

THE KINGDOM OF GOD sermons by Rev. George R. Fiddes

Sermon 1 - INTRODUCING THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God

During the week, when I was chatting to one of our elders about the church as a whole, where we are going and what lies in the future for the church, I found myself thinking again about one of the things that has always been important for me: that is, that although today the church as we know it is loved by Christ and is of great importance to Him, when He began His ministry the emphasis of His ministry was the Kingdom of God.

There is a very real sense that we often forget about the Kingdom and concentrate on the visible church as an institution. The 'church' is the thing that is in some respects more tangible and visible. That local church, which tends to dominate our horizons, is in fact but a small representation of a wider concept: the rule of God in our lives and our witness to the world. The church is important as the body of believers, but it is the concept of Kingdom living that is of greater importance. We need to keep that wider perspective before us if the local manifestation is to be true to its purpose.

So, as we start this series on the Kingdom, it is worth asking some questions. For example, how important is the Kingdom? What place does it occupy in the purpose of God? Has it been inaugurated? And, especially, **What is the nature of the Kingdom of God?**

Two Scripture passages provide a background for our thinking: 2 Chronicles 1:1-10, Luke 9:51-62

In the first of these there is reference to the kingdom established by Solomon following the aspirations of David.

Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.

Then Solomon spoke to all Israel--to the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, to the judges and to all the leaders in Israel, the heads of families--and Solomon and the whole assembly went to the high place at Gibeon, for God's Tent of Meeting was there, which Moses the LORD's servant had made in the desert. Now David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to the place he had prepared for it, because he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. But the bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made was in Gibeon in front of the tabernacle of the LORD; so Solomon and the assembly inquired of him there. Solomon went up to the bronze altar before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

In Luke, we have the story of disciples being sent to proclaim the message of the Kingdom.

Luke 9: 52 - 62

And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

There is no doubt that the concept of the Kingdom was foremost in the teaching of the New Testament.

Let us look at four aspects.

1. The Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God: it was central to His whole ministry here on earth. We are told He did so through the whole of Galilee: *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.* (Mt. 4:23) *Jesus went into Galilee, ... proclaiming ... "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mk 1: 15.)

With the Kingdom of God near at hand, it was required that people would repent and believe the Good News. That message still applies today - the message of repentance and faith. It is still the same call today – repentance, which means a turning away from those things that are wrong; and faith in Jesus, a transforming faith that turns us around and gives us a new direction, a new life, and a new hope.

2. Jesus sent His disciples to proclaim the kingdom

The disciples, when they were with Jesus, were sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God. It happened in their first limited commission: *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God* (Luke 9: 1,2.). We read further, in Luke 9: 59-60, that there is an individual commission to proclaim the Kingdom of God: *He said to another man, "Follow me."* In the next chapter again the sending out of the Seventy takes place so that they might tell them that the Kingdom of God is at hand. *"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'* "

3. Even after His death He spoke of the kingdom.

In the significant days after His death and resurrection, when He commissioned His disciples to continue the work He had begun, Jesus talked to them primarily about the Kingdom. *After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.* (Acts 1: 3.) All their concern focused on

Kingdom of God. *Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, (Acts 8:12)* The disciples asked Him whether this was the time He would restore the kingdom, only to be told to wait and work for that event.

4. The Kingdom of God in the preaching of Paul.

Paul continued the teaching of Jesus, amplified it, and took it to a wider community. He took the good news of the Kingdom of God, not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

Wherever he went, he would go to the synagogues and tell the Jews of Jesus: *As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, (Acts.17:1-3),* and in the synagogues he seeks to convince them concerning the kingdom of God. *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. (Acts 19:8.)* When the Jews rejected him he took the same message to the Gentiles. This was the thrust of his missionary journeys.

This was also at the centre of his instruction to the early church. We read about that in his travels and as he taught, he preached the Kingdom of God *"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. (Acts.20:25.)*

He warned them that there would be difficult days ahead before they entered the Kingdom. *Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. (Acts.14:21-22.)* He would later write to them and encourage them: *For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1 Thes.2:12)* and with regard to the Kingdom and its worth and value for us. *All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (2 Thes.1: 5.)*

In Acts 1:3 Jesus spends some 40 days talking about the Kingdom; Paul talks about it from morning to night (Acts 28:23).

So, if the Kingdom features so prominently in the good news that Jesus came to proclaim, and which he commissioned his disciples after him to continue, then that is surely something that is worthy of our attention?

Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom. But what is its nature?

We now go on to look at that aspect.