

the kingdom of god

1: what is the kingdom?

introduction

FACILITATOR: *Jesus didn't mention the church very much – in fact, the Gospels only record two places where he talked about it, in Matthew 16 and 18. But he seemed to talk about the Kingdom of God all the time; it was his main theme. Have a quick look through Matthew, Mark, or Luke and you will see scores of places where Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God – or the Kingdom of Heaven, as Matthew records it.*

welcome

CELL: What area of character is God working on at the moment?

worship

CELL: Spend five minutes in silence listening to God and then share the results. Perhaps give a few verses from a Psalm as a seed before the silence begins.

word

FACILITATOR: *Ask the group to define the 'Kingdom of God'.*

The Kingdom of God is anywhere where God is acknowledged as King and where his laws are obeyed. Since the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it is being ushered in gradually.

The Kingdom involves a visible demonstration of radical love and justice, activated by the power of the Holy Spirit. It comprises pockets of people on earth where God's reign is acknowledged and therefore expressed through their lifestyles.

CELL: Read Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36; Matt 6:9-10 then answer the following question.

-Is God's kingdom more about ruling or territory?

FACILITATOR: *The Greek word used in the New Testament for Kingdom is 'basilea'. The meaning carried by this word is primarily that of 'rule' and 'reign' rather than territory. The Kingdom of God can be defined as 'the rule of God'.*

Split the cell into three groups. Give each group one set of the verses below.

Group A: - Mark 1:15, Matt 12:28, Psalm 29:10, Matt 11:12

Group B: - Matt 8:11, Luke 23:42, Luke 22:18, Luke 19:11

Group C: - Matt 6:9-10, Luke 17:20-21, John 3:5, Col 1:13, Matt 13:31-32

CELL: Based on the verses you read, answer and discuss the following:

-Is the kingdom something that is here now or is it something we are waiting for?

Try to put yourself in the shoes of the disciples and other Jews of the first century.

-What did they understand when Jesus talked about 'the Kingdom of God'?

-What was their context?

-Jesus was referred to as the Son of David, what did that mean to them?

FACILITATOR: *David was the high watermark for the Jewish people and so Jesus was often called the 'Son of David.' They would be hoping to return to a time of prosperity and power like that of David's reign.*

Some thoughts for the group to ponder...How would you feel if you were living in a nation that had once been very great, but now was cruelly occupied? Imagine, in addition, that you and all the people

around you felt that your nation and people were uniquely chosen as God's special people on earth. Would you pray that God would send a savior, a 'messiah'? Wouldn't you expect that Messiah to defeat the occupying army? What would that Messiah look like and how did Jesus differ?

Picture the excitement that swept through the countryside when Jesus appeared, preaching the Kingdom and doing signs and wonders! Everyone would have felt that the day of liberation was at hand. But confusion and anger followed when they realized that he was not interested in warfare and insurrection. He taught against it (Matthew 5: 43-48) and even spoke well of a Roman soldier (Matthew 8: 5-13).

witness

CELL: What form does the Kingdom of God take on campus? Together pray God's promises over your campus. Ask God to extend His Kingdom in your university and to break down strongholds.

what now?

CELL: Do you think we understand the Kingdom of God today? Is it a common subject for clear teaching among believers? Take a few minutes to discuss the following questions as a cell.

Write down three thoughts concerning these ideas and try to apply them this week.

- How would somebody live who had a clear understanding of the Kingdom of God?
- How can you best extend God's kingdom in your life and of those around you?

2: on earth as in heaven

introduction

FACILITATOR: *As part of the Kingdom of God, we must focus on what that looks like in our lives.*

welcome

CELL: Tell us about your first love. (i.e. person, toy, sports...)

worship

FACILITATOR: *Read a short passage of scripture about Jesus and ask each person to write their own short Psalm inspired by that passage. Then let each one read their psalm inspired by that passage and allow people to pray in response to each reading.*

word

CELL: Read Mark 1.

FACILITATOR: *Scan through the story line of Mark 1. Note that John the Baptist created an unprecedented stir in Israel when he came preaching, "Prepare the way of the Lord..." As soon as John was put in prison, Jesus began to preach and say, "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" His audience would have understood that the Kingdom of God was best represented in their history during the reigns of two Kings – David and Solomon. David represented the battles required to 'take the Kingdom by force', while Solomon represented the promise of a reign of peace. That reign was prophesied by more than one of the recognized prophets (see Daniel 2:44 and Isaiah 9:6-7). To an extent the Jews were right. The Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus does consist of two phases: first the battle to see it come and then, the unending reign of peace. Jesus has promised that he will one day return and complete the coming of the Kingdom.*

CELL: Read Revelation 21:1-5 and try to imagine what good plans God has for us. Spend a few minutes talking to one another about the pictures this passage produces in your mind.

FACILITATOR: *The Kingdom of God has two phases, and we are still in the first one. Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom at the start of his ministry on earth. Then he left us with his presence and the power of the Holy Spirit and told us to get on with the battle to make the Kingdom come. Often this battle takes place in our own lives as we allow God to build His Kingdom in us.*

CELL: Have someone read Hebrews 12:1-12. It will help us remember our context for battling to make the kingdom come. Consider and discuss the following:

- We should keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, our king.
- Discuss words such as perseverance, discipline, and struggle against sin.
- Suffering is often the prelude to the Kingdom and there is no Kingdom without suffering.
- Focus on the 'harvest of righteousness' and get testimonies of how people have seen breakthroughs in personal battles with sin.

witness

CELL: As God's kingdom agents we can be used by Him to extend His Kingdom. We are most effective when we are in close relationship with Him, living holy and righteous lifestyles. Pray for each other to be used by God this week to share the gospel with non-Christians and with friends.

what now?

CELL: How are you fighting to make the Kingdom of God come? Talk with your accountability partner this week about your 'battles'. Spend time confessing sin; Jesus' main message about the kingdom was "repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near".

3: kingdom liberation

introduction

FACILITATOR: *This week we are looking at how to build the Kingdom of God in our relationships with other Christians, whether that is in church or cell. How did God intend his children to live and treat each other? Both the Old and New Testaments hold clear keys to what this should look like.*

welcome

CELL: Feedback from last week's "witness" section. Did anyone have an opportunity to share with a non-Christian friend?

worship

FACILITATOR: *Read Luke 7:36-50 when a sinful woman anointed Jesus.*

Give the group two pieces of small paper. On one ask them to draw a 'tear drop' and on the other an 'alabaster jar'. Use it as a time of confession. On the tear write a list of sins that you want to confess to God. On the alabaster jar write a list of things that you want to offer up to God as a sacrifice of praise. These could be things that you want to give away or fast from for a while or things that you want to dedicate to God. You could keep the bits of paper for future reference or throw them away or even burn them as an act of worship. End in prayer.

word

CELL: Read Daniel chapter 2 and then discuss.

Now go back and re-read verses 34 and 35, then verses 44 and 45. This is one of the great, prophetic pictures of the Kingdom of God.

-How is that picture expressed today?

FACILITATOR: *The Kingdom of God is anywhere where God is acknowledged as King and where his laws are obeyed. Since the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it is being ushered in gradually. The Kingdom involves a visible demonstration of radical love and justice, activated by the power of the Holy Spirit. It comprises pockets of people on earth where God's reign is acknowledged and therefore expressed through their lifestyles.*

When the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, God instructed them to divide up the land according to the size of each tribe and family. This resulted in each family owning a plot of land on which they could build their own house, grow crops and graze animals. God laid down laws about not moving the boundaries of their neighbor's field and how the widows, orphans and foreigners were to be looked after. God boldly promised that if the Israelites were obedient to these laws, "there would be no poor among you" (Deut. 15:4).

What a promise! This was a demonstration of God's justice and gave rise to the idyllic picture of 'shalom' – each man or woman sitting under their own vine, on their own land, in peace. The future kingdom draws on this vision.

Human nature being what it is, this 'utopia' was never fully realized. Families lost their land through drought, pests, debt, theft or the death of key breadwinners. But God had fully anticipated these tragedies and instructed that every 50 years, there was to be an effort to restore equality in society through re-distributing the land and wealth. This 50th year was known as the year of Jubilee, where slaves had to be set free and land and houses bought or otherwise acquired in previous years had to be returned to the original owners of their heirs.

Sadly, Israel was never willing to practice this remarkable provision.

CELL: Read Acts 2: 42-47.

-How did the early Christians apply something akin to Jubilee?

-What should believers do today? Are we thinking radically? '

witness

CELL: How can your cell best mimic the early church in spreading the Kingdom of God? This time focus your discussion on your relationships with non-believers. Pray for these things to happen and continue to pray for specific friends.

what now?

CELL: Now discuss how your cell best mimic the early church in spreading the Kingdom of God focusing your discussion on your relationships with other believers in your community. (Are you willing to share with anyone who might have a need? Are you breaking bread together or taking time to enjoy a meal together with other believers?) Pray for understanding from the Holy Spirit. As God speaks to you, take action!

4: kingdom expansion

introduction

FACILITATOR: *The Great Commission makes it clear that we are to be God's agents to extend His Kingdom. This week we will focus on how to do this, how to extend the Kingdom of God into every sphere of society.*

welcome

CELL: Who or what, specifically, did God use to bring you to the point where you knew you needed Jesus?

worship

FACILITATOR: *Prepare a meditation.*

Either: ask the group to close their eyes and imagine that they are a character in the Bible.

Talk the members through a particular Bible story and how they might feel. Maybe use a chapter from the gospels with some interaction with Jesus.

*Or use a passage such as Revelation 4: 1-11 and read it through slowly with music in the background, allowing the group to imagine the vision.
Allow this to lead into prayer.*

witness

FACILITATOR: *Lead the worship straight into a time of intercession, crying out for your friends and university. Use statistics of the proportion of Christians in your university, level of drug and alcohol abuse, suicide and pregnancy rates and pray that God would turn these stats around.*

word

FACILITATOR: *Unlike David's Kingdom, the Kingdom of God will not come by a conquering sword. Though Jesus made this clear, through the ages people have gone to war in the name of Jesus, committing terrible atrocities – the Crusades, Inquisitions and various tribal and racial wars. Jesus sought to dislodge this violent orientation to the coming of the Kingdom by telling parables.*

CELL: Read Matthew 13 with its seven parables about the Kingdom of God and discuss in smaller groups.

-Do you see how some of them echo the theme of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2?

-What do you think they mean?

FACILITATOR: *The rock that became a mountain, the yeast and the mustard seed all illustrate something that seems to be small and yet has immense impact. Real disciples of Jesus have probably never in history been the majority in any given society. But they have, as a minority, transformed nations and empires.*

It is doubtful that, in the first three centuries after Christ, true believers ever numbered more than 5 – 10% of the Roman Empire. But their effect was so great that, eventually, the Emperors decided it was in their best interests to claim loyalty to the Church.

CELL: Think back on your church experience or your experience as part of this cell. Do you think we are 'yeasting' all of society? If not, why not?

Read Matthew 5:13-16. How do we remain salty and let the light shine?

FACILITATOR: *We are called, as a community, to strengthen and encourage one another, but we are also called to go out into the world and be 'salty'. The world desperately needs our 'salt' and 'light'. How should the church function so that we help one another to be salt and light in the world?*

witness

CELL: Consider...what are you called to do? Are you called to business, or politics, or medicine, or education, or the media, entertainment or the arts? Each of these spheres of society needs believers to be representatives of the Kingdom of God.

Spend a few minutes talking in pairs or threes about your career plans. Are you seeking God's will? How can you see yourself being salt or light in the world?

what now?

CELL: This week memorize Matthew 5:13-16. Ask God to make these things true in you.