

Seeking the Kingdom of God

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When Jesus' followers expressed concern about their daily needs, He told them to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33 NKJV).

What encouraging words! It is a promise that has brought comfort to millions.

Yet, have you ever considered *what the kingdom of God is* and *how we are to seek it*?

Does seeking God's kingdom mean we are to search for the right denomination to join?

Does it mean we are to seek the right list of religious ceremonies, rituals, and sacraments to perform?

Does it mean we are to seek to identify the right legal method, words, and requirements to get our sins paid, erased, or accounted for?

Jesus said,

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are

trying to (Matthew 23:13 NIV84).

These religious leaders were teaching out of the Torah, the Scripture, the God-given religious code, ceremonies, and instructions found in the Bible, yet Jesus told them that their teaching *from the Bible* was shutting people out from the kingdom of heaven. Thus, seeking the kingdom of God entails more than religious teaching—even from the Bible.

Jesus makes it clear that His kingdom is not found in careful rule-keeping. He said,

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 NIV84).

God’s kingdom operates within the heart and mind! The kingdom of God does something within us—it changes us; it makes a fundamental reorientation of what our hearts long for, what our inmost selves desire, and what we hunger to experience. Thus, to seek God’s kingdom means we desire, pursue, and strive toward experiencing this heart change and then growing in character to be more like Jesus.

Our careful religious rule-keeping does not bring the kingdom of God—that doesn’t necessarily mean every religious activity is wrong or bad, but only that such actions do not bring God’s kingdom. Rather than bringing, initiating, or sourcing the kingdom of God, any action, ceremony, or ritual that is genuinely godly is simply the outworking of God’s kingdom that is operating within the heart. Just as the apostle Paul said,

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17 NIV84).

And the Holy Spirit operates within our hearts and minds to enlighten, convict, inspire, renew, transform, empower, and heal.

While God is Creator, while all physical reality is the Lord’s, while God is the God of our real physical universe, while there will be a new earth that is a real physical place where we have real physical bodies—while all of this physical stuff is real—none of it is what the Bible means when it speaks of the kingdom of God. His kingdom is within us; its core foundational roots, principles, and building blocks are not physical—they are spiritual. God’s kingdom is not primarily about power, might, or physical material; rather, God’s kingdom is about the life-giving operational principles that creation is built upon. God’s kingdom is functional; it is the outworking of the values, methods, protocols, attitudes, motivations, ideas, and truths that originate in God and direct the inner working of our beings, and, when reproduced in us by the Spirit, restore us to harmony with God.

The operational landscape of God’s kingdom, then, is the living landscape of our hearts and minds. It is where love functions, where truth operates, and where life flourishes. It is also where Satan attacks and has planted his foul seeds of sin. In other words, the battle between God’s kingdom and Satan’s happens within hearts and minds, and both sin and righteousness only exist in hearts and minds.

Sin does not happen in books or registries in heaven; and recovery from sin, our healing and salvation,

also does not happen in books or registries in heaven. Both sin and salvation occur in the hearts and minds of people.

Sin is not made from molecules, physical matter, or material substances. Sin is founded in *lies*, which break the circle of love and trust, resulting in *fear* and *selfishness*, which results in *rebellious* and *disorderly* living; i.e., actions that deviate or break God's design laws for life and health and without remedy result in ruin and death.

Righteousness is found in the truth that originates in God, the truth about God, and it is this truth that destroys Satan's lies and restores us to trust. In trust we experience God's love filling our hearts (Romans 5:5), which purges our fear (1 John 4:18), eradicating selfishness (1 John 4:7-12) and transforming our inmost being to become like Jesus (Galatians 2:20). The kingdom of God—the character, methods, principles of God—is within us!

If we want to seek the kingdom of God, then we must seek to know God (John 17:3), for to know Him is to love and trust Him. And once we have come to know God and have surrendered to Him, we experience His love and, in response, we live to love and honor Him (1 John 4:19). Then in that love/trust relationship, if we want to journey deeper into God's kingdom, we seek daily to advance our minds into a deeper understanding of truth—eternal, operational, functional, reality-based biblical truth. We seek to grow up and become mature Christians who apply heaven's truths to how we live our lives each day. By practicing God's methods, we develop mature thinking and real experience in the working knowledge of God's kingdom and are able to discern right from wrong (Hebrews 5:14).

If we want to journey deeper into the kingdom of God, then in addition to pursuing the truth, we seek to *practice* the principles of God in how we treat others. We apply God's methods and principles to our actions. We love others and seek what is in their best interest. And we always leave others free, just as Jesus instructed:

As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give (Matthew 10:7, 8 NIV84).

The kingdom of heaven is advanced through truth and love, through giving, and through the application of God's principles in how we govern ourselves in dealing with others. Thus, the righteous live lives of loving service in their communities. And in so doing, God's kingdom advances in both the community *and* in the heart of His followers.

We become more like Jesus, meek and other-centered. And "whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4 NIV84).

Those who seek the kingdom of God experience a change in the inner person; their fear and selfishness are replaced with love and trust. They no longer seek to advance themselves, are not arrogant, are not prideful, but they humble themselves and place their pride in Jesus (Galatians 6:14). This is what it means to be reborn, and without this experience, we cannot understand, comprehend, experience, or see the kingdom of God. Jesus said,

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3 NIV84).

This “seeing” is not visual; instead, it is seeing with the heart, comprehending with the mind, and appreciating with the deepest longing of the soul. Jesus and John both tell us that those who crucified Jesus will “see” Jesus come in glory seated next to the Father (Luke 22:69; Revelation 1:7). They will visually “see” Jesus on His heavenly throne in command of His heavenly kingdom, but they will misinterpret what they see. Having rejected Jesus and the truth of God’s kingdom of love, having accepted the lie that God’s law works like human law and that justice is using power to inflict punishment for disobedience, they don’t see our loving Savior, whose heart grieves over all His lost children; they “see” an angry, wrathful, punishing being of infinite power coming to destroy them and, rather than rejoicing in His presence, they are terrified and beg for the mountains to fall on them (Revelation 6:15, 16).

Only those who are reborn in heart, mind, and spirit can truly “see” the kingdom of God, for only those reborn by the Spirit have God’s kingdom restored within them.

So as events in this world continue to decay, don’t get distracted by the fears and worries, but remember Jesus’ promise and “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 NKJV).