

07

The Keys to the Kingdom

WHAT'S THE SAME | THE KINGDOM



Last week, Jesus helped us understand the excitement of living off menu with God as creative collaborators. This week, he flings us the keys to the kingdom and says, *“Hey kid, it’s all yours. Go find it.”*

Seeking the kingdom is the opposite activity of entertaining anxiety. It puts a stop to spinning thoughts because it is one place that isn’t affected by the cares of this world. The problem is we aren’t exactly sure what the kingdom is or where to look. Is it something we do? We get? We open? We live in? We win?

We’re a little kingdom confused. And that’s okay.

It’s understandable because Jesus always operated from an eternal perspective. He is always inviting us to look beyond what we see and what we experience to understand more of what the kingdom of heaven should look like here on earth.

The first misunderstanding about the kingdom is that it is like a big bag

of heavenly treasure we get to open someday when we die. And Jesus says, nope, it's already been deposited, go withdraw it now. Worry and anxiety isn't a heavenly reality. Kingdom living equips his kids to walk in that freedom today. And tomorrow. And the next day. And the day after that.

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The second misunderstanding is that the kingdom is obvious and easy to get into. There was nothing obvious about Jesus coming to take back the throne from the enemy through his brutal death on the cross. And we're told that the way to the kingdom "life of more" is narrow and few find it (Matthew 7:14).

It's narrow because it's the harder way. The kingdom is inconvenient. It isn't going to fit in nicely with your plans. I hate to say it because I hate to hear it. And that's why Jesus requires we take rigorous inventory of where we find our value and what we place value on to be certain convenience hasn't replaced the call of the cross.

**THE KINGDOM IS
INCONVENIENT.**

This is where I often look around at my life and sadly see the crutches I've created instead of the crosses I've picked up. I'll be honest, I want the castle life. I want to be served, not serve. I want to be dressed, not dress others. But one hard thing at a time, I see my castle tendencies crumbling and the kingdom rising.

The slow fall of self is lifelong, which is a worthwhile investment, since the kingdom Jesus tells us to seek is eternal.

So what do we get right about the kingdom?

Foremost, Jesus is the King of it. And his kingdom is royal. It's extravagant. It's worth your time.

The word for kingdom is *basilea*. It is "the domain ruled by God as the sovereign king." This domain is two-fold. It is absolutely what we are looking forward to in heaven someday, *but* it is also the kingdom that takes up residency in the inner being of who we are when we commit to following Jesus. It is a life force powered by the Holy Spirit that animates our mouths, our hands, our feet, our wallets, and our thoughts towards a deeper and more trusting walk with him. Right now.

It's more like coming home, than inheriting a castle. And let's be honest, a castle sounds like too much work.

Here's a great baseline for all believers needing kingdom clarity—Jesus says, “Unless you become like little kids, there's no way you will get into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

When Jesus begins explaining the kingdom, he teaches the way children learn: through imagination and shared experience. He humbles himself in all his wisdom and brilliance and instead tells stories.

He tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44). And it is like a merchant in search of fine pearls (Matthew 13:45). And it is like a net that is thrown into the sea and catches all kinds of fish (Matthew 13:47). It is like a vineyard owner who gives really good salaries to the slackers (Matthew 20:1). It is like a celebrity wedding reception that saves the best seats for the least likely to succeed (Matthew 22:2).

The kingdom of heaven hovers below what is detectable by the world as worthwhile. It operates on different terms than the opportunistic culture we are a part of. It is no respecter of class, status, income, race, or political party. And when it is found, we will recognize it as being incredibly valuable, diverse, inclusive, empowering, and unexpected.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT | THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

The main difference between our verses is that Matthew is just a little more long winded in his account than Luke is. Matthew rings the righteousness bell for us, revisiting the soul superfood we learned about last week. And Luke gets to the end quicker, almost like he can't wait to tell the reader the ridiculous generosity that God has in mind when we seek his kingdom.

All these things will be added.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HOVERS BELOW WHAT IS DETECTABLE BY THE WORLD.

The very things you worry about? Jesus says that if you seek the kingdom first, he will represent them in your life in ways that are better than anything you could drum up. You'll get the best of what God has to offer in place of the very worst you've been fearing.

Don't get this wrong, he isn't offering perfect outcomes, he is offering his kingdom come—which is better.

He is offering kingdom order, a realigning of what's broken for the benefit of you and others. He wants to tuck his heavenly reality into our hearts in the middle of imperfect and hard. He is delighted to give us joy when we walk

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through junk with Jesus as our guide.

Jesus offers us order in the disorder of our current reality. We get to walk a well-lit pathway in the middle of darkness (John 8:12). We get overflowing hearts when we feel drained by life (John 7:37-39). We get the door that leads to safety when the wolf is on the prowl for our peace (John 10).

And when God sees his kids running to his Word, he goes bananas. He plants orchards that get overrun with produce. He fills water basins with the best wine. He replaces thorns with cypress trees. He fills up deserts with pools of water. He fills scrape-the-bottom jars with thick, delightful oil. He takes a lunch of trout and a loaf of bread and makes an all-you-can-eat fish buffet.

HE REPLACES THORNS WITH CYPRESS TREES. You just can't go wrong with kingdom obedience when you are dealing with a Dad who simply wants you free and filled.

WHAT THAT MEANS | GETTING KEYS MADE

So here's the mic drop: we can't be our own kings anymore. We have to evict ourselves from that old way of anxious living, one hard thing at a time.

In Luke 13:18, Jesus gives us one more poetic picture of what the kingdom of God is like: "It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

Back to birds.

It's about time. I've missed our feathered friends.

The kingdom starts small. And grows big. But the growth illustrated here, through the kingdom lens, isn't security, it's *largess*, a Latin word that means "generosity". It is "bestowing money or gifts upon others."¹ The kingdom of God, Jesus alive in us and ruling over us, facilitates growth that allows other birds of the air—people who have needs and are made to be reliant on God as well—find home too.

This kingdom offers shade and rest through friendship and community through the key of your very own life and personal experience of who Jesus is. Jesus' job as caretaker of our souls is to make us into key holders of the kingdom for other people who call him King too. To pay attention to what the Spirit is doing in you, and in the lives of those around you, will be hard,

humbling work. But it's work worth doing.

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Kingdom living is a constant checking in, responding, and trying again with Jesus. It is moving forward, staying put, being quiet, and speaking up. It is like any other kind of relationship. It moves and morphs and grows and shrinks.

There is no time off for the kingdom seeker to stop seeking. To seek the kingdom is to tirelessly dig for Jesus' authority in every area of our lives. In our parenting. In our sex lives. In our schooling. In our passions. In our dreams. In our mental illness. In our physical illness. In our trauma. In our healing. In our grief. In our gladness. On laundry day. On graduation day. On our birthday. On our last day.

It looks like collectively building a kingdom wholeheartedly with the only currency we all share: *time and energy*.

The first step for someone who has been circling the block for a little while is to actually catch the keys Jesus flings at us. Even if you drop them a handful of times, it's okay. Jesus keeps on flinging. So we should keep on seeking.



DISCUSS

Describe what it means to “seek the kingdom” in your own words.

Name the people in your life that have keys to your house. Why do they have them?

Do you believe God trusts you with the keys to his kingdom? Do you believe he should? Why or why not?

Read this thought: “Kingdom citizenship is totally reliant upon how contagiously curious his kids are about looking for it with their own lives.” How contagiously curious are you about seeking the kingdom?

What discipleship moments does your curiosity of Christ and his kingdom create in your everyday?



READ & REFLECT

Read Luke 17:20-21.

What does Jesus say the kingdom of God is not coming with?

Why do you think Jesus says the kingdom of God is invisible to the one looking for visible signs of it?

Where is the kingdom always found? (Look in verse 21.)

Read Psalm 46:5. Where does God say he is and what does that mean for us?

What does it say God offers us every single morning?

PEACE PRACTICE | SHARE A SLICE OF HUMBLE PIE

The Bible says that humility is necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:1-4). Make a list of the times God has humbled you. Make a list of the times you have humbled yourself.² What was the outcome of those moments? Which way would you prefer to be humbled? Come next week ready to share.

First Look

Luke 12:32

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Second Look

Matthew 6:34

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.