* in nature. It operates on earth from within the soul of every believer, where the Spirit of God works to advance the Kingdom from within unto righteousness, peace, and joy.

Since the Kingdom of God is spiritual and dwells in and advances from the spiritual component of believers' lives, the means whereby the Kingdom operates and accomplishes its ends must also be spiritual. Not political and not cultural, but spiritual.

But what are those means?

Spirit and Word

First in the means Jesus used to bring and advance His Kingdom are the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. These are the primary and indispensable means whereby Jesus achieves His goal of making us like Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18), so that His Presence and power overflow from us like living water to refresh our world (Jn. 7.37-39; Ps. 110).

The implications of this are clear: First, we must understand what the Spirit is trying to achieve in us. I will mention three primary things: Teach us the Law of God (Ezek. 36.26, 27); bring forth in us the fruit of holiness (Gal. 5.22, 23), and empower us for service in the Kingdom, first by using the gifts He bestows on us (1 Cor. 12.7-11) and second by empowering us as witnesses for Jesus (Acts 1.8). We will realize the presence, promise and power of the Kingdom of God as we devote ourselves to the Spirit's agenda and submit to the Word of God that He might thereby outfit us for our calling.

Hence, it is important that we walk in the Spirit, and not in the flesh, and that we are filled with the Spirit daily and continually.

The Scriptures are spiritually alive and powerful to three ends: To show us Jesus in all His wisdom and might (Jn. 5.39); to equip us to be and live like Jesus (2 Tim. 3.15-17); to engage the Holy Spirit within us for the work of making all things new and overflowing in our lives (Rev. 21.5; Jn. 7.37-39). We cannot know, love,

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and serve Jesus as citizens of His Kingdom apart from continuous, constant, and careful reading, study, and obedience to the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures are the primary and indispensable spiritual means whereby the Kingdom works within our spirit to equip and engage us for advancing the Kingdom of God. If we neglect these resources, we cannot expect any other spiritual resources to be of much effect, for these—prayer, preaching, and teaching—require solid footing in the Word and Spirit if they are to be of value in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God. I repeat: If you're counting on preaching, a Sunday school class or Bible study group, or some favorite Christian author to increase your Kingdom experience, you are barking up the wrong tree. Without the Holy Spirit and Scripture as your daily fare, you will never realize the fullness of God's Kingdom salvation.

Additional resources

All of which, of course, is not to say that preaching, teaching, fellowship, and reading good authors cannot help us realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God. They can, when we are depending on this in the fullness of the Spirit and on the foundation of Scripture. Read all you can. Pay attention to good preaching and teaching. Learn Jesus by every available means, for this is what disciples do and it's what brings us into more of the true spiritual life of the Kingdom of God.

And prayer. Oh yes, prayer. In all, during all, throughout all, for all, and unto all the fullness of the Kingdom of God. We must pray always, seeking the Kingdom's coming on earth as it is in heaven and beseeching our Father in heaven to bring us more deeply into the depths of its spiritual character and mission. Let prayers for the Kingdom guide all your prayers, so that earnest and holy spiritual seeking of the Kingdom pervades all you do all day long.

The Kingdom of Jesus is not of this world. And if we want out-of-this-world experiences and an out-of-this-world way of life, they're ready to hand. But we must appeal to the proper means to realize them. Only through the Word and Spirit, prayer and the resources of the Church will we become the Kingdom citizens and ambassadors we have been called to be.

Search the Scriptures

1. Review Matthew 6.10, 33. In what ways are you using your spiritual resources for these purposes?
2. How would you explain the not-of-this-world Kingdom of Jesus to a new believer? Where would you turn in Scripture?
3. Summarize Moses' advice in Psalm 90.12, 16, 17 about bringing more spiritual power to our daily work.

Next steps—Preparation: Review the spiritual means by which you are presently seeking the Kingdom of God. Where could you improve in the use of each of these?

3 The Kingdom of God Is Power

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45 Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.” Daniel 2.44, 45

For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 1 Corinthians 4.20

Dynamite all around

The Greek word for “power” is δύναμις, *dynamis*, and, obviously, this is the word from which we get “dynamite.”

Thinking of “power” as “dynamite” is, however, a bit misleading. As I am writing, power is at work all around me, in me, and through me. Electrical power illuminates my desk and runs my computer. Muscle power punches the keys to make words. Wind power from a small fan cools me as I work.

Hardly explosive stuff, that.

“Dynamite”—δύναμις—is at work all around us. To think of “dynamite”—“power”—only in explosive terms is to miss the fact that God in His grace has put a wide variety of powers at our disposal for knowing, loving, and serving Him. Much of the power we need to serve Him comes from sources beyond the pale of the Kingdom of God—power plants, Internet operators, manufacturers of this, that, and the other. In a sense, the Power that drives the Kingdom of God *plunders* power sources from the unbelieving world so that the people of God have all the power we need to seek and advance His realm.

But the power that drives the expansion of God’s Kingdom is not a material power like electrons or wind blades or human muscles. It is, like the Kingdom itself, *spiritual* power. And for that reason, it is far greater than any other power we can know.

Great enough to overthrow nations, cultures, and hardened hearts.

Spiritual power

Let’s not underestimate the strength of spiritual power. Spiritual power spoke the cosmos into being (Gen. 1). Spiritual power parted the Red Sea and the Jordan River. Spiritual power destroyed the Assyrian army under Sennacherib. Spiritual power turned water to wine, opened blind eyes, healed lepers, and raised dead people to life. Spiritual power raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned Him in the heavens. Spiritual power birthed the Church and brought about the conversion of multitudes. Spiritual power composed the Scriptures. Spiritual power has kept the Church and the Word of God for two millennia. Spiritual power has done more good in the world than all other powers combined. Spiritual power translated you from darkness and wrong belief into the Kingdom of life, light, and power.

Spiritual power is real and powerful, more powerful, in fact, than any other form of power.

I know that doesn’t seem likely, given such things as nuclear bombs, hurricanes, and whatnot. But it’s true, nonetheless. Spiritual power, as we see in Scripture, can work directly on the world—as, for example, in times of great revivals and awakenings to Jesus, or when a sinner comes to faith in Jesus. But more typically, the spiritual power of the Kingdom of God employs other power sources to accomplish its ends. And to do this, the spiritual power of the Kingdom—the Holy Spirit working with the Word of God—works in Kingdom

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citizens from all walks of life.

The power of the Kingdom of God is the power of Scripture. Scripture is living and powerful and able to cut to the depths of a human soul, there to perform spiritual surgery that changes the way a person thinks, believes, loves, works, relates to others, and much, much more (Heb. 4.12).

The power of the Kingdom of God is the power of God's Spirit. He can transform us increasingly into the very image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18); brings forth from us holy spiritual attributes in our lives (Gal. 5.22, 23); endues us with gifts for carrying out Jesus' agenda (1 Cor. 12.7-11; Matt. 16.18); and empowers us to proclaim the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom to the people to whom God sends us (Acts 1.8).

This—the power of God's Word and Spirit—is the power that changes the world by harnessing other powers to glorify God. And our heavenly Father *exercises* that power in and *unleashes* that power through people like you and me.

Accessing the power of the Kingdom

We should be asking, "Where can I get me some of that power?" Don't you want to know the power of God at work in you, doing things such as I described above? Wouldn't you thrill and rejoice to exercise some of that power in leading someone to Jesus or building them up in Him? Is there anything you wouldn't do to help that power break out, course through, and transform every aspect of life and culture in this world?

Of course not. And participating in that kind of power surge is as simple as this: Read and heed the Word of God, seeking Jesus and His Kingdom in everything you do.

Where the power of the Kingdom is exercised, God is glorified. And we can glorify God, using the power of His rule, in all the daily small things of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31). Imagine the world as seen from space, completely dark. No lights anywhere. Then, all at once, believers in every nation step outside and strike a single match. If you've ever been in a church at Christmas time when the fire is passed from candle to candle, you have witnessed the power of doing whatever small thing is near to us at any moment, living out the teaching of God's Word in the power of the Spirit to shine the light of Jesus' love into our sad world.

It's that simple, really. Daily reading and study of God's Word, bathed in prayer and meditation. Then using every moment and every next step in obedience, so that grace flows through us and Kingdom power is activated to the glory of God.

The Kingdom of God is powerful. And it uses our everyday manifestations of that power to light up the dark world for the glory of God.

Search the Scriptures

1. Which of the parables of Jesus speaks to you about the power of the Kingdom of God?
2. How many ways did the power of God work through the apostle Paul?
3. How did God's power work to bring you to saving faith in Jesus?

Next steps—Transformation: You are a holy power station for the Lord. How will God's power flow through you today? Thank and praise God for the power to know, love, and serve Him.

4 The Kingdom of God Is Righteousness

... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness... Romans 14.17

What is righteousness?

The Kingdom of God presents a particular *character* to the world: righteousness. Where the rule of King Jesus comes to expression through the citizens of His Kingdom, righteousness is on display. The power of the Kingdom of God flows to bring this character into being, as electrons flow to make light or wind flows through turbines to make electricity.

Where Jesus rules, righteousness obtains, for the Kingdom of God is righteousness.

But what is righteousness?

Righteousness is whatever God says is right, and whatever God declares to be righteous has been revealed to us in His Word. When, having read and studied God's Word and communed with Him in prayer, we learn how to love Him and our neighbors in whatever ways we can, righteousness appears. The more we do such things, the more righteousness will be seen in us, and the more our inner self—our soul—will be shaped for righteousness.

But this righteousness is not anything we're able to gin up. It is, rather, the righteousness of Jesus, imparted to us and expressed by us through the Kingdom power of the Holy Spirit. Every little kindness, every thoughtful word of encouragement, every duty joyfully performed, every proper manner and courtesy observed during a meal—all such quotidian conduct is righteous and builds righteousness in us and brings glory to God (1 Cor. 10.31).

The Law of God is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 12.17). Jesus is *the* Righteous One, and thus all His Word in Scripture is righteous. We can know what God says is right, and by the power of the Kingdom at work in us, we can be righteous in Jesus Christ.

How can we obtain it?

When it comes to righteousness we do not so much "obtain" it as "express" it. Righteousness is like a new suit of clothes which is way, way too big for us because we're just children. The suit is beautiful, and when we have it on, well, we look a little snappier. But it's obvious we need to grow some to fill out the full beauty of this suit.

Righteousness is like a Jesus suit, but it's a suit we can never grow into fully. All our righteousness is external to us before it becomes internal and outward through us. It's in Jesus and His Spirit. It's described for us in the Scriptures, beginning in the Law of God. But we mustn't think that we can just go out and "do a little righteousness" on our own, just because we see what the Scriptures teach.

No. We need Jesus. To see Him in His glory. To devote ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice. To be filled with His Spirit every moment of the day. To call for His wisdom and strength and grace to enable us to *be* His witnesses. To grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18).

As we do these things, earnestly seeking Jesus and His Kingdom through them all, we grow into our Jesus suit a little more, and a little more of His righteousness is expressed through us.

The effects of righteousness

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained that righteousness is like salt and light (Matt. 5.1-20). When it is

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present, it has effects. It illuminates the goodness of God in the world, and it preserves that goodness against decaying influences.

The righteousness for which Kingdom citizens hunger and thirst has the effect of making us shine like the noonday sun: “He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday” (Ps. 37.6). Righteousness is God’s doing, and when He does it, we shine like light, and like the sun when it casts no shadows. And, if only a little, we preserve whatever is good in the world within our reach.

But the righteousness to which we’re called is not exhausted in personal ethics. It extends to cultural transformation, the care of creation, and the rebuilding of institutions so that they honor God and do good work (cf. Rom. 13.1-4). We are the salt of the earth! We are the light of the world! Where the Kingdom of God is present and advancing, holy spiritual salt and light lend their good effects to people, places, and things, and people can see the reality of the Kingdom in the righteousness it imparts.

Righteousness stands out; it shines like a light in a dark place and adds savor to blandness. The effect of this salt-and-light presence is that people realize God is at work, and they give Him glory and honor (vv. 13-16). Our calling is to make ourselves as salty and as light-filled as we can, for the Kingdom of God is righteousness (Rom. 14.17, 18).

And overarching these glorious effects is the Kingdom blessing of peace. Peace is the condition that the Kingdom of righteousness spreads to all who know it.

Search the Scriptures

1. How would you explain righteousness to a new believer? To which Scriptures would you turn?
2. Meditate on Matthew 5.13-16. How should the light and salt of righteousness appear in your life?
3. Read Romans 7.12, Matthew 22.34-40, and 1 John 5.1-3. What is the role of the Law of God in helping us to grow in righteousness?

Next steps—Transformation: Spend some time meditating on what it means that the Kingdom of righteousness should show through you as salt and light. In what specific ways would you like to see more of these effects in your life?

5 The Kingdom of God Is Peace

... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace... Romans 14.17

Kingdom condition

Righteousness defines the *character* of the Kingdom of God. Every Kingdom citizen strives to increase in righteousness by growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His righteousness is an inexhaustible supply; thus, we ever expect to increase in righteousness, and doing so, to increase the visibility of the Kingdom of God.

The righteousness which expresses the character of the Kingdom gives rise to the *condition* of peace:
The work of righteousness will be peace,
And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever (Is. 32.17).

The mountains will bring peace to the people,
And the little hills, by righteousness (Ps. 72.3).

Righteousness is the character of the Kingdom of God; and peace is the *condition* all know who have entered the Kingdom of God and are increasing in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is the overwhelming, undergirding, and guiding sense that, every other condition or situation notwithstanding, all is well, gloriously and truly well: “It is well, it is well with my soul.”

Peace is the bequest Jesus left to His people as He prepared to ascend to the throne of His Kingdom: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace” (Jn. 16.33). “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Jn. 14.27).

Peace is the condition that arises from righteousness. The more we grow in and are transformed into the likeness of Jesus, the more His righteousness will be evident in us. And the more consistent we are in His righteousness, the more the condition of peace will be the defining motif of our lives.

The peace that we know in the Kingdom of God is a gem with three facets.

With God

The two texts cited above help us understand this three-fold peace of the Kingdom of God.

First, it is peace with God which comes as a promise from His Word that our righteousness—that is, the righteousness of Jesus in which we are increasing—brings an overall sense of *assurance* to our lives. This is the assurance that comes as God sees the work of Jesus in us and approves His righteousness. He grants the condition of peace between us and Him in the form of and inward assurance that all is well with our soul. This is a work of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8.12). All is well between us. We are right where He wants us to be. And we are increasing in His good and perfect will.

Such assurance leads inevitably to joy, and we shall have more to say about this in our next installment.

Within yourself

Peace with God leads to peace with and within ourselves. Since God approves the righteousness He sees in us, and grants us assurance of salvation and favor with Him, who are we to do anything other than be at peace with ourselves? No more self-condemnation, second-guessing, or self-deprecations. Instead, we give thanks in every situation, for God has refreshed our soul with assurance of His favor, and we rejoice in Him

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and in the true and satisfying *quietness* He brings to our soul. This is that sense of rest and contentment that comes with knowing the Presence of God and the favor of His face. We are at glorious peace with and within ourselves.

Such peace goes beyond anything we can understand or explain and rests ultimately in our relationship with Jesus Christ (Phil. 4.6, 7).

With your neighbor

At peace with God and within ourselves, we become bringers of peace to the people around us. God brings *peace to the people* through the peace He has granted us. This peace brings healing, encouragement, hope, and blessing, both to the people and all the places (“the little hills”) where we do our work. Peace banishes resentment, grudges, one-upmanship, gossip, a condescending attitude, and all contrary or demeaning affections. It harnesses our words with grace, that they may bring edification to others. Peace becomes the environment, a kind of spiritual aura, that others experience as we work at our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Peace and quietness and assurance fairly ooze from all our spiritual pores; and such a pervasive presence of peace cannot but affect the people in our lives.

Peace—with God, within ourselves, and with others—is the condition that Kingdom righteousness brings to the world. God grants us peace as the fulfilled promise of seeking first His Kingdom and righteousness in all that we are and do. The Kingdom of God is righteousness and peace! May God grant us all to increase in this glorious character and condition.

And may we thus realize more of the promise of joy that is the consequence of Kingdom living.

Search the Scriptures

1. Jesus promised to grant us peace. In what sense is His peace “not as the world gives”?
2. Righteousness is a precondition for knowing the peace of Jesus. How can we grow in righteousness? To what Scripture would you turn to answer this question for a new believer?
3. Meditate on Philippians 4.6, 7. Now read verse 8. How can doing what verse 8 teaches help us to increase in righteousness and peace?

Next steps—Transformation: To whom will you bring the peace that passes understanding today? How should you prepare?

6 The Kingdom of God Is Joy

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Acts 14:21, 22

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ... Revelation 1:9

... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy... Romans 14:17

Increasing in the Kingdom

I pray that you are gaining a clearer and more thrilling sense of what it means to have been conveyed into the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:12-14).

The Kingdom of God is real. Jesus rules from His heavenly throne, administering His dominion in grace and truth, by the power of the Spirit and Word of God. Real and transforming power flows from Jesus to all His citizen/ambassadors, as we seek His Kingdom and righteousness in all we do. Where the Kingdom of God has become established, righteousness flourishes and peace abounds.

The reality and experience of the Kingdom of God are limited only by our desire for it. Higher planes and richer experiences of Kingdom living are available to us as we press on in our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2:12). If we want these, we will seek them; and if we seek, Jesus promised, we will find.

For all who daily pray for and seek more of the Kingdom of God, more of it will be granted (Matt. 13:12), so that we increase in Kingdom character and know more of the wonderful peace which accompanies that righteousness. And righteousness and peace lead to the Kingdom *consequence* of joy.

Joy is the unflappable privilege and disposition of all who are advancing in their journey in the eternal Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The joy of Jesus

In our segment, "What is the Gospel", we wrote that the joy we possess in the Kingdom of God drives away every fear, cannot be diminished by changing circumstances, surpasses every form of mere happiness, and fills us with an indestructible sense of wellbeing, delight, pleasure, and hope. This, we said, is the joy "we as human beings were made to know, happiness full up, overflowing, and without end." We also wrote, "The life of joy comes as a gift, bought and paid for by Jesus and bestowed by His Father and ours. No strings attached."

Joy makes you want to dance and shout. It brings tears and smiles. Makes you reach out and hug someone. Engages your tongue with sweet words of gratitude and praise. When you are experiencing the joy of the Lord, you never want it to end. And you know that a day is coming when joy will be everlasting.

But most believers will tell you that the experience of joy can be fleeting. C. S. Lewis wrote that joy is like something you glanced for a moment, out of the corner of your eye, and when you went to explore it more fully, it was gone.

But just a taste of Kingdom joy can be enough to spur us on in seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God—to discover Jesus in His Word, delight in His Law, devote ourselves to His Spirit, and daily live for His glory. Joy in living adorns the Kingdom path wherever we tread it. And the more we walk the path that Jesus

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walked (1 Jn. 2:1-6) the more His righteousness, peace, and joy will be ours as well.

Well, there is that.

But as in any climb one might assay, difficulties will be encountered as we seek to ascend higher in the Kingdom of God. John described himself as a companion with us in the tribulation and Kingdom and patience of the Lord. Paul said we must enter more deeply into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations. And this is nothing more than what Jesus promised as well (cf. Jn. 15:18-25).

When it comes to trials, tribulations, setbacks, confrontations, struggles, and persecutions for being a citizen of God's Kingdom, we can only say, "Well, there is that."

This is because the Kingdom of God exists amid the kingdoms of man. The Kingdom of God unfolds within and through the disciples of Jesus into the time, space, and people of their world and, besides shining the light of divine truth and love, exposes selfish motives, false idols, flimsy hopes, routine deceptions, and outright lies that characterize the kingdoms of this world. It operates like Jesus in the temple, challenging settled ways and beliefs, overturning cherished practices, driving out self-interest and fraud, and insisting that the world get its act together.

And some folks won't sit idly by while that is happening. Ask Paul. Ask John. Ask Jesus.

We must expect challenges to our faith, some of which may be painful and perhaps costly. Yet these come to us from the Lord, first as confirmations of our Kingdom citizenship and, second, as opportunities to know more of His joy. The Lord, Job explained, tests us every moment (Job 7:17, 18). Every moment He offers an opportunity to gain more elevation in His heavenly Kingdom. As we live in righteousness and hold fast to His peace, we can know His joy during every trial and tribulation. Just as Jesus did, hanging on the cross and focusing on the coming of His Kingdom (Heb. 12:1, 2; cf. Ps. 22:21-31).

Let the world bring on its objections and threats. Joy awaits us as we engage them with the righteousness and peace of Jesus.

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Habakkuk 3:17-19 teach us to lay hold on the joy of the Lord when troubles come?
2. Read Hebrews 12:1, 2 and Psalm 22:21-31 (keeping in mind the setting of Psalm 22:1-31). How was Jesus able to know joy amid horrible suffering?
3. How do you experience the joy of the Lord? When have you experienced His joy? Do you believe that you know more of His joy, more of the time?

Next steps—Preparation: Today, what lies ahead that can rob you of your joy? How should you prepare for this? Pray Habakkuk 3:17-19, putting your expected obstacle in place of the things mentioned in v. 17. Memorize these verses..

7 The Kingdom of God Is in the Holy Spirit

... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Romans 14.17, 18

Get ready

Following His resurrection, Jesus spent forty days teaching His disciples about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1.3)—what it is, what it's like, what to expect when it comes, and what its coming will mean for the world.

The disciples got it. I mean, they bit down on it good—hook, line, and sinker. That is evident by their response at the end of this season of instruction and preparation: “Is it *now*...?” (Acts 1.6) They were ready. They were eager. And they were right so to be.

Jesus' response is a bit enigmatic. First, He told His fired-up gang that it was not for them to know the details about the specific timing of the Kingdom's coming. This He said to discourage any vain speculations or specious plans. The details of the full coming of the Kingdom—the full and complete coming, which was, in essence, what they were asking about—are the Father's remit alone.

But, second, He told them that they were about to receive power. The Holy Spirit was coming, as Jesus had promised in John 14-16, and He would bring with Him holy spiritual power to enable them to bear witness to and advance the Name and rule of Jesus.

In other words, when the Spirit came, He would come to dwell within believers, unleashing a power that had only occasionally been glimpsed in the course of human history, but which would now, with the Spirit's coming, be distributed among and unleashed through all those who were called to follow Jesus as His disciples and witnesses.

Put even more succinctly, *the Kingdom of God is in the Holy Spirit*. The righteousness that characterizes the Kingdom, the peace which is its prevailing condition, and the joy that results from these are all *in the Holy Spirit*.

And He is in the soul of every Christian, every disciple and follower of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit's agenda

The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in believers with an agenda. His agenda is not ours, and unless we can put our agendas aside, we will never line up with His to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

The Spirit has not come to make us ecstatically happy. He has not come to fulfill our every wish. He comes to bring forth in us distinctly Kingdom values and virtues: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He comes to distribute among us spiritual gifts, God-given abilities to serve one another in caring and sharing ways. He comes to empower us as witnesses for Jesus, both in how we live and what we say. And He comes to build our churches up into Christlikeness by our unified and focused work.

Spiritual power, spiritual fruit, spiritual gifts, and spiritual communities. This is the agenda of the Holy Spirit.

And, since He has such a clear Kingdom agenda, we must believe that He also has clear means for fulfilling that agenda. And we would be right to think so.

The Spirit's means

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The first and foundational means the Spirit employs in accomplishing His agenda is to teach those in whom He dwells to understand and obey the Law of God: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*” (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

As the Spirit teaches us the Law of God, He causes the glory of the Lord to appear in glimpses of Jesus—His beauty, goodness, truth, love, righteousness, peace, and joy. The Spirit uses those glimpses of Jesus, in wondrous and mysterious ways, gradually renewing us in heart, mind, and conscience, so that we think with the mind of Christ, love with the heart of God, and hold fast to the Law of God and all His Word as our highest value and priority. Thus, we are gradually transformed into the image of Jesus Christ: “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror [the Law and Word of God, cf. Jms. 1.22-25] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3.17, 18).

As we grow in Christ, working out our salvation in conjunction with Him Who is at work within us (Phil. 2.12, 13), we submit more completely to His rule, enter more completely into His Kingdom, and demonstrate the evidences of faith (Heb. 11.1) which the Spirit brings forth in us. We improve in our calling as citizens and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

This happens because the Spirit of God is always at work within us, showing and leading us onto the path of righteousness, convicting us when we stray, and empowering us for sound judgment to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God (Jn. 16.8-11).

The Kingdom of God—the rule of King Jesus!—is *in* the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is in *us*, all who believe and are followers and disciples of Jesus Christ.

And that is a reality worth getting excited about every moment of every day.

Search the Scriptures

1. Meditate on Galatians 5.22, 23 and 1 Corinthians 12.7-11. How do you see these works of the Spirit in your own life?
2. Read Matthew 5.17-19. Who is great in the Kingdom of God? How does the Holy Spirit help one to attain such greatness?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 4.3. To what “unity” was Paul referring? What is our duty with respect to that unity?

Next steps—Preparation: Spend an hour meditating on the three questions above. Which of the Spirit’s works, mentioned in these questions, would you like to see more of in your life?

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Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How would you explain the Kingdom of God to a new believer? What does God intend for us in His Kingdom?
2. What is righteousness? How can we increase in righteousness?
3. Why do peace and joy naturally follow from righteousness?
4. What is the Holy Spirit's agenda in your life? How is working to realize that agenda?
5. What's the most important lesson you have learned from this study?

For prayer:

What Is the Kingdom?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.