

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: FORETASTE TO FULFILLMENT

(A Brief Summary of the Bible's Teaching Concerning the Kingdom of God)

The game was about to begin and our Coach huddled with the team for final instructions and pep talk. He stressed to us the fundamentals of holding onto the football and not turning it over to the other team. But sure enough, in hardly any time at all, our first player to handle the ball fumbled it to the other team! Strangely, on the replay it appeared that the captain of that team had simply talked the ball carrier out of it. He literally handed the ball over to the enemy! From that moment, the other team took complete charge of the game, and any hope we had of winning was all but gone.

Later, yet at just the right time, the Coach called a time out and gathered his defense around him. He calmly slipped into a uniform and, inauspiciously, ran onto the field with the rest of the team! The other team, knowing his prowess and power, cringed at the sight of this Man lining up with his team. As soon as the ball was snapped, our Coach and Star Player hit the quarterback so hard that he knocked the ball loose, and recovered the fumble. Our hope of victory came to life again!

But our elation was short-lived - the Coach was not getting up. It was a serious blow to our team to think of playing this game without him. As he was being carried off the field, he encouraged us to follow what he had taught us. Quickly he gave us instructions to follow his example. Keep a keen eye on him on the sideline, and listen carefully to his moment-by-moment coaching. The Coach was always there on the sideline, but our view of him was often obscured by the commotion of the game. He called all the plays, and we ran them the best we could with the help of another player that he sent in to take us the rest of the way to victory.

This new player appeared in our huddle and started conveying the Coach's plays for us. We quickly learned to trust this guy and do what he was telling us. Oddly, he sounded a lot like the Coach. Our hope was again raised because this new guy kept telling us the victory would be ours. It still wasn't easy, though. We still got bogged down and often had to punt. We still turned the ball over and frequently got penalized for our mistakes. But through all our failure to even listen to the Coach's instructions at times, he kept forgiving us and encouraging us to press on.

With just seconds left to play and our team trailing by a point, we had the ball deep in our own territory. Suddenly we heard a roar from the crowd, and look! Here comes the Coach, again in uniform, jogging back onto the field! You could actually see the fear in the other team's eyes. Our Star took the snap, and without impediment, decimated the enemy, along with his entire team - breaking their tackles, effortlessly tossing them aside as he stepped over the goal line, and won the game in glorious fashion!!! Time expired, and the victory was ours! We all rushed onto the field and lifted our Leader on to our shoulders, and paraded together around the stadium, cheering his victory (and ours)...

We win! We win! We win!



Jesus and His apostles talked a lot about the “Kingdom of God.” I think Christians use it as a generic term to talk about God, and the way He does things. But what does it really mean? What is the Kingdom? Where is it, and what are we supposed to do with it? Let’s see if we can’t develop a sort of, “working definition” of the Kingdom, one that leads us to love the King more and live a life more focused on advancing His rule in the earth.

In short, the Kingdom of God is the sphere in which at any given time or place God's rule is acknowledged. The Kingdom is the "King's domain." It's where King Jesus has “dominion.” When people recognize, enjoy, and obey the kingship of God; that’s the Kingdom of God. It’s not so much a *location* as it is a *condition* of His ruling activity. It’s where the King rules over life here on earth, and then eventually rules through His people throughout the universe.

The best way that I can think to summarize the history of the Kingdom of God is this:

The Kingdom of God was RELINQUISHED by Adam, RECOVERED by Jesus, RESTORED by Jesus to believers in foretaste form, and will be REALIZED in its final form when Jesus returns.

And the best way that I can think to illustrate the history of the Kingdom of God is to use the football metaphor.



The ball was fumbled (Adam's fall), recovered (Jesus' incarnation), handed off (Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection), and ultimately the game is won (His glorious return).

So, here we go on a sort of whirlwind tour of the *Kingdom of God* in the Bible. Much better, and more complete, studies have been done by smarter people than me. (I’m partial to George Eldon Ladd’s books on the subject myself.) But this Reader’s Digest version will get you started.

THE KINGDOM RELINQUISHED – *The Fumble*

Adam and Eve were the original trustees of the earth. They were charged with rulership under God.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

You made man a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. (Psalm 8:4-8)

The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man. (Psalm 115:16)

So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. And after he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword ... to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:23-24)

Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Their fall led to a double disaster when they disobeyed the Lord in the garden. They lost both their *relationship with God*, and their *rulership under God*. They transferred their allegiance from God to the snake, and at the same time relinquished the dominion with which God had entrusted them. Rulership had now become the legal position of the devil. That's why he's called: ***"The Prince of this world... the god of this age... The ruler of the kingdom of the air."*** (John 12:31, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2).



Our first parents were entrusted with the football, but they carried it irresponsibly, and lost it to the other team. When they fumbled the ball, the Adversary immediately picked it up and held it for his team.

THE KINGDOM RECOVERED – *The Fumble Recovery*



God wasn't willing to leave it with the enemy possessing the ball, and us on defense. He had made us to reign with him, but, in order to recover the fumble, the King Himself, had to come here as a player on the team, don the uniform, and retrieve the ball for us.

Read the Gospels again and take note of how the King does His Kingdom. He told us how the Kingdom works, how to carry it, how to run with it, and how to hand it to others.

"If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you...." (Matthew 12:28)

"... the Kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21).

He demonstrated what happens when God's rule re-enters the human scene. Satan is put in his place, people are restored to wholeness, and God is glorified.

It was man who *relinquished* the Kingdom, it must be a Man who *recovers* it. Our team lost the ball and a Member of our team had to get it back. Christ came as the *"Last Adam"* in order to undo the damage brought by the *"First Adam."*

“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.” (1 Corinthians 15:22,45).

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:17-19)

Sinful man could not recover the fumbled ball on his own because he is under the control of Satan (the coach of the other team). God chose to use a Man over whom Satan had no control and no legal claim.

The prince of this world is coming and he has nothing in me. (John 14:30)

Jesus' assignment was to destroy Satan's claim on the people who by faith lay claim to the benefits of His death and resurrection.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil... (Hebrews 2:14)

THE KINGDOM RESTORED (in foretaste form) – The Handoff

“I confer on you a Kingdom, just as My Father conferred one on Me.” (Luke 22:29)

“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3,5)

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves... (Colossians 1:13)

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus... (Ephesians 2:6)

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)

Because the King included us, we can see His Kingdom, *enter* its influence, share in its powers, enjoy its benefits, and participate in its advance.

"Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." (Matthew 6:10)

"I give you the keys of the Kingdom. Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 16:19)



In keeping with the football metaphor, Jesus' goal was not to simply carry the ball Himself, but to hand it to us so that we could run with it. We were made to play on His team, follow his instructions, and carry the ball to victory. He recovered the ball that we fumbled, and handed it back to us so that we could do what we were originally intended to do.

The Church is the *Enforcement Agency* into whose hands the Kingship of Christ on earth is entrusted. As were Adam and Eve before they fell, we are God's kingdom *trustees* on the earth. We are tasked to "cooperate" (which means to operate in partnership) with Him in order to bring heaven's life to earth.

As His agents, our Kingdom responsibilities include...

- 1. Establishing Kingdom life in the midst of earthly circumstances through following the King and doing what He says***
- 2. Enforcing Kingdom authority against hell's usurped authority through prayer, purity, and proclamation***
- 3. Extending Kingdom influence into the world through evangelism and works of service***

In this era (this stage of the game), we are experiencing a foretaste of the final age's powers, not the fulfillment stage of the Kingdom (Hebrews 6:5). That the Kingdom was being restored on earth in stages confused the first disciples of Jesus. From their understanding of the Old Testament teaching on the Kingdom, they looked forward, and with good reason, for the Kingdom to arrive in its fully-realized form when Messiah arrived. They expected Jesus to bring the "Golden Age." They figured that when He stepped on the field, the game would be over. They were puzzled by Jesus' offer of a Kingdom that was not political and physical, but moral and spiritual. Even John the Baptist was confused about the Kingdom coming in phases when he asked Jesus, "*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*" (Matthew 11:2-3)

It's clear that the Kingdom is a future blessing...

“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable” (1 Corinthians 15:50)

But just as clear is the reality of its influence in the present...

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

It will someday have to do with the immediate overthrow of governments...

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15)

Nevertheless, it is now available as an incrementally increasing inner spiritual blessing...

“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).

It is a realm to be entered tomorrow...

“I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 8:11)

But it must be entered into today...

“I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31).

“The future has invaded the present! The Kingdom which is yet to come in power and glory has already come in secret and hidden form to work among men and within them. The power of God’s kingdom which in “The Age to Come” will sweep away both evil and all its influence, has come among men in the present evil Age, to deliver them from the power of sin, from servitude to Satan and from the bondage and fear of death” (George Ladd).

THE KINGDOM REALIZED (in final form) – Victory!

According to the Bible, Jesus makes two appearances to earth: the first in history in common human flesh, and the second at some undisclosed time in the future in glorious divinity. He came as a *“Lamb”* who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He will return as a *“Lion”* who will destroy not only sin, but all sinners. In the same way, there are two manifestations of His Kingdom: the first in *foretaste* and the other in *fulfillment*. The first is a “taste,” the other will be the full meal. The first stage of the Kingdom (the one we’re experiencing now) is limited by human choices, a fallen world system, and the presence of a formidable foe. The final state of the Kingdom (the one He’ll bring when He comes in the clouds) will not be restricted in jurisdiction by anything or anyone. The corrupt system and its evil leader will be destroyed. When the Kingdom comes in consummation, *“... every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”* (Philippians 2:10).

The Second Coming of Christ triggers this completed stage of the Kingdom, and is frequently referred to as King Jesus being “revealed.”

... as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. (1 Corinthians 1:7)

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. (II Thessalonians 1:7)

...set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:13)

The Greek term for His coming in these passages is “apokalupsis”, which means an unveiling or uncovering. His return to the earth will be an unveiling of His Kingship. We’ll all see Jesus to be the King that He’s been all along! He is King now, and is now reigning at His Father’s right hand. But now we can see it only by faith. When He returns, as a fine work of art, His majesty will be unveiled for all to see! It’s been covered while people gathered to see it. The sculptor then tears off the sheet as the spectators applaud and appreciate his masterpiece. In the same way, to us; Jesus is partially veiled, His kingship is not entirely unveiled. But some day, *the rest of Him* will be revealed. We’ll see Him as He really is!

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

The response of man will no longer limit His influence. His reign will cover the earth “as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9) The King and His Kingdom will be universally honored. The *foretaste* will turn to *fulfillment*. All the opposition – Sin, Satan, and the System will be smashed and be replaced with “*righteousness, peace, and joy.*” All who lived in faith that Jesus was King will then see Him as He really is, and experience the full force of His kingship.

Not only will we all revel in His reign, and enjoy our “*face to face*” with the King, we will take our place at His side as He rules the universe. We’ve been groomed to “reign with Him.” Today, we’re seated with Him at the right hand of God by faith (Ephesians 2:6). There is coming a day in which that privileged position will be fully functional.

The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6)

The planet which was originally given to man under God will be given back to glorified saints under Christ in a “new heaven and new earth.”

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...” (Revelation 21:1).

“But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” (II Peter 3:13)

“There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

If we don't give up, if we continue by faith to see Him as He is, and to follow Him as our King, someday our faith will become sight. And all we've hoped for will be realized as we serve Him in His eternal Kingdom.

"...if we endure, we will also reign with Him" (II Timothy 2:12).

"To him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne" (Revelation 3:21).



Look! Here comes the Coach, again in uniform, jogging back onto the field! You could actually see the fear in the other team's eyes. Our Star took the snap, and without impediment, decimated the enemy, along with his entire team - breaking their tackles, effortlessly tossing them aside as he stepped over the goal line, and won the game in glorious fashion!!! Time expired, and the victory was ours! We all rushed onto the field and lifted our our Leader on to our shoulders, and paraded together around the stadium, cheering his victory (and ours)... We win! We win! We win!

To recap...

- The Kingdom of God, the King's domain was *relinquished* by our father, Adam.
- That which Adam relinquished, Jesus *recovered* when He visited, died, rose, and ascended.
- What He recovered, he *restored* to His followers in foretaste form, and gave us the command to submit to its rule and responsibility to advance its influence in the earth.
- Then at His return, He will include those who overcome in the full *realization* of His never-ending, unrestricted, and glorious Kingdom!

A "Working Definition"...

It's not adequate to just have a well-worded definition of the Kingdom. As important as it is to be able to articulate what the Kingdom is, what the King is like, and how desirable His rule is today and then someday; we need more than that. As Kingdom people we require more than an explanation of the Kingdom that doesn't lead us to do anything. Our explanation of the Kingdom should be accompanied by an experience of the King and the power of His rule. It has to lead us to love the King and the ways of the King. We want to participate in the advance of his kingship, and someday fully revel in its beauty and power.

Let's submit ourselves to the King, labor with all our might to extend the boundaries of His rightful rule on the earth in humble and passionate anticipation of His glorious return!