

RANSOMED
HEART
ministries

September 2005

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you well, living in God, walking with him.

I am moved to write this time about the kingdom of God. And as I say that, what comes to mind? Does the phrase “the kingdom of God” draw a blank? Does it rouse religious associations, jargon you’ve heard too many years? Does it stir your heart with thoughts of life, and goodness? I think if you were to ask ten Christian friends you know to tell you, “What was the gospel Jesus preached?” My guess is they’d all say, “The gospel of the forgiveness of our sins.” Or something close to that. The Gospel. Meaning, salvation. Right? And yet, that is not how Jesus describes the gospel he preached.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching *the good news of the kingdom*, and healing every sickness among the people (Matt 4:23).

Jesus went through all the towns and villages...preaching *the good news of the kingdom* (Matt 9:35).

“And *this gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14).

...and he sent them out to preach *the kingdom of God*, and to heal the sick (Luke 9:2).

Jesus calls the gospel he preached “the gospel of the kingdom.” Not the gospel of forgiveness, not the gospel of heaven-when-you-die, but the gospel of the kingdom. Hmmm. Maybe we’ve missed something here. Maybe quite a bit. It would do your heart good to pull out a concordance, or just flip through the gospels, and look for the word kingdom. I did, and it blew me away how much Jesus talked about it. He talks about the kingdom of God a *lot*. What sealed this for me was what happened after the resurrection.

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)

He’s got forty days left with his disciples, and what does he choose to teach them more about? The kingdom. Given the circumstances – he’s about to hand the whole mission over to them – I’d think he’d teach on evangelism, right? Or maybe, faithfulness under persecution? Nope. He teaches about the kingdom. Why? Two reasons. First, because he came to bring a kingdom. And second, because that’s what he wants us to do. Apparently they – like you and I – had a lot to learn about the kingdom, and apparently that’s what Jesus wants us to become students of.

So, what is the kingdom of God? Jesus gives a simple definition in what we call the Lord’s Prayer.

“This, then, is how you should pray ‘...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’” (Matt 6:9-10). The kingdom of God is where the will of God is done, as it is done in heaven. There is nothing to stand in the way of God’s will being done in heaven. But many things stand in the way here on earth. For example, the kingdom of darkness.

“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt 12:28).

People were being held in bondage by foul spirits, held in the kingdom of darkness. Christ, by his authority, commands they be set free. The demons obey. God’s kingdom comes to that person, bringing freedom and life. He then gives us that authority, to do the same. “I have given you authority...over all the power of the evil one” (Luke 10:19). Another expression of the rule of God coming to earth is in healing. There’s the story in Acts 3, where Peter heals the crippled man. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (3:6). In the name of, meaning, by the authority of Jesus, who reigns. Bringing his authority, bringing his dominion, his rule. His kingdom.

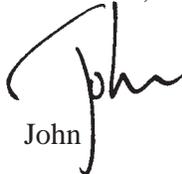
At any given point in your world, someone’s authority is having sway. Sometimes it is yours, sometimes it is someone else’s, sometimes it is the kingdom of darkness, and sometimes it is God’s. Learning to bring all things under the authority and rule of God is how we learn to live in the kingdom of God.

Now, I know, I know. It raises a number of questions. “I prayed for my mom, and she didn’t get well.” “We tried to bind Satan, and it didn’t seem to work.” We don’t know why certain experiences don’t seem to respond. But we *do* know this: We are very young and untutored in knowing how the kingdom of God works, how to usher it in, in this or that situation. After all, the disciples had Jesus face-to-face for three years, saw him bring the kingdom over and over again. Yet, Jesus stays forty more days after his resurrection, to teach them more *about the kingdom*. I think a posture of humility would say, “I have a lot to learn about the kingdom. I’m not going to lose heart because I can’t yet seem to bring this or that under the rule of God. I’m going to hang in there, and learn.”

A good place to begin would be, first, to do a word search on kingdom in the New Testament. Then, I would suggest studying the authority given to Jesus – and to us, his followers. This will help to strengthen our understanding of the authority we do have. As I have said many times before, the Christian life is about so much more than forgiveness. It is the invasion of a kingdom...and all that goes with it.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:33).

With love,



John