Living in the Kingdom of God

Dear Friend,

Over one hundred times Jesus during His ministry on earth refers to the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven. This reference to the Kingdom is a declaration to God's sovereign rule in the Universe. The Bible declares that at the very beginning where it says, "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth."

In the Book of Matthew, the Kingdom of God/The Kingdom of Heaven refers to the entry of God's long anticipated Anointed One, the Prophesied Messiah, the Deliverer and the King of Israel. He would be the Savior of not only the Jews but of all of humanity.

Jesus' presence introduced the Kingdom of God and the revolution of love and hope it brought. Living in the Kingdom changes everything. It means that believers living in the Kingdom will when Christ returns (Matthew 26:29) no longer be hostage to the rule of death, sin, or oppressive human political systems. Satan will be overthrown as Jesus brings life, hope, and love, both now and for all eternity.

Matthew 3:2 and 4:17 Jesus declares, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." What does this repentance mean? Henri Nouwen explains, "Jesus the Blessed Son of God, hungers, and thirsts for uprightness. He abhors injustice. He resists those who try to gather wealth and influence by oppression and exploitation. His whole being yearns for people to treat one another as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same God."

"With fervor He proclaims that the way to the Kingdom is not saying many prayers or offering many sacrifices but in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and the prisoners. He longs for a just world. He wants us to live with the same hunger and thirst."

Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt states that, "Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of Heaven, and He was filled with a mighty spirit, the spirit of the rule of God. It raised a storm among His listeners when He said: 'Repent! Become quite a different person! Everything must change. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

"That is leave all your preoccupations, give up all that has influenced you till now, and give up every power that has gripped you. A new kind of power is taking over. A new monarch is on the throne. A new King has assumed His reign. You shall have a new lord over you. The old is passing away and a new time is coming."

Jesus has shown us that His Kingdom is a community that lives in total contrast to the world's expectations and established religious systems. In the sermon of the mount Jesus spells specific directives for living in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom Character is given in Matthew 5:1-16. Jesus gives us the Kingdom Commands in Matthew 5:17-48. The Kingdom Devotion is laid out in Matthew 6:18. Kingdom Priorities are provided in Matthew 6:19-7:28.

Jesus declares with the Kingdom now present the world's value system is turned upside down. The poor are the ones declared blessed as they possess wealth in love, energy for peace, and victory. They are the ones who bear the world's suffering as they move forward with the inner vision and promises given to those who are in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus tells us that we cannot serve both God and money. Only when we are free from the cares of this world are we free to serve God. This service to God consists of the acts of Love that Jesus directs us to do for the hungry, sick, imprisoned, homeless and hurting in Matthew 25:31-46.

It is in Matthew 7:21 that Jesus says, "not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

One cannot overstate how critical it is that we obey the will of God and "enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer described how it is possible to enter through the narrow gate of the Kingdom of God. He explains, "If we behold Jesus going on before us step by step, we shall not go astray. But if we worry about the dangers that beset us, if we gaze at the road instead of at Him who goes before, we are already straying from the path. For He is Himself the way, the narrow way and the strait gate. He, and He alone, is our journey's end. When we know that, we are able to proceed along the narrow way through the strait gate of the cross, and on to eternal life, and the very narrowness of the road will increase our certainty. The way which the Son of God trod on earth, and the way which we too must tread as citizens of two worlds on the razor edge between this world and the Kingdom of heaven, can hardly be a broad way. The narrow way is bound to be right.

C.S. Lewis says “when it comes to trying to enter to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, ‘live for others’ but always in a discontented, grumbling way, always wondering why others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself, and once you become that you will be a far greater pest to anyone, who has to live with you, then you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish.”

Lewis goes on to say, “The Christian way is different. It is harder and easier. Christ says, Give me ALL. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. . . I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: My own will shall become yours.”

Often my anxiety causes me to be more of a pest to those around me than I would like to admit. This anxiety is a result of my refusal to die to myself and surrender each and every need to God. All this as a result, causes me to pray that I would not only know about my God, but would be fully persuaded like Abraham was. Perhaps that is why I find myself wrestling with the divine so frequently.

It seems that now that I am in my seventies that this issue should be settled. At this age I should be strolling through the Kingdom of God but instead, I find myself stumbling, arguing, and crying out to my heavenly Father more than ever before.

Perhaps I shouldn’t be so surprised after all Moses was eighty when He had His encounter with the Divine at the burning bush. Abraham was in his nineties and Jacob over 100 when they had their show downs which resulted in the Kingdom principals being burned into their hearts.

I can perhaps most identify with Jacob who when he was about to meet his brother Esau in Genesis 32, tries a wide variety of ways to pacify Esau. Jacob had every reason to fear. Years earlier he had stolen Esau’s birth right and had to flee because Esau vowed to kill him. Now Esau was coming towards him with 400 men.

In order to stop his brother, Jacob sends gifts to Esau which are refused. Now Jacob is getting desperate and tries to solve his problem by dividing his families into two groups realizing that if one doesn’t survive the other will. So many times, instead of surrendering the problem to God I will try to figure out the solution until the situation becoming almost unbearable.

As this happens, Jesus invites me into His Kingdom of peace and assurance that He has everything under control. He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

The night before Jacob is to meet Esau, he finds himself in a wrestling match with God. Jacob is broken so he can be blessed. His hip is knocked out of joint. Now he can't even run. He is crippled so he can be crowned. Jacob, which means "con-artist" gets his name changed to "Israel" which means "prince".

When Jacob meets Esau the spirit of God has worked in Esau's life, and they are reconciled. All of Jacob's fear had been a waste of time. I am seeing that as I abide in the Kingdom of God, I don't have to be anxious about anything but, "with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" I can let my needs be known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard, "My heart and mind in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6,7).

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:33, 34, "but seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Now instead of panicking when we face an impossible situation, we must see how critical it is that we pray because "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Accepting the truth of this passage following the death of a loved one is very difficult to say the least. C.S. Lewis in his book, "A Grief Observed", which was written following the death of his wife Joy said, "God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't. In this trial He makes us occupy the dock, the witness box, and the bench all at once. He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down.

God showed me that when I was in my fifties and Penny died. Then in my sixties He allowed 1411 Locust to be closed and KNLC TV 24 to be sold to pay the bills and move us into a new chapter of service at New Life Evangelistic Center.

Each transition was painful but continued to drive home the message of Acts 4:12. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we might be saved."

That name is Jesus. That "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10, 11).

When John in Matthew 3:2 says, “repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand” he was announcing that the rule of God’s King was about to overthrow the power and rule of all evil both human and hellish. The Kingdom was here because the King Jesus Christ was here. His presence introducing the power of the “Kingdom of God” meant a new world of hope had arrived. It meant we would no longer need to remain hostage to either the rule of death or the deadly oppressive human systems, political or otherwise. Further the Kingdom of darkness would be confronted and death, be overcome. As God’s King Jesus offers the blessing of God’s rule and hope both now and for all eternity.

One cannot be born into the Kingdom of God without hearing the message of salvation, renouncing one’s sin, and turning from that sin to Christ the Savior (Acts 3:19). As children of God, we grow in our knowledge of the Kingdom as we obey Jesus’ commandments and following His teachings. “The one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he (or she) does” (James 1:25).

As citizens in the Kingdom of God we will not be fruitful without the willingness to accept the Holy Spirit’s correction and guidance. “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, enjoying one another” (Galatians 5:24-26).

It is humility that allows us to experience the secrets of the Kingdom for Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Pride and self-sufficiency edges God out. This lets the ego take over which spells out edging God out. The Bible says we must at all costs avoid such because “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

After Jacob wrestled with God, he had his hip knocked out of joint. Jacob was given the new name of Israel, but he still did not live happily ever after. Living in the Kingdom of God was a lifelong process for Jacob. His beloved wife Rachel died. His favorite son Joseph was ripped out of his life until he believed Joseph was dead. Yet Jacob continued to live on believing God was true to the promise and the covenant He had made with Isaac and Abraham.

Then the day arrived, that Jacob learned God’s guiding hand had always been present and Joseph was alive. God’s unseen hand was using Joseph in Egypt to provide food which saved the lives of thousands of hungry people. Before Jacob died, he leaned on his staff and blessed His children.

Now as believers who live in the Kingdom of God, we must daily humble ourselves and trust that the unseen hand of God is at work. Romans 8:28 says, “truly all things work for good to those who love God and called according to His purpose.”

I would like to conclude with these thoughts shared by George MacDonald concerning the Kingdom of God when he asks, “What have you done this day because it was the will of Christ? Have you dismissed an anxious thought for the morrow? Have you ministered to any needy soul or body, and kept your right hand from knowing what your left hand did? Have you begun to leave all and follow him? Did you set yourself to judge righteous judgment? Are you being aware of covetousness? Have you forgiven your enemy? Are you seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness before all other things? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Have you given to some one that asked of you? Tell me something that you have done, are doing, or are trying to do because He told you?”

Jesus promises in Matthew 6:33 that if you seek, “First the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Yours in Christ,



Larry Rice