

Exploring the Kingdom: The Realm
Christ Community Church – May 12, 2024

We are Exploring the Kingdom of God together this Spring and summer. This space where Jesus dwells and reigns; this central idea of Jesus' teaching and ministry. What IS the Kingdom of God? What is it like? What are its qualities; what is the climate? If you were to enter in and walk around and be at home – what might you see and experience? What would be there and what would not?

God's Word reveals many of these things to us. I began the series a few weeks ago looking at the KING himself and His reign; last week, Tom drew us to the essence of God's Kingdom, which is LIFE. Abundant, flourishing, thriving LIFE that ushers from God's throne.

Today, I'd like for us to consider the Realm of God's Kingdom. The realm now, the realm that will be. The territory of Jesus' reign.

Scripture Reading – Matthew 6:9-10

Places have addresses, latitude and longitude. We can sit down there, put our feet on the ground, observe our surroundings. And kingdoms are places, aren't they? You could map and identify the British Empire, for instance. It was here and not there. Even today, did you know that the Netherlands is a Kingdom? It has precise boundaries, with four subdivisions, three of which are in the Caribbean. This is its REALM.

What about the Kingdom of God? Where is its realm? One could argue that this is the best, grandest and most important place of all – and yet where is it? In response to his presence and his ministry, Jesus said things like, 'the Kingdom has come near,' 'the Kingdom of God is in your midst,' and 'the Kingdom has come upon you' – okay... so, where?

To answer this, we must also wrestle with the question of 'what'. What, substantively, is God's Kingdom? It is a physical place or space? OR, is it a spiritual reality, entered into with our spirits and by the Spirit of God? An invisible territory?

The truth is, the Kingdom is both Physical AND Spiritual. These descriptions belong together in God's plan. But simply saying one or the other can be misleading or confusing, and so to help explain this more clearly, I'd like to look at them separately first and then bring them together.

A quick side note: just as with all our Kingdom explorations, understanding its realm involves coming to grips with the reality of the overlapping of ages. Do you remember that concept? It is our present perspective. I introduced it two weeks ago as crucial to our whole series. The Bible speaks of a present age and an age to come.

This present age is subject to the consequences of our rebellion against God; sin rages, death looms. In this present age there are competing kingdoms. Satan is a usurping spiritual ruler and aims to take control of all the kingdoms of the world. In the age to come,

only Christ is King. All enemies are conquered, and only light and peace and righteousness are present with those who are redeemed. The LIFE of God abounds unabated.

So where are we now? In the coming of Jesus, we understand that the ages overlap. The present age has begun to end, the age to come has moved into the neighborhood and is ever-more settling in. We are living in the time between the times, the already-not yet, here IN the overlap. And so, we must define Kingdom in light of this.

And we must define REALM in light of this. So back to our primary question: Where is the REALM of the Kingdom? The answer is both Spiritual and Physical. The spiritual establishes the physical. I'm going to explore them separately, and then bring them together, since Christ's true and lasting Kingdom, an embodied spiritual kingdom.

First, let's look to the Scripture to explore the ...

I. Spiritual Kingdom

There is No Kingdom without God and His reign. And what is God's substance? He is Spirit. As Jesus taught us, *God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth* (John 4:24). And Paul says, in a statement of praise, *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever*. Eternal, immortal, invisible.

God Reigns as Spirit and by the Spirit. His Kingdom has always been a spiritual kingdom and always will be. This doesn't mean ONLY Spirit, but that it can never be without the Spirit. This is why Jesus teaches, *no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again, born of the Spirit (Jn 3:3,5)*. We are born in the flesh in this present age, but our spirits must also come alive in God in order to enter the age to come, even now in this overlapping of the ages. And ONLY God's Spirit can give this entrance to the Spiritual Kingdom.

Let's understand what this means now and what this means ultimately.

For now, we recognize that there is more to reality than what we can see, touch or measure. We are not materialists. We know there's something more; we know we're not just animals. The Scripture teaches us that there is an entire spiritual reality – created by God, yet invisible to our eyes most of the time in this age. Angels and demons, spiritual forces in the heavenly realms as Eph 6:12 puts it. And we know from the Scriptures that God as Spirit is present in all places. David writes, *where can I go from your Spirit?* (Ps 139:7).

Does that mean all places are His Kingdom? No, because there are places and hearts that resist his will and his glory. But it does mean that there is no place where His Kingdom cannot be. There is no physical or spiritual space outside of the reach of God. No territory, however dark, where the reign of Christ cannot enter in and make change.

Might that bring you encouragement today – perhaps into some dark region your life touches? Perhaps even in a dark place of your emotion? The Kingdom can come, even there.

Therefore, the Lord himself teaches us to pray: *let your Kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Mt 6:10). In this prayer we learn that we find the Kingdom where the will of God is done in response to His Reign, and where the name of the Father is made holy, hallowed. Through relationship with God in prayer, through the indwelling Spirit of God in our spirits, through obedience to His Will, through the lifting up of God's name, through trust and love – we experience God's Kingdom in our midst.

This is all true and happening right now in the Spiritual Kingdom as this present age is passing away. What about ultimately, forever? The spiritual dimension does not go away. God is ALWAYS Spirit, as are the spiritual realities. The demons are punished and thrown into hell, but the angels will exist forever, as will those human beings whose spirits have been made alive and brought into God's presence. We will encounter God as spiritual beings. He will always be able to minister to our inmost being; He will always know our thoughts and desires; we will always be invited to worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth.

There is a Spiritual Kingdom: But the Kingdom of God is not only Spiritual, now or later. We do not experience God's kingdom only within or only by our spirits.

And so let's also recognize...

II. The Physical Kingdom

God's Kingdom has come to the natural as well. The spiritual establishes the physical. Let's begin with the simple obvious fact that God has created the visible as well as the invisible, of course. Physical things. From the Spirit and by the Spirit, He brings forth the physical, all created things. And these created things and people and animals are not separate from the place of his presence and reign.

God has always given eternal value to creation. He has always intended a physical Kingdom. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* And it was good. As we saw last week, the abundant LIFE of God overflowed into the original creation, and **THUS** it was good. And then, ultimately, at the end: the throne of God, the river of life, the tree of life. God's LIFE overflows in a new earth.

And right in the middle of the ages, at the point of overlap, we have Jesus coming in the flesh. As a remedy for sin, as Messiah of a people, **AS** a man. God incarnate. The Father sent the Son *in the flesh*. And as He was raised to life, it was with a **BODY**. And as he will reign eternally with the Father, Jesus will reign bodily and physically.

What's the point of me reminding us of these things? God is not opposed to created, natural, physical things – He created on purpose. Our Lord Jesus did not come to remove creation but to renew creation. God's Kingdom is and will be a physical Kingdom which is established by His Spiritual reign.

Let's understand what this means now and what this means ultimately.

For now, even as those spiritual made new and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and promised eternal life, we are not those try to escape this world. To use Jesus' frame of reference, even though we are not "OF" the world – meaning belonging anymore to sin and the Fall – we are still very much IN the world – on purpose. Feet on the ground, air in our lungs, physical connection with other created beings.

We are IN the world that the Kingdom of God might be proclaimed. Just as physical realms on earth are often led by men and women in the flesh and of the world and its desires, the physical Kingdom of God has begun in the world but OF the Spirit and HIS desires.

What are the implications here? For one, it means that both sin and righteousness are not only spiritual concepts. Since the spiritual establishes the physical, both sin and righteousness have a physical consequences.

Our sin, for example, often corrupts the physical – whether interpersonally or societally. How often does someone's outer world reflect inner chaos and lostness. Those under the rule of demons in the NT were often found in filth and violence, living alone in the tombs, crying out in anger and pain.

When I am only looking out for what's best for ME, I miss caring for my neighbor; I do not follow Christ into the hard places of his Kingdom; I miss and frustrate my family instead of blessing and leading them. Where does sin impact your physical being and the physical space around you? Where does it harm another person?

The consequences of sin show up in the flesh even when the outside is successful by the world's standards. There are well-manicured, pristine palaces on the outside that are racked with spiritual filth; there are outwardly religious and moral people who are spiritually hardened and dead. Because even if one's home, stuff or workplace are orderly or lavish, the lack of Christ's spiritual kingdom means the person will lack the love and mercy of Christ in the flesh in the areas that truly matter. Jesus reserved his strongest condemnation for those who controlled the outside appearance while the inside was filled with pride and hatred. They were those who arrested him in the flesh, after all.

But Christ's rule can establish exceedingly positive impact in our physical realms Right NOW too. For example, walking in the light and law of God will often bring a measure of peace and order and goodness on a physical, natural level. Think of when someone's released from the bondage of gambling addiction, for instance. Think of the money and mental space and relational presence that is now freed up in service of what is good and lovely. Think of the family dynamics that change when one finds freedom from all kinds of patterns of unhealth, fear and selfishness.

Even in the already-right now overlap, God establishes a measure of His Kingdom in our physical spaces. I think of the creative beauty of artists seeking to glorify God. I believe there's something of God's Kingdom in the aesthetic and comfort apparent at Martha Jefferson Hospital.

I think of the creative skilled labors of architects and builders and doctors and researchers designing and crafting physical materials for the sake of peace, beauty, wholeness, help. I think of holy management, administration and leadership helping institutions be redemptive in their interaction with the people and the systems around them.

God's natural Kingdom is appearing NOW. But let's keep in mind, all the GOOD of God in this world is only a taste. His Kingdom will only fully and completely come when this present age has come to an end. And what does this mean for us, ultimately? It means that our hope and the fulfillment of our lives in Christ is not invisible, airy, and completely divorced from this present age. There's a continuity between God's Kingdom now and His Kingdom forever, even in our physical spaces.

I love Isaiah 65's vision of the age to come. It is a prophetic vision of fulfilled purpose and joy and satisfaction and harmony in the created realm.

They will build houses and will dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit... they will not labor in vain... the wolf and lamb will feed together (21, 23, 25). There is no giving or receiving harm; there is no destruction.

When you think of God's Eternal home and Kingdom, do not imagine only light and brilliance and splendor. When the Lord will say to us, come, my child, welcome into the inheritance I have prepared for you, we will be entering into a real place.

But even as all this is true, the Kingdom of God is not only physical. We cannot fashion it with our hands alone or improve it with our creative skills, we cannot find it on a map in this age. It must be established by the presence and reign of God who IS Spirit.

And so exploring the Kingdom's Realm both now and forever means

III. A Spiritually Embodied Kingdom

In the eternal Kingdom, the goal of God's Reign will be completed. We experience both the spiritual and physical now in a limited way – limited by the Fallen world; limited by our sin; limited by God's restraint and forbearance. But the Kingdom Come will be of a measure and quality that is different that we have yet experienced. There, God's presence will be more than moving in, it will be fully settled and bringing with Him the full and final establishing of his ways forever.

Perhaps the clearest teaching we have of a spiritually embodied Kingdom is in Paul's discussion of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15. There, Paul's responding to the Corinthians who are asking... with what kind of body will the dead be raised? He answers by speaking of the continuity between a seed and a plant as well as the differences between bodies. And then, beginning with v42, we read this: ⁴² *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;* ⁴³ *it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;* ⁴⁴ *it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

What is this “spiritual body”? This is not as in immaterial; but as in ‘supernatural, a body animated by the Spirit, like Christ, transformed FOR the age to come. Do you know that the resurrection doesn’t mean resuscitation of a corpse to what it was? Just as Jesus was raised in the flesh, so are we. It means the transformation and glorification of a person.

Think about what this implies for the Kingdom. As Paul continues to write about the final end of this age, he says, *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God... For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* (50-52). Why are we changed? FOR THE KINGDOM! Our personal, resurrection lives will fit and be suitable, spiritually and physically, for the Kingdom.

As with Christ, as with us, SO ALSO with all creation. Creation is not cast away but transformed and glorified beyond our most magnificent visions. Not only able to receive Resurrected bodies, but a fully redeemed universe. This is Revelation 21, the new heaven and earth, prepared as a bride, shining with the glory of God.

Conclusion

SO, where is the Kingdom? Here, now in this age (though not OF it). And also, there, in and of the age to come, at the Resurrection and renewal of all things. The Kingdom is both Spiritual AND Physical, the spiritual establishing the physical – both now and forever.

And so we have a right now response. We open the Word and do what it says. And by doing His Will, we prioritize His Kingdom, His reign in our lives and through our lives.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Into what dark places would you like God’s Spirit to enter and reign?
2. Where have you experienced sin negatively impacting your physical spaces or life?
3. How can you testify to God’s Spirit bringing about good in your spiritual and physical realms?
4. In what ways can you do God’s will and thus see His Kingdom come?