

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

### Sermon 2 - INAUGURATING THE KINGDOM

#### The Nature of the Kingdom of God

Last time we looked at the place of the Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus and in the preaching of Paul. Its prominence there means that there is a great deal said about the Kingdom of God. We are aware of it as part of our faith and an important part of our understanding of the church. Yet, there is so much that we don't fully understand.

So let's look at what it is like.

#### 1. The Kingdom of God is Spiritual not Physical.

Though obvious, this does not come naturally to us. There is a great temptation that, as we live in a physical world and the material needs of our lives seem to demand so much of us, we see everything in terms of our physical being. But, the Kingdom is different.

This can be seen in the story in Mark's Gospel of the scribe who questions Jesus about the greatest commandment *"The most important one (commandment)," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mk.12:28-34 9)*

The Kingdom is about a spiritual relationship manifest in loving God and in loving one's fellow man. Perceiving his thinking, Jesus tells him: *"You are not far from the Kingdom of God"*. It was because of the man's understanding of what is important i.e. an overriding love for God and a love for our fellow human beings. It was about the sovereignty of God and the need to apply that in our lives.

The very clear implication is that the Kingdom of God is a spiritual, rather than a physical, reality.

#### 2. The Kingdom of God is dynamic not institutional

In Luke's Gospel we have the question by the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom of God would come. *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."* (Luke 17:20-21)

Jesus' answer is that it won't come with observation of physical events. There are so many people who are out there searching for phenomena, for something that will change the world, and change them. So often it is the case that the change needs to be within. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within you, or among you.

There are two possible interpretations of this. One is that the rule of God is in our hearts and that is when we surrender all to God and allow Him to have His say in

our hearts that His kingdom is established. The other is that the Kingdom of God is in the person of Jesus and so is among us, in our midst, accessible.

Either way it means that the Kingdom of God is about God entering our lives and consequently our lives being changed by God when we come under His rule.

When Jesus gives a reply to Pontius Pilate in John 18 He says "*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.*" (John 18: 36).

He states very clearly *that my kingdom is not of this world*. His was not an earthly, institutional kingdom as the Jews had been expecting from the Messiah. The Kingdom of God is not a physical entity, an institutional entity. Therefore, it cannot be propagated by force or physical means. Indeed the only way the Kingdom can be spread is through establishing a spiritual relationship, through the renewing of the mind, through the changing of hearts, by the whole notion of starting afresh, being born again into a new kingdom – the Kingdom of God. In addition to being ‘born of water’ being ‘born of the Spirit’. (John 3: 5.)

- The Kingdom is a dynamic, transformational relationship.
- The Kingdom of God is the reign of God in Christ.

Matthew uses the term the *Kingdom of Heaven* and this might well be that Matthew was the most Jewish of the gospels and for that reason wanted to emphasise that this was not an earthly kingdom but a spiritual kingdom that was being talked about here.

Also. the Jews had a literary device whereby they would often say the same thing twice but use a different form of words in order that there might be a better grasp and understanding of the truth. On that basis the terms are interchangeable. Both refer to a spiritual regime, one that is not found naturally but needs to be welcomed and accepted and enlisted in.

When Jesus teaches the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew, He says “*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done...*(Matthew 6: 10. ”)

The Kingdom of God will come as His will is done on earth.

That is the challenge of the Kingdom. It is our responsibility, as stated in Mt.6:33, to seek the Kingdom of God first and foremost and to conform to the will and purpose of God.

But, when and how does that Kingdom come?