

# Stewardship

## Kingdom, Mission & Money

### Session 1 | Stewardship

#### Introduction

The purpose of this two-week study is to help us better understand what the Kingdom of God is, and how all Christians are called to the mission of seeing God's Kingdom come 'on earth as it is in heaven'. The first Study focuses on the principles of the Kingdom of God. The second study explores how we should use our money in light of these principles. Each study begins with a "Worship Preparation" designed to assist the group in its focus on God as our King.

#### Worship Preparation (10-15 Minutes)

##### Psalm 47

<sup>1</sup> Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. <sup>2</sup> How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! <sup>3</sup> He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. <sup>4</sup> He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. <sup>5</sup> God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. <sup>6</sup> Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. <sup>7</sup> For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. <sup>8</sup> God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. <sup>9</sup> The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted. (NIV)

1. Read the Psalm out loud and note the themes of God as King.  
(vs. 2, 6, 7)
2. What attributes of Kingship does the Psalmist see as praiseworthy?  
(vs.1 - all nations; 3 - 'subdued'; 8 - 'reigns', 9 - 'the earth belongs to God')
3. How do these attributes bring 'joy'?  
(vs. 1, 5)
4. How do these attributes bring 'comfort'?  
(vs. 9)
5. Take some time as a group to offer up prayers of praise, focusing on God's rule as the King to whom 'the earth belongs'.  
(vs. 9)

#### Bible Study/Discussion (30-45 minutes)

##### Introduction

These beginning words of "The Lord's Prayer" draw us into the heart of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus came to make the Kingdom of God visible on earth.

##### Mark 1:14,15

<sup>14</sup> And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (NAS)

<sup>9</sup>"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, <sup>10</sup>your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (NIV)  
Matthew 6:9,10

The questions below are designed to help the group better understand not only what the "Kingdom of God" is, but also the implications for how we are to live our lives in light of "The Lord's Prayer".

### Matthew 4:12-14, 16-17

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.

<sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, <sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah.....<sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." <sup>17</sup> From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Jesus' words and deeds as recorded in the Gospels (healing the sick, feeding the hungry, casting out demons) were signs that the Kingdom of God was at hand, which means that the pent up longings of God's people for their Messiah to come were about to be realized in Jesus Christ. The "Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13), modeled for his disciples (and us) implies that as citizens of the Kingdom, we are called to participate in the ministry of Jesus ("on earth as it is in heaven"). Matthew records this prayer as part of a longer section of Jesus' teaching on matters ranging from anger and forgiveness to compassion and money .

The implication of this expanded teaching is that every area of our life is under God's rule. He has called us to be his people, and expects that we would seek to follow his laws, his values, and his priorities - in other words, his mission. But as we will see, this is not to be a legalistic or harsh obedience borne out of fear, but a willing conformity to the purposes of God motivated by our gratitude for the love Christ demonstrated for us through his death on the cross.

**1. What images come to mind when you think about a king? How does the notion of a kingdom differ with most of our political and cultural experiences/backgrounds? In what ways (if any) do these images influence our relationship with God? How might our "Western" mindset limit our understanding/experience of God as King?**

Webster defines a king as one who holds a 'preeminent position' and who unilaterally heads an 'organized community'. Most of us have been born and raised in a 'democratic', as opposed to 'autocratic', society. Therefore, the notion of unilateral power residing in one person is foreign to our thinking and experience. We are accustomed to choosing our leaders, and voting them out of office if they don't do what we like.

Therefore, there is a danger in misunderstanding Scripture's teaching about God as King. Seeing God exalted as our King, as someone who unilaterally rules the world, as one whose rules are the only ones that matter, grates against our pluralistic and democratic impulses. There is a danger of missing the connection between 'my life' and 'God's Kingdom'. We resist being told how to live our lives, especially in a place like NYC. We are used to controlling our own destinies and mapping out our own futures. To be a citizen of a kingdom means submitting to the will of one person and living according to his rules.

Refer back to Psalm 47 and reinforce how understanding God as King means:

- He is King over all the earth (nature) and nations (governments) (vs. 2,7,8)
- He is a good King who brings 'joy' and rules in 'holiness'
- We are completely dependent on him for everything
- Therefore everything belongs to him including our time, energy, and resources
- He is therefore to be worshipped, which means we are to live our lives in light of his desires (Romans 12:1-2)

2. Read Isaiah 11:1-9 below. What does this passage teach us about the longings for the Kingdom and the characteristics of the Kingdom?

#### Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

God's people longed for their King ("A shoot will come up..") They had been enslaved in Egypt, dragged as exiles to Babylon, and had lived on the brink of cultural extinction. Through the words of their prophets they "dreamed of new age in which human crookedness would be straightened out...the foolish would be made wise, and the wise humble. They dreamed of a time when deserts would flower, ...people would work in peace...all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God". In other words, they dreamed of the ultimate shalom. One author summarizes that image this way - (see quote in margin)

**The Kingdom of God is "the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation, fulfillment, and delight". This is what the Hebrew prophets called shalom, a "universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight - ...in other words, ..the way things ought to be"**  
- C. Plantinga

**The essence of the Kingdom is manifestation of the power of God in every area of life. Some of the characteristics to take note of from this passage in Isaiah are:**

- a. Impartiality - he will judge with 'righteousness'**
- b. Justice for the poor**
- c. Elimination of evil - "he will strike the wicked"**
- d. Peace - "the wolf will live with the lamb"**
- e. Wisdom - "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord"**

**3. What are the implications of Jesus' statement at the end of the passage below ("Today this ...fulfilled....")? What might have been the reaction of the original audience to these statements? Read Luke 11:20 & Mark 4:23. What do these verses teach us about how Jesus made the Kingdom a reality to his community? What are the implications for our lives as individuals?**

He (Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:16-21

A reading of the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) leaves little doubt that Jesus saw himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah King (Mark 8:27-30; John 11:25-27). Jesus was the resurrection and the life, the one who had come to eradicate injustice, speak on behalf of the poor, confront religious and political hypocrisy, and reverse the curse of sin. His mission was Kingdom oriented. He was to bring about the shalom mentioned above. History would never be the same. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus ushered in what the writer of Hebrews called "these last days" (Hebrews 1:2). As one writer puts it, Jesus' use of the present tense ('is fulfilled') leaves little doubt that the 'great fulfillment is definitively started' and that the Kingdom of God is no longer ONLY a future hope. With the announcement by Jesus that he is the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah, the future has penetrated the present.

When Jesus made this pronouncement the religious leaders were shocked and threatened. Note how in Luke 6:7 the Pharisees and Teachers were 'looking ' for reasons to accuse Jesus, for Jesus was announcing that he was God the King. The 'leaders' likely reacted this way because their power base was threatened. Others would have seen Jesus as a political solution to their Roman oppressors. Yet Jesus came for a purpose much greater. Reflect back on Psalm 47 (above) and see how Jesus came to be King over all the nations. His kingdom was not limited by geography, culture, ethnicity, or even time. He is the King over all of History

Evidence for this present reality of the Kingdom comes in Jesus' words and deeds. For example, Jesus says in Luke 11:20 if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. Jesus has dominion and power over the kingdom of darkness. Jesus' teaching and working of miracles were also signs of the present reality of the Kingdom. Matthew 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

**Understanding that the ministry of Jesus marked the beginning of the coming of God's kingdom has significant implications for our lives.**

**First**, our lives are not our own (1 Cor 6:20, 7:23). We are part of the Kingdom that has come. Our confession as Christians is that Jesus is both our Savior and Lord, and therefore we are to be obedient to his will (2 Cor 9:13).

**Second**, that obedience implies connecting to the mission of the Kingdom. It isn't obedience for obedience's sake. We are called to participate in further manifestations of God's Kingdom. Practically, this means am I concerned with the concerns of Jesus? Do I work for justice? Am I concerned for the poor and marginalized? Do I invest my time and resources in Kingdom work? Am I a productive citizen of the Kingdom?

**4. Read the passages below. Discuss what it means that we are a "people" who are working towards seeing the Lord's Prayer answered ("thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven").**

**2 Corinthians 5:20** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

**1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Jesus instructs us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom (Matt 6:9-10), and Paul in the passage above (2 Cor 5:20) identifies our role in that coming. Paul, writing to a

**"The task of the church is to preach the kingdom of Christ in a way that effectively reverses the Fall and brings wholeness and peace to individuals and community"**

**- Harvie Conn & Manuel Ortiz**

**"Biblically defined, the church is not merely a collection of individuals but a social body built around Christ that focuses on God's reign".**

**- Mark Gornik**

church in a major city, identifies for them a corporate mission and identity. They are to collectively represent Christ to their community; fulfilling the command Christ gave his followers (Matthew 12:28). The mission of making the shalom of God's Kingdom real in Corinth rested on the church. With the guidance and gifting of the Holy Spirit they were to be Christ's ambassadors of the Gospel of the Kingdom. (Mark 1:14-15).

Peter, writing to a different set of churches, also communicates a sense of mission. Note that he calls the community a 'royal priesthood' (royal indicating that they are representing the King) who are to 'declare' to their surrounding community the Gospel ('who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light').

To live in light of the present reality of the Kingdom means we must be connected to the community of God's people. Peter reminds us that the kingdom of 'light' (vs. 9) is one we share with a community. We are not 'solo' Christians. Our identity ('are a... people') can only be understood when we are part of a community who see themselves as a 'holy nation...belonging to God'. That is our identity. We are to work together to see God's kingdom come.

Jesus shared the mission of the Kingdom in community. Friends and co-laborers constantly surrounded him. He sent out his disciples to "preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:2). To be a Christian means to be a part of a community that is working to make the God's agenda our agenda. The understanding that our lives are connected to a greater purpose gives our lives deeper meaning. It means that all of our vocations/gifts/skills are to be mobilized in light of mission of the Kingdom of Christ. Do we see our roles as attorneys, teachers, bankers, artists, parents as part of the greater mission of the kingdom? Are we engaged with our neighbors and the greater community to make sure that NYC is a place where shalom is made manifest? This is what we are called to when we pray "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

**5. Gospel Meditation. Where do I find the motivation to live for God? Where do I find the mercy, compassion, generosity, integrity to live this Kingdom lifestyle? How does the passage below help us? What does it tell us about Jesus our King? What is the source of our motivation?**

**Philippians 2:3-11** <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage is full of language calling us to a 'kingdom lifestyle'. We are to live lives of humility; live lives that reflect that heart of Jesus. By looking to the interests of others the way Jesus did, we will see manifestations of God's Kingdom in our relationships, families, jobs, and neighborhoods.

Yet, we must realize that our tendency instead is to put our own interests first. Therefore, Paul in this letter to the Philippians reminds us that what we need is to gaze at Jesus. We must see that although he had everything (vs. 6) he put our interests ahead of his own - to the point of 'death on the cross' (vs. 8). Romans 5:8 says that 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. In other words, while we were preoccupied with our agenda, he came to serve us through a redemptive death. Meditating on Christ's obedience for our sake, will fuel our obedience for his sake.

Take some time as a group to rejoice over Christ's sacrifice. Also, take time to pray for the shalom of the City (for the homeless, poor, marginalized, our political and business leaders, our neighbors and families).

**Remind the group that next week the discussion will focus on how the spending of our money is part of living a Kingdom lifestyle.**