



Bigger than All of Us Have You Found Your Place?

When I was eight or nine, I walked into a local grocery store on my way to school and went to the candy bin where there were sour candies. I looked around and did not see anyone watching me. I quickly reached down, snatched one of the candies and shoved it in my pocket. Scanning everywhere for an eye on me, I quickly made my way to the door and hurried down the street. With my prize safely stored in the front pocket of my jeans, I marched into class like a victorious general. As I sat at school, the candy became a heavy weight. Guilt over what I had done sapped me of all happiness and as the day progressed, I became obsessed by my crime. I did not even pull the candy out of my pocket to look at it, let alone unwrap it or stick it in my mouth. I do not remember what happened to that hard piece of candy, maybe I threw it away, maybe it remained in my pocket until my mom washed my jeans. I just know I never ate it, never even took the plastic wrap off it because it represented what I never wanted to be. The me I hoped to be could not put the candy in his mouth and ever enjoy it. Freudian psychologists might contend I had an enlarged super ego. I would just say that the Kingdom of God, a term found throughout the New Testament, was affecting my thinking.

Just saying those words, "Kingdom of God" has an emotional response for many. Some think of oppression, legalism, guilt. Others hear joy, peace, love, and eternal happiness. Forty-four times the term "Kingdom of God" is used by various writers of the New Testament, and it is not clearly defined. It is both spiritual and physical at the same time, something coming to pass as well as already here. Here is what we do know.

First of all, the Kingdom of God is "good news". Jesus made that clear as He declared, **"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.** (Luke 4:43-44 NIV) **After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him...** (Luke 8:1 NIV) The Kingdom of God is light at the end of the tunnel, an oasis in the middle of the desert, a celebration. The world, as led by Satan, may not see it that way, but those who long for the end of war, disease and death and look forward to eternal joy and never-ending peace celebrate its coming.

The Kingdom of God is received and not seized. Listen to what Jesus says about the Kingdom of God. **"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** (Luke 18:17 NIV) You decide if you are going to have a place in the Kingdom of God or not. It is not forced upon you and psychological manipulation will not be used to try to push you into it. Like a child who has nothing to offer in return for receiving a gift, so we gain the kingdom without anything to trade for the opportunity. Jesus' disciples made the mistake of turning away children that their parents wanted Jesus to bless. You see, they did not think the children had anything to offer Jesus and His work and so they tried to keep them from Christ. **When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** (Mark 10:14-15 NIV) Honestly, you really have nothing to offer Jesus to get Him to accept you into the Kingdom of God. You enter empty handed with no skills He needs, no talents He must find, no personality traits that will win Him over. The Kingdom of God has an open door for people like you who simply want to be a part of it.

The Kingdom of God is unlike any other society or collection of people you have ever known. In fact it is beyond your imagination. **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 NIV) That does not mean that within the Kingdom of God there is not eating or drinking. Jesus often used the picture of a feast to describe the sort of life the Kingdom of God offers. **People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.** (Luke 13:29 NIV) It is just that you will not notice that mostly. It is the goodness of the people that will captivate you. They are right in every way. No discontent, hurt feelings, anxiety or frustration. Everyone does what is right and is good within and without! It is not all talk either. It is a power that drives such happiness and peace. **For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.** (1 Corinthians 4:20 NIV)

Now I want to share something interesting about the Kingdom of God. As it would seem, you enter the Kingdom of God. **Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.**" (Matthew 19:24 NIV) In these comments, Jesus is noting how nearly impossible it is for the wealthy to enter into the Kingdom of God. They just do not care about it. However, what I want you to notice here is that the Kingdom of God is entered. We see this again when Jesus confronts the Jewish leaders who had no interest in really living a life of goodness. **"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.** (Matthew 21:31-32 NIV) Literally, Jesus declares that the prostitutes and tax collectors were constantly going in ahead of the Jewish leaders. It is because they wanted to be there...it was their goal, their longing. If YOU enter the Kingdom of God, you come into it because that is your desire, even your hope. Now there is another side to this. Not only do you enter the Kingdom of God, it enters you!

Consider this powerful statement of Jesus. **Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "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 NIV) Literally, He insists that the kingdom of God is continually within you. You might also use language like this to describe a place you love. "I left Georgia, but Georgia is still in me." Jesus is saying much more than this. The Kingdom of God is not merely a spot in the Universe. It is the life of God present within and without. Not just His influence, but Himself and where He is, there you have the Kingdom of God. His rule and His creating power are wherever you find Him...and where you have not yet discovered Him.

There is this profound revelation of Jesus in John 3, the famous passage of Jesus and Nicodemus, the inquiring Pharisee. Jesus responded this way to Nicodemus commenting on Jesus' miracles. **In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** (John 3:3-5 NIV) Here you have the Kingdom of God explained in a nutshell. To be a part of the Kingdom of God, to be aware of it and to be joined to it requires a transformation. Water was a symbol of a washing that must take place where your sins are removed from you and your life is purified by the salvation Christ gives you. When that happens, or at the same time, the Spirit of God becomes a part of you and you are a new creation, you and God joined together into a completely different personality. You though must enter the Kingdom of God if you are to have this new life. You do so by faith. Believe in Jesus to take your sin from you and give you eternal life and it all starts right then. You will begin to see Christ everywhere you go because the Kingdom of God will be within you and before you.