

## SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Following Jesus into the Tensions of Life

TITLE: The Kingdom Paradox

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4-10

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PASTOR: Jim Thompson

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Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear — either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

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“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Thanks, Yogi Berra. But he’s playfully on to something. Far too often we reduce life to “either/or” decisions. This is regularly unnecessary or wrong because so much of life isn’t about choosing one thing *or* the other, but about wisely balancing “both/and.” Life is full of paradoxes that we shouldn’t run from, especially when it comes to paradoxes about God and his word.

Matthew 4:17 tells us that Jesus went around proclaiming, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand!” But then, within a chapter or so, he is teaching his disciples to pray that the kingdom would come. So, which one is it? Has the kingdom come already? Or is it coming in the future? Well, yes. This isn’t a simple “either/or” decision, but rather a “both/and” paradox. But in what way is God’s kingdom already present and here? And in what way is it not? How do we talk about both of these?

Firstly, we should start with a definition of kingdom. Some people wrongly think the kingdom is just a spiritual thing in your heart, or that it’s just a future thing about when Jesus comes back. Some assume that it’s biblical way to talk about doing social justice, and some even reduce it to the place you go when you die if you love Jesus. But all of these are wrong because they’re woefully incomplete. Rather, including all these things and more,

Kingdom is the world *the way it’s supposed to be*.

Graeme Goldsworthy says that the kingdom of God is “God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule.” Anthony Hoekema writes that kingdom is “the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus, the purpose of which is the redemption of his people, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.” It’s also been noted that kingdom is “God’s design to have people reigning with Him, like Him, and for Him over all creation.” And these more formal definitions underscore our simple definition that kingdom is *the world as it’s supposed to be*.

But how has *the world as it's supposed to be* already started? Didn't Jesus claim that it had already begun? But how? It simply doesn't feel like that's the case. Well, *the world as it's supposed to be* has come backward from the future into the present in Jesus, and is currently colliding with *the world as it shouldn't be*. And kingdom life breaking into the present looks like the life and ministry of Jesus in Matthew 5-9. He's teaching people that life in God's world that he's making new isn't top-down, power-hungry, and me-first kind of life. But rather, the kingdom comes in and through our lives when we give up our way of doing things, and we turn, instead, to God's way of doing things in Jesus. He is, after all, the king of the kingdom. And God's reign is experienced and extended when we live in right relationship to King Jesus.

Also, we learn from Jesus that God's kingdom is not merely about inward spirituality, but about all of life. It's about power, values, lust, money, community, people different than us, loving your enemies, worry, and so much more. And the presence of the king and the kingdom should change the way we think about all of these issues. But... The kingdom hasn't come. It's still on the way. At least, it hasn't come fully.

There are two ways that God's kingdom is still to come.

One, it will continue to advance as God continues to graciously rescues sinners through the message of King Jesus, and it will continue to come as 'those rescued' partner with Jesus to fill the world with love, service, compassion, truth, joy, and hope in the face *a world the way it shouldn't be*.

Two, there is a consummate and specific end-of-time as we know it - a day when Jesus will physically return to right all wrongs, and make all things sad come untrue. And on that day, heaven and earth will be made one again, and all shadows of past injustice will be chased away by the dawn of the eternal day. It will fully and finally be *the world as it's supposed to be* - all in happy praise to God as King.

This is the paradox, the decisive reign of God has already come to us in Jesus, *and* we also mysteriously await its coming in the future. So, what do we do with this? How should we apply the kingdom paradox? Where's the upswing of doxology that should follow?

Here are four suggestions for how we should respond to the fact that the kingdom has come, and it's still to come:

1. REPENT. Change your mind about the way you think life is supposed to work.
2. BELIEVE. Swear allegiance to and trust Jesus alone in all of life.
3. OBEY. Pursue kingdom advancement in the way you think, love, and serve.
4. PRAY. Ask God to make kingdom come in and through his people.

Don't forget, all of these are in response to and in praise of Jesus' ultimate kingship. Doing these makes *the world as it should be* blossom around us in Jesus' name; it's his kingdom and not ours. He is our crucified, risen, and soon returning king that makes kingdom come now as we await it's coming in the future. And things like repenting, believing, obeying, and praying are the kinds of things that he has called us to as we wait for the final and forever kingdom day to dawn.

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*For Discussion —*

1. In your own words, how would you define the kingdom of God?
2. Personally, what stood out to you the most from this message?
3. What are specific things in your life right now that you need to repent of?
4. What are specific things in your life right now that you need to trust God about?
5. What is most interesting to you about how the kingdom has come in Matthew 5-9?
6. In what two ways is the kingdom still to come, and what should we do about it?
7. Who is someone you know who seems to live with this mind of kingdom mentality?