

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

INTRODUCTION

This series of sermons came about through reflection on what it means to be church in these days.

They are based on Biblical teaching on the Kingdom of God as presented by Jesus in the Gospels and spelt out in the rest of the New Testament.

In presenting the message He came to bring, Jesus often used illustrations and concepts which gave meaning to His teaching. For example, there is reference to agricultural and horticultural themes like sheep and shepherds, wheat and tares, fish and nets.

Foremost and fundamental in these presentations is the concept of the Kingdom of God. It implies several things. For example, it is a community which follows certain rules and procedures, it is a coordinated, governed entity each owing allegiance to its recognised Leader. It is an operational unit capable of achieving purposes and fulfilling projects. It comprises a king – an acknowledged leader who is respected, and followed; and who also provides the direction and resources. It also consists of subjects, those who follow, who are an essential part of the Kingdom.

While historical associations may carry overtones of oppression and coercion, this kingdom is voluntary, accepted and benevolent in its function and mode of operation. More than that, it is distinct, has clear rules and procedures and is strong and purposeful.

That is a picture of the purpose of God and the message Christ brought to earth.

God is King, deservedly so. In Him we move and have our being. He is God, Resource, Guide, Mentor, Leader, Jehovah. He wants to govern subjects (who currently are slaves to another malevolent king, Satan). So he secures their release and brings them into His kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

Looking at this theme of the Kingdom of God will therefore help us in understanding God's purpose and how it affects and influences our spiritual life and behaviour in this world while anticipating that future undisturbed reign.

This series of sermons was originally preached in St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick, and they are summarised here in response to popular request in order to make them available to a wider audience and as a reminder for those who wish to reflect further on that Kingdom and its significance in their lives.

After all the key prayer of the Christian Church, taught by the Lord Jesus implores:

***Our Father, which art in Heaven
Hallowed be Thy Name
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven.***

May these homilies serve to help that prayer to be prayed more fervently and contribute to its effectually being answered.

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.

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 is 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?

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

Sermon 3 - ESTABLISHING THE KINGDOM

The Establishment of the Kingdom

We have already seen that the Kingdom of God is within or among you: it is here. But when and how did it come?

1. The Kingdom of God foretold

Before the coming of Jesus we read in Daniel of the Kingdom of God. There we are told that God would establish a kingdom, and a kingdom that would never be destroyed. "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands--a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. (Daniel 10: 24.)

We also read in Luke the words that are spoken by the Angel Gabriel in *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:31-33)*

Jesus would be given the throne of David; and of His Kingdom there would be no end. There are kingdoms that come and go and yet the kingdom that is being talked about here is a kingdom that in essence is different from any other kingdom, one that will never be defeated, destroyed or overthrown.

When Jesus was on this earth He spoke of the Kingdom in such a way that it reminded people of what was being expected.

- At the start of His ministry *The Time has come - The Kingdom is at hand.* (Mark 1:14-15)
- At the height of His ministry *"I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."* (Mark 9:1-9)
- At the end of His ministry - Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the Kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. The Thief on the Cross and Joseph of Arimathea looked for the Kingdom and after the resurrection Jesus teaches His disciples to inquire about the Kingdom.

It was well established in the public awareness that a kingdom would come.

2. The Kingdom of God Present

Not only did Jesus refer to the promised Kingdom, He took every opportunity to stress that, in Him, and His being accepted by faith, it was present, "among you".

- The Kingdom now exists by virtue of Jesus' authority and rule. He has been given *all authority in heaven and on earth.* (Matt 28:18) He has been *made both Lord and Christ* (Acts 2:36) All things have been *placed under His feet.* (Eph. 1:20-22) All authority and power have been made subject to Him (1 Peter 3:22).

- The reign of God is now administered by Jesus. He is the *ruler over the Kings of the earth*. (Rev. 1:5) He has received *power to rule the nations with a rod of iron*. (Rev. 2:26-27) *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (1 Tim. 6:14-15); He will *reign until all enemies are placed under His feet*. (1 Cor. 15:25-26)

In the NT story of the early church, it was obvious that the Kingdom was well established in reality. For example,

Those in the church were being called into the Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12)

They were being *translated into the Kingdom* (Col 1:13)

They were *receiving the Kingdom* (Heb 12:28)

They were companions in the Kingdom (Rev 1:9)

Becoming a Christian meant confessing Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9-10).

The church is the community of souls in whose hearts Christ is recognised as sovereign.

Because of this reality and immediacy, the terms ‘church’ and ‘the Kingdom’ are often used interchangeably.

3. The Kingdom of God Future

The Kingdom of God is both present and future. We have in Matthew 13:40-43 the parable of the Tares and the notion of gathering the good into the Kingdom, but leaving the bad. The righteous shine in the Kingdom of their Father.

In the description of the judgement in Matthew 25:34 when the Son of Man comes in His glory, the blessed will inherit the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.

Paul looks to the future, expounds the hope of the resurrection, and encourages believers to live holy lives and be steadfast and expresses his own hope for the future (2 Tim.4:18)

Peter takes it further when he says: *Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 1:10-11)

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

Sermon 4 - EXPERIENCING THE KINGDOM

The Blessings of The Kingdom

We have been looking at the idea of the Kingdom of God.

We now come to some of the benefits. Two scriptures provide a background to this. The first is an account in Psalm 84 of the blessings in the House of God:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!

My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young-- a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.

As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Look upon our shield, O God; look with favour on your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

The second is Paul's account from Colossians:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The first thing that we hear of Jesus doing in His public ministry is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. The notion of the gospel is that it is Good News, and the Christian faith is about Good News for all mankind: Jesus' coming to bring us Salvation. I never weary of taking every opportunity to tell people of the Salvation that is offered through Jesus.

As we reflect on that Good News, it is worth remembering that there are real blessings to be gained when we freely submit to the reign of God in Christ Jesus. There are:

Blessings in the Present

1. God's forgiveness – there is redemption: *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1: 14); through the blood of Christ: to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. (Rev. 1: 5.)*
 This is the start of the gospel and the main purpose for the coming of Jesus into our world that we might be saved from the penalty we deserve for our sins. That is the chief purpose for the coming of Jesus and that is why He went to the Cross. Anyone who tells you otherwise is deceiving you. When we have entered through Christ into that new relationship with God then there are other benefits.
2. We enjoy God's care. – When we submit to God's rule then we benefit from His care: *For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. (Psalm 84: 11)* We have no need to have any anxiety over the necessities of life: *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? (Matt. 6:25)* so long as we seek His Kingdom first: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:33)*
3. We are brought into God's Family. When we come to faith we are made members of Christ's body, the church, God's family. (1 Tim. 3:15.) We receive manifold more family (Luke. 18:29-30) (Mark 10:29-30)
4. We receive God's Holy Spirit. It is promised to those who believe. He is a source of righteousness, peace and joy. (Romans 14:17; 15:13.) He serves as God's instrumental agent to strengthen us, that we might produce the fruit of a truly blessed life (Eph 3:16; Gal. 5:22-23)

Blessings in the Future

1. We will enter into God's Eternal Kingdom (Matt.7:21-23) promised to those who do the Father's will; not just those who talk a good game nor for those who have to do a great deal but for those who have surrendered to Jesus.
2. God's Eternal City – Prepared for those who seek it. (Heb 11:13-16). Like Abraham, and the Old Testament faithful, and Paul, and the New Testament saints. Or, as Revelation puts it, *as a bride adorned for her husband, the Holy city New Jerusalem. (Rev 21: 2)*
3. God's Eternal Presence. They will need no candle neither light of the sun for the Lord God gives them light. (Rev. 21:22-23) The Glory of the Lord illuminates. No more curse and no more night (Rev. 22:3-5) His servants shall see His face and reign.
4. God's Eternal care. – Preventing the reason for sorrow. Rev 21:4. Wiping away all tears, the former things have passed away. Providing our every need Rev. 22:1-2. The river of life flowing from the throne. The tree of life.

We need to start Kingdom living now and look forward to that day when we will know it in all its fullness.

But, how do we become part of it?

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

Sermon 5 - ENTERING THE KINGDOM

Two background Scripture readings throw light on this aspect. The first, from 2 Chronicles, shows how those eligible to enter the Tabernacle and temple were listed by name. They were identified as being entitled to enter.

In addition, they distributed to the males three years old or more whose names were in the genealogical records--all who would enter the temple of the LORD to perform the daily duties of their various tasks, according to their responsibilities and their divisions.

The second, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7, warns that not all are automatically awarded entry:

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' (Matthew 7: 15 – 22)

How does that apply where the Kingdom is concerned?

When talking to first communicants about joining the church and explaining to them what these sacraments mean, I am amazed at the variety of reasons people have for wanting to be part of the church. There are occasions when I have come across people who hold their vows very lightly, I still remember speaking to a lady who said she took what she wanted of the faith and ignored the rest of the teaching/demands of the church. Perhaps again this is symptomatic of the lack of respect that there is for authority or the demands of others or even the demands of God. Such a casual, indeterminate approach is totally out of place. A key question is: How do we enter?

There are certain requirements if we expect to enter the Kingdom of God.

1. There is the need for obedience to the will of God. We need to do what God calls us and commands us to do. It is not for us to pick and choose but to respond appropriately to the demands of God as stated in the Bible.

There is a story in Matt.21:28-32 about two sons who were asked to go and work in the vineyard. The first said yes but didn't go; the second said no, thought better of it, and then went. It was the one who did what his father had asked that pleased him. It is not enough to want to be a Christian, or claim to be a Christian. It is not enough to be religious, or to be affiliated to one church or another. What is required is that we hear the command of God to obey – to repent and believe.

There is a need to obey the gospel of Jesus. For example, the Thessalonians are told: *-your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.* (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

In Romans, Paul says that *faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.* (Romans 10: 17.)

Equally, those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, will be punished: *He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thess 1: 8.) And it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17)* The obedience is the obedience of faith; that we walk with God; that we obey Jesus and follow His teachings.

2. There is a need for repentance. There is a widespread misconception that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are about people doing God a favour; that if people say they believe in Jesus and become a formal part of the church, then somehow or other they are doing God a great favour. They take eligibility for granted.

But, that is not the case. It is God through His Son Jesus the Messiah who has brought deliverance to our world and to us as individuals and it is only by repentance and belief (= total trust) that we benefit from it. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached a message of repentance (Matt 3:1-2, Matt 4:17). That means a turning away from sin and going in the other direction. Paul tells in Galatians what will keep us out of heaven. *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Equally, trust in self righteousness disqualifies, as we read above in the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah talks about *our righteousness being as filthy rags. (Isa 64: 6).*

Repentance is not easy or light. It is a major decision with serious consequences. It involves sacrifice – abandonment of the past; commitment – adherence to a new way of living; and endurance – pursuing that way *against the tide*, as it were.

3. There is a need for Sanctification with a higher standard to every aspect of life. This means to be holy; and to be holy as God is holy. This is not an airy fairy sort of notion but a real down to earth change in our hearts and in our lives. Sometimes folk will say to me that what I say is down to earth, but that is what the Christian faith is about, and it needs to be down to earth because we live in this world. God is in our world and there has to be a spirituality that starts in heaven and finishes here where we are. It is to be a sanctification that leads to a nobler character – i.e. we become more like Jesus, in our very nature and the qualities that we have.

And summing all these up, it becomes essential to realise that

4. It needs a new birth. Jesus said in John *you must be born again. (John 3: 7);* and in Matthew *become like a little child. (Matt:18:3)*

In order that we might depend on God and obey Him, we are to be born of water (natural) and the Spirit (regenerated by receiving the life of God through Christ) As a result we can say, like Paul in Galatians: *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2: 20.)*

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

Sermon 6 - LIVING THE KINGDOM

The Righteousness of the Kingdom

Having entered the Kingdom there is a responsibility to live a new life, a life of righteousness. Therefore today we look at the Righteousness of the Kingdom, thinking particularly of:

- The Necessary Attitudes –
- The Necessary Conduct –
- The necessary Priorities-

There is in the July edition of Life and Work a letter that is written in defence of homosexuality as a viable Christian lifestyle. The means of justification is that the Christian faith is about love and that is all that matters. As I considered what was being said, I reckoned that the author of the letter was coming more from a humanist perspective than a Christian one. What was being espoused as Christian was a very narrow caricature of what the Christian faith is really about.

It is only when we look and see what Jesus teaches about the Kingdom that we can gain a sound understanding of what it is to be a Christian.

In the true Christian experience, it is necessary that we come with repentance and faith, that we receive forgiveness, that we know and experience the mercy and grace of God and renewal in our lives. We are also called to holiness of living to reflect the righteousness of the Kingdom.

1. Necessary Attitudes.

The best and the clearest indication and direction that we have with regard to the attitudes that should be in our lives are set out in the Beatitudes as delivered to us by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5 – 7). Attitudes are the heart of behaviour. For example, with the start of Wimbledon, there will be the hopes and the expectation that Andy Murray will be able to do well. One of the recognised factors in the life of any successful athlete is a right attitude. It is no different when we are in the cause of Christ.

The attitudes are listed in chapter 5:

- Poverty of Spirit(humility) can lead to The Kingdom of Heaven
- Mourning (over sin) - Comfort from the burden of sin
- Meekness (towards God and others) – Inheriting the earth(living a blessed life)
- Hungering and thirsting after righteousness – Being filled with righteousness
- Mercy towards others – receiving mercy
- Purity of heart (desiring holiness) – Seeing God
- Makers of peace – Being known as children of God
- Enduring persecution – the Kingdom of Heaven

2. Necessary Conduct

There must be an outworking of these attitudes in our conduct. The very same Sermon on the Mount says: *Let your light shine.*

Last week I was talking to the children about being salt and light. That is something that is intended for us all. We are to be salt in this world, meaning that we bring

flavour and taste and preservation. We are to be light shining the light of God into the darkness, so that people might glorify God. (Matt. 5:3-16)

There is a necessity for a higher standard of conduct. It is not enough that you don't murder but you also need to avoid anger (Matt 5:21-26). Not just avoid adultery but eschew impure thoughts. (Matt5:27-30). And more. For example, avoid divorce because of what it does; avoid flippant oaths by speaking truthfully. And positively, responding to evil with good; loving your enemies; doing charitable deeds to be seen of God and not man; praying & fasting to be seen of God not man. (Matt 5:21-6:18)

3. Necessary priorities

Getting your eyes fixed on heaven. The things that are most important to us are the things that motivate us. (Matt 6:19-24)

We are to lay up treasure in heaven, for if our treasure is there then our hearts will be also. Let me ask you what is most important to you today, is it your eternal salvation, is it your relationship with God, is it God's Kingdom. You cannot serve two masters – whatever those two masters might be.

Living the Kingdom entails effort, choices, commitment: not to do things that come naturally, but to do things that come from that supernatural inspiration. Or, as Paul told the Corinthians, to follow “*a more excellent way*”. (1 Corinthians 12: 31.) There is no need to worry. Indeed the Sermon on the Mount gives the assurance that we should: *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* (Matt 6:25-34)

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

Sermon 7 - APPRECIATING THE KINGDOM

The Mysteries of the Kingdom Revealed

We have so far dealt with the proclamation, nature, establishment, blessing, entrance, and righteousness of the Kingdom. We now come to one of its unique features: the mystery, by which is signified an open secret for the initiated but it is totally incomprehensible to those outside.

The Mysteries of the Kingdom can be divided into three. The Kingdom **Itself**, the **Disciples** of the Kingdom and the **King** of the Kingdom.

1. The Kingdom Itself

The Growth of the Kingdom In a climate where we seem to be seeing the decline of the church there is a great deal of interest, at least in certain parts, as to how to make the church grow. There are any number of conferences and courses. But, the church grows organically.

The parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31) talks of small beginnings that spread to far greater things. It is something that spreads like yeast or leaven (Matt. 13:33), where you may not see it happening but none the less it is going on all the time, permeating the whole. It is connected to the Word and the proclamation of the word and often in a way that we don't understand, but is real none the less. It spreads despite Satan's efforts (Matt. 13:24). The parable of the wheat and the tares elaborates on that.

The Value of the Kingdom Two parables, the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, demonstrate the principle of value, where the Kingdom is concerned.

The Beneficiaries of the Kingdom. There will be a separation, for not everyone will enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13:24ff). Despite bearing appearances, only the genuine will benefit from being in the kingdom. The parables of the wheat and the tares, and the dragnet indicate that some will benefit while others definitely will not. The kingdom will be taken from those who should have received it and given to those who deserve it (Matt. 22:1-14) as seen in the parables of the Wedding Feast, and the Great Supper.

2. The Disciples of the Kingdom

The Behaviour of the Disciples. Discipleship depends on appropriate behaviour. True disciples are those who have ears to hear and who do the will of their Father; who bear fruit for the Kingdom as in the parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3).

Or, those who prepare for the Lord's return and work for the kingdom, as in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, or the parable of the talents. (Matt. 25)

Or, those who live the right way, as illustrated in the story of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10)

The Attitude of the Disciples Various parables show that attitude is important. For example, they are to be merciful as God is merciful, grateful for their Salvation (the Two Debtors: Luke. 7:41 Luke 12 & 16) Now is the time to sort things out and have the right priorities and to have a spirit of humility (the Rich Fool, Lazarus and the Rich man, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. (Luke 18) And, to know that what they

do is only what is their duty. (Luke 17) and at best they should only regard themselves as Unprofitable Servants.

3. The King of the Kingdom

Yet other parables illustrate the characteristics and standing of the King of the Kingdom. For example, His great love for the lost is amply illustrated in the three stories of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Coin and the Lost Sheep in Luke 15.

Other parables highlight His role in the coming judgement where the wheat and the tares are gathered and sorted; or the fish are separated in the dragnet; or the servants are held to account, and are dealt with accordingly, as in the parable of the talents.

To the uninitiated these are mysteries: to those who have entered they are enlightening and motivating as they see how the Kingdom operates and appreciate its values and distinctives, the kind of secrets Peter had in mind when he encouraged the persecuted Christians to *be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you.* (1 Peter 3: 15).

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

CONCLUSION and SUMMARY

These sermons have tried to illustrate that the Kingdom of God is a new way of living under a recognized Head.

This kingdom was brought in by the coming of Christ into the world as part of God's redemptive purpose. We read that "*God so loved that world that He gave His only begotten Son that whatsoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*". (John 3: 16) Jesus came into our world to rescue mankind from the bondage of Satan and to generate a set of people to follow the ways of God, living as 'citizens of heaven' or aliens in this present evil world.

That kingdom is from God: it is spiritual. But it is for people. It is accessed by faith following repentance. It is for those who turn from the world, commit themselves to a new way of life and actively follow the ways of the King. It is the kingdom that can be accessed here, enjoyed now but continues to eternity.

Entrance into that kingdom is by repentance (which means turning away from the worldly life) and faith (which is acceptance of a liberating truth) and the adoption of the new code of behaviour made possible by the resource the King provides by His Spirit.

This is a mystery - an open secret to those who are in the know but total confusion to those who are still in darkness.

There is no automatic entry but it depends on a response to the challenge posed by Joshua: "*Choose this day whom you will serve*". (Joshua 24: 15) The right choice brings peace with God, an experience, a hope in a wonderful privilege and responsibility.

No wonder Paul encouraged the early Christians to think of themselves as "*citizens of heaven*" and also reminded them of the need to "*walk worthy of that vocation*"

In practical terms the church should reflect that very same truth.

It is a collection of people who have turned their backs on the world, trusted in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, believed the message and endeavour to live a life according to the standards and principles set out in the Bible. That is a real life, it is a spiritual life, which reflects all that God is; and anticipates all that should – and one day will - be.

And so, we pray:

***Our Father, which art in Heaven
Hallowed be Thy Name
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven.***