

## The Kingdom of God: A True Life and Witness of the Church

This bible study is written to help us understand the good news of the kingdom that Jesus preached throughout his ministry. It explores the entire bible to see the all-pervasive theme of the kingdom that occurs throughout the scripture. The centrality of the kingdom of God and its values described in the beatitudes have been highlighted. How the followers of Christ live and witness to other people, depends on the reality of God's kingdom in their lives.

A copy of these studies can be obtained from the reception or downloaded free of charge from the web site of the author; [www.austindayal.com](http://www.austindayal.com). The study material is meant for the group study that will be conducted during this Lenten period, but its use for any other purpose is not permitted without the written permission of the author. The readers can do these studies without the book but reading the book would certainly help. The Kingdom of God: A True Life and Witness of the Church, is available on Amazon in digital and paper back formats.

### Introduction

Since the beginning of time the Kingdom of God has been an important issue. God is the sovereign ruler over everything because He is the creator of all things. Therefore, God is the legitimate and obvious choice to be the King. This theme runs right through from Genesis to Revelation covering the entire human history. The Kingship belongs to the Almighty God who has created heaven and earth. The bible is full of this assertion (Ps. 90:2; 93:1-2; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1-7 & 9; 99:1-2; Dan. 4:34-35; 6:26).

The gospel of Matthew records, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near."" (Mat. 4:17). In the gospel of Mark, it says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand ..." (Mark 1:14). In Luke's gospel also Jesus said that he was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom (Luke 4:43). It is quite significant that Jesus began to preach "The Kingdom of heaven has come near" at the start of his ministry and continued to preach the good news of the Kingdom. Almost all the parables are about the kingdom of God. The centrality of the message of the kingdom of God indicates the main purpose for which God had sent his Son into the world.

Jesus died after three years of his ministry which makes it difficult to understand his proclamation about the kingdom being at hand. The prophecies of the reigning Messiah and the suffering Messiah in the Old Testament were not clearly understood by the Jews. Therefore, they were mainly focussed on the socio-political freedom they had enjoyed during the time of king David. But God had a much bigger plan which would encompass not only the whole visible world but also the unseen world (Eph. 1:20-21, 3:10; 1Pet. 1:12). Jesus also said that the flesh and blood can't inherit the Kingdom of God. Therefore, no human being can enter God's kingdom in a sinful state. To make this possible Jesus sacrificed his life, because through him people can now enter the Kingdom of God. This is the reason why Jesus died.

The early church understood the importance of the kingdom of God and its values, Jesus described in the beatitudes. They left everything and began to live in a community like Jesus used to live with his disciples. They had everything in common and lived in peace with one another. They were able to do this by the love of God that filled their hearts. When God's people begin to live by the values of the Kingdom, it accomplishes two important things. It fulfils the proclamation Jesus made that the Kingdom of God has come and gives credibility to the power of the gospel by demonstrating its transforming power in a tangible way. On this earth the church should be the place where God's people live in peace with one another, sharing their lives and their possessions.



- VI. Have you been able to overcome sins in your new life which might have dominated your old life? Give specific examples.
  
- VII. What is the most difficult area in your life where you fail, and how can it be overcome by faith in Christ?
  
- VIII. The salvation is a free gift from God, which will cost us everything even our life! Discuss this truth from your life experience. (The Kingdom of God, pp. 20-22)

(b) The divine love

- I. The presence of divine love in our life is a result of our faith in Christ. What is the divine love and how can we receive it and experience it in our daily life? (Eph. 3:16-19)
  
- II. Why the benchmark of righteousness that Jesus outlined in the beatitudes (Mat. 5-7) can only be met when God's love is the source of our motivation? [Compare this to the efforts of a legalistic religion]

We must hunger and thirst for God like the king David and the prophet Isaiah did (Ps. 42:1-2; Isa. 26:9). We should live like a devotee, living only for God and nothing else. The desert fathers led such devoted lives in the first few centuries after Christ, but later, this tradition gradually disappeared from Christianity. When John the Baptist said, "the One who is coming after me will baptise you with Holy Spirit and fire" he meant the fire of 'love'. We should become besotted with God and his presence so much, that we are not able to live without him.

[The greatness of God's love can only be understood and experienced within the community of God's people – the church (Eph. 3:18-19). This is one sure way to enjoy the love of God in our daily lives.

Within a church where the love of God reigns supreme, we get a foretaste of the goodness of God that we will enjoy in heaven.]

- III. Why should we be consumed by the love of God like Isaiah and king David experienced? How do you think this would change our perspective on life?
  
- IV. How can the divine love change our family lives and our church community?

(c) The hope of eternal life

The hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus is the anchor that helps us go through any difficult situation in life. There is nothing that can help us endure hardship and suffering more than the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus. It is a golden chord that connects us to heaven. Jesus promised his disciples that he will come again to take them where he is, so that they may live with him forever. This life on earth is not the end but a short prelude to a wonderful life with God that will never end. The hope in Christ gives us a different perspective about this life and its purpose.

If life goes pear-shape or if we are living in war-torn country where we are persecuted, the hope of an eternal home gains a lot of weight. Even in times of peace we are not as secure as we think, because the pressures of life and the temptations of the world can be formidable forces.

- I. These days we enjoy the blessings of food, home, comforts of life and security. Does this affect our appreciation of the eternal life?
  
- II. How important the hope of eternal life is for us today? Is it just regarded as something extra we may have in the future?
  
- III. What about the other dangers that are mentioned above? Should we be complacent because of the apparent security we enjoy today? Spell out some of the dangers that you see in the life today?





### 3- Study

Attack on the Christian tenets contained in the bible; from the outside world and from within the church

These days we are lulled into thinking that everything is okay. We tend to believe that God has blessed us with peace and prosperity, but we fail to notice the subtle ways by which the enemy is eroding our faith and destroying the church.

The church is supposed to manifest the values of God's Kingdom in this world; destroy this and you destroy the Christian witness. It does not matter what grand edifices we build or what exciting programmes we run, they have little or no meaning, without the reality of God's kingdom being displayed in the church.

- I. Salvation by faith alone was the main issue during the reformation time. What has happened to it since then? Aren't we just doing lip service these days?
  
- II. Do you see the need for correction in the church today? How serious do you think is the problem?

#### (a) Attacks from the outside

Faith is unreasonable and blind. It is superstition and its use by date has expired. It is old and has no place in the modern age of science. These are some of the allegations that are levelled by the world, against the Christian faith today. People also say that religion is the main cause of strife in the world. It is alleged that human beings would be better off if there was no religion.

The forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ is the other issue, which is vehemently opposed by the secular world. The guilt due to sin is said to be wrong and damaging to the human development.

- I. Describe instances when you encountered one of these allegations. How did you react to this?
  
- II. Describe some of the ways by which we can counter these accusations?

III. Has the world managed to change the church?

(b) Attacks from within the church

In the name of progress and modernisation, faith has been redefined by some churches. The narrative of Genesis is explained from the perspective of science and morality is now a big fuzzy area where everything is due for a change. The awesome Holy God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has been reduced to a pliable god who agrees to everything we think and say.

The accuracy of the scripture is questioned, the existence of a real historic Jesus is denied and the repentance for our sins is limited to a verbal recitation of a few words during the Sunday service.

- I. Is it right for the flawed human mind to redefine the content of our faith in Christ? Shouldn't we rather try to listen to God? (pp. 78-81)
  
- II. Why are people trying to do this?
  
- III. Why are we embarrassed by the biblical truth? Who are we trying to please; God or the world?
  
- IV. How does the morality issue affect our walk with God?
  
- V. Can we defy God's statutes and still call ourselves Christians?



## 4- Study

### (a) Defending the faith

The attacks directed towards Christian Faith must be countered in a nonviolent way that Jesus advocated. Jesus faced a similar situation in his time and he dealt with it by teaching the Jews the Law and its implication for their lives. The beatitudes are the essence of what God wants from his followers. Therefore, in today's context we must proclaim the gospel clearly to the people. The gospel is regarded as the gift of personal salvation by most Christians, but the good news is that the Kingdom of God has come into this world. It exists wherever a group of Christians live by the values of his Kingdom.

- I. What did Jesus do when he was threatened by the Jews? (Mark 3:6 & 14; Mat. 9:34, 10:2, 12:14; Luke 6:11 & 14)
  
- II. How did the early disciples stand up against these forces (Acts 2:41-45)?
  
- III. What was their first port of call when they were threatened? (Acts 4:23-31)

Jesus destroyed the power of evil on the cross, in a very unusual way. Referring to this Paul says, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Col. 2:15). Therefore, the crucified Jesus is not a symbol of defeat but God's triumph over the powers of this world. (p. 106)

Therefore, as people of God, we need to emulate his example without fear or embarrassment, because the cross is the power of God for those who are being saved (1 Cor. 1:23-24). This is a potent and most effective way that has destroyed evil, without generating a perpetual cycle of hate and revenge, but it does demand that we lay down our lives in the same way as Jesus did.

[The church in most democratic countries does not face persecution these days but its faith in Christ, its love for God and its hope of the coming Kingdom is under constant attack. It comes in the form of false ideologies of this world and from the wrong teaching given in the church.]

- IV. What was common between Jesus' life and the early church community (Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; 11:1; Acts 2:42)?

- V. In the early church everything revolved around their new life in Christ. Why making faith a part of our daily life is the good strategy to counter these attacks?

(b) Faith in Jesus Christ

[There are several ways we can tackle the decline of our faith. The best place to start is to learn from Jesus' life and how he dealt with this problem. We can also look to the earlier Christians and learn from their lives. We can pray and seek God's wisdom about our situation. p. 108]]

- I. Faith in Christ Jesus is crucial to our life and our witness. What can be done to strengthen our faith? The disciples asked Jesus this question and how did Jesus reply to them? (Luke 17:5-6)
  
- II. Clear understanding of the content of our faith is important. Where do we get this help and what can we do about this?

(c) Genuine repentance

[Genuine repentance and victory over sin is necessary to prepare ourselves against the formidable evil forces. We must remove any foothold that Satan has in our lives. The victory has been won by Jesus on the cross and we need to learn how to use the power of the cross. (John 14:27; 16:33; I John 5:18, 20)]

- I. Repentance and victory over sin are both essential parts of our new life in Christ. What is genuine repentance?
  
- II. Why the emphasis on personal salvation has not helped us to be more loving and caring towards other people? ("What's in it for me" attitude. Salvation has become just another thing to have as a security for life after death. It seems to have lost its relevance for our daily lives.)
  
- III. Why is the genuine repentance necessary for peace and harmony within the church? (James 5:16)

- IV. The greatest commandment has a complementary part which relates to interpersonal relationships. To love our neighbour as ourselves, is the evidence that we do understand the implication of the greatest commandment for our daily life. Why should genuine repentance must include the restorative action, to address the hurts inflicted on the victim? The episode of Zacchaeus illustrates this point (Luke 19:8-9). (p. 109)

#### (d) Victory over sin

Victory over sin is an issue that is not well understood. The new life in Christ will have no meaning, if we keep committing the same old sins we did before. No one can please God if they continue to sin in their new life, as Jesus said that you will know them by their fruits. These fruits are displayed in the good we do by the help of the Holy Spirit.

We must safeguard against the sexual immorality by practicing a clean living that Jesus preached. He said it is sinful to even look at other women with lustful thoughts and not to be angry with our brothers because it sows the seed of hate that may eventually lead to murder.

- I. What is meant by victory over sins?
  
- II. Is victory over sin possible and how can we gain it?
  
- III. Write down few examples from your own life to illustrates this point.

#### (e) Removing the mammon

[The church can guard itself against the mammon of this world by adopting a basic life that Jesus and his disciples lived. This is possible when we live in a community as a family of God. That is how Jesus lived on this earth and that's how the people in the early church lived.

According to Jesus, the scourge of money must be eliminated from our lives and our churches. He said we can't serve two masters. The use of money should be kept to a bare minimum, which is just enough for our basic needs. The main reason for this is to free ourselves from the power of mammon.]

- I. How debilitating is the effect of mammon on our walk with God? (Mat. 20:25-28; Luke 19:45-46; 16:13-16)

- II. List a few practical ways which you can adopt to overcome the power of mammon in our lives?

(f) A community life

God has adopted us into his family to share the glorious inheritance of his Kingdom. This process must begin here on this earth, albeit in a small way.

Charles Moore says, *“There is one vital thing that the early Christians understood very well, and that is that only renewed lives can hold on to such values and principles. Only those who have been crucified with Christ and have experienced the power of new life could live according to these principles.*

- I. God has made us a part of his family and blessed us with such a great honour. Why do we still struggle to even entertain the idea of living together as a community?

[Why do we expect a miracle to take place in heaven that would change us to suddenly start loving one another and live as a family, while on this earth we can't stand each other? Jesus surely was talking about this life when he invited people to follow him. They did live together in a commune with Jesus and trusted God for the daily provisions.]

- II. In fact, this miracle is possible here, if we crucify our old nature with Christ as Charles Moore says above. What are some of the things that we must overcome in our lives for this miracle to happen?

(g) Awakening the DNA of divine love

Those who truly believe in God become a part of the living body of Christ, which is knit together by the divine love (Rom. 5:5). Those who believe, live by the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). They become their brother's keeper and guard each other from the worldly attacks. In this way they counter the evil attacks that try to destroy the families and the relationship between people in the church. There is no other force that can transform our lives except the love of God. This is the fruit of the Spirit which is given by God.

Awakening the DNA of divine love in our lives and in the community can play a pivotal role in our fight against evil. The divine love of God can change our thinking and our attitude completely.

- I. The divine love is a gift from God. How can we receive this gift?
  
- II. A person who is leading a defeated life, does he possess the gift of divine love?
  
- III. We need genuine repentance to receive the gift of salvation. What can we do to receive the gift of divine love?
  
- IV. Divine love is the glue that holds the body of Christ together. How can the love of God build us together to be one in spirit and in mind? (Eph. 4:4-5; 15-16)



## (b) A new life in Christ

It is true that the cost of discipleship looks daunting. Jesus warned that anyone who wanted to be his disciple must count the cost first, before deciding to join him (Luke 14:28). He also said that if anyone loved his father, mother, children and possessions more than him, he was not worthy of him. Paul says that those who believe in Jesus have died with him on the cross.

We are here only for a short-time and these relationships, though important, are not as permanent as we think. It does not mean that we don't look after our families, but we should not become so occupied with our own little family that we forget the bigger picture in which all of us are a part of God's family.

- I. How does the question of forsaking all impact your thinking about the family life and the material possessions? Does it scare you and why?
  
- II. Why do you think Jesus made it mandatory? Is there another way? Should we even be considering an alternative option, in view of Jesus' clear demand?
  
- III. What does it mean to share our lives and our possessions with others, and what are the benefits of it?
  
- IV. How can a community life showcase the reality of God's Kingdom? [Seeing is believing.]
  
- V. What do you think about "agreeing to disagree" approach? Doesn't it sound a better option for avoiding conflict, but what does it accomplish? Is it biblical and what does the bible say?
  
- VI. Paul says to fulfilling the Law of Christ we must carry each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2). How does it help in building a caring and loving community? [Our counter cultural life will set us apart from the self-centred life people live in the world. Reflect on Jesus' life and how he always lived for the good of others. While on the cross he was praying for those who were killing him.] (pp. 136-138)

- VII. What is the yoke of Jesus? How does it differ from the heavy burden the Jews had to carry under the law?
  
- VIII. What about the burden of religious legalism and piety that sometimes we carry today?
  
- IX. How do we find rest for our weary souls by trusting in God completely? Have you experienced this bliss in your life; when you were brave enough to trust in him fully? (pp. 138-139)

(c) The values of the Kingdom of God

[Living as a community following the values of God's Kingdom is a subtle but direct assault on the kingdom of this world; because it displays the good life that the world tries to achieve through various endeavours – but has failed.]

- I. What are the main principles of God's Kingdom? Make a list of the values that are central to the Kingdom of God. (p. 143)
  
- II. Why is the detachment from the world necessary? (p.144)
  
- III. Why is a basic lifestyle important and helpful in pursuing the Kingdom values? (pp. 145-146)
  
- IV. How does forsaking all become a blessing rather than a sacrifice? (p. 147)
  
- V. Do you agree that the church should manifest the values of God's Kingdom in this world? Do you think this can be achieved in its present form, and why not?

VI. What about the present way of life? Write down the positives and the negatives of this life?

(d) Servant leaders

[Jesus warned his disciples to safeguard against domineering tendency among them (Mark 10:42-43). He also said the poor and the meek shall inherit the earth, which indicates that in his Kingdom only the humble people would rule with him.]

I. Describe the concept of servant-leaders and discuss its importance in the light of present leadership model that is followed in most churches. (p. 149)

(e) Reverential fear of God and obedience

[The Jews learned to honour God and they took great care not to come in his presence with an irreverent attitude. Their ancestors had seen God and his glory (Exo. 24:9-11; 34:6-7), and God talked to their prophets and gave them his counsel. In modern times we do not get such a real experience of God's presence.]

I. How does the fear of God impact our walk with Him? Does it prevent us from sinning and how?

II. Does it help in our obedience to God's will?

[The above discussion about our faith and its implication has helped you to think about our present situation and how we can deal with it. Write down a paragraph or two about what has come out as the most significant thing that you would consider implementing in your own walk with God.]

III. What action you would take in this regard? Is there anything you can do in your church?

## 6 – Study

### (a) The Kingdom of God and the Church

The Kingdom of God captured the imaginations of the Jews especially since the time God delivered them from the bondage of the Egyptians and promised to give them a land of their own. (Ps. 114:2). The Old Testament prophets foretold about the establishment of such a Kingdom. This promise could have been fulfilled in Jesus, but the Jews did not recognise him as their Messiah. They rejected Jesus and killed him. What happened because of Israeli rejection is a widely debated issue.

A generally accepted view is that from the resurrection of Jesus up until his return a mystery Kingdom has been established in the church. This was not well understood in the Old Testament times, but Jesus explained it to his disciples through a series of parables recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Mat. 13:3-51, Luke 13:18-21 and Mark 4:26-34).

Discuss the main theme that runs through all the mystery kingdom parables. Identify the time in the gospel records when Jesus began talking to people only in parables, but in private, he would explain their meaning to his disciples. (pp. 66-70)

- I. What is the significance of time, when Jesus started to talk about the mystery kingdom?
  
- II. What is the main theme of the mystery kingdom?

### (b) The principles of the Kingdom of God

[We have previously identified the principles of the Kingdom that are essential for a Christian community, e.g. love, humility, equality and justice]. Does God's perspective about the core values of the kingdom differ from the human viewpoint and why?

- I. How did Jesus live on this earth? Did he practice what he preached?
  
- II. How was Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom fulfilled in the early church? Describe their counter cultural lifestyle.

(c) What does it mean for us today?

[We need to live out our faith in the community of God's people, which displays the values of the Kingdom. But the composition of the modern church structure does not allow people to live by the values of God's Kingdom.]

- I. What changes are necessary in the church structure, to allow people, to live by the Kingdom values? Is it at all possible to implement these changes in the present climate that prevails in the church? [Consider the time when Martin Luther wanted the church to make changes in 1517, and how did the church authorities react.]
  
- II. From where will the strongest opposition come and how can it be overcome? [Try to identify the people who will be threatened by it the most.]

(d) The church as a community of God's people

- I. Who can be a part of such a community? What did Jesus say (Luke 9:23-25; 14:25-33)? (pp. 169-170)
  
- II. How does removing the mammon help in building the community? (Matt. 6:19-24 & 33; Luke 12:29-33).
  
- III. When Jesus challenged his followers to forsake all; what was he trying to save them from. Could the power of the mammon affect our sense of equality among all people? What are the other issues that are related to this?
  
- IV. How does forsaking all help those who want to join or start a community? [Human reasoning would dictate that having a lot of money would help in establishing a community. But Jesus always said, "go and sell what you have and give it to the poor, and come and follow me." (Mat. 19:21)]

- V. Eberhard Arnold founder of the Bruderhof community said that the community is a gift from God. It can't be created by human efforts. Do you think this is true and what can be done about this?

[On this earth the church is the place where his people find shelter and respite from the evil forces of this world, and they are assured of a place in heaven. Therefore, **if we are a part of God's Kingdom here on earth, then we will have a place in his Kingdom in heaven.**]

- VI. Is it important to live by the values of God's Kingdom in this life?
- VII. Our righteousness is imperfect, so will the experience of the Kingdom be, but it must have its beginning here on this earth. Do you agree? Why and why not?
- VIII. What things hold us back from experiencing God's Kingdom on this earth?

(e) The structure of a community in an urban/rural setting

[When a Christian community begins to live following the values of the Kingdom, it accomplishes two important things. It fulfils the proclamation Jesus made that the Kingdom of God has come, and it gives credibility to the claims of the gospel by demonstrating the transforming power of God in a tangible way.]

- I. There are communities that thrive both in urban and in rural settings today, but they are very few in numbers. Is it a reflection of the spiritual depravity of the present-day church?

