

The Discipline of Disciple-Making: Seeing, Understanding, Entering, Living & Seeking the Kingdom of God

Acts 17-20

When we were born again, we become citizens of Heaven. Salvation was when we entered and began to live in the Kingdom of God, while still living here on Earth. That tension between our citizenship in Heaven, and our stay here on Earth is what so much of the New Testament is written about.

There are three truths that will transform how we look at our calling here on Earth as believers. These three truths we all need to know if we are to master the discipline of disciple-making. Here are those truths:

1. **Jesus Taught** that Salvation was Coming Under God's Kingdom & Rule
2. **The Apostles Taught** that Salvation was Coming Under God's Kingdom & Rule
3. **Disciple-makers Understand** that Salvation was Coming Under God's Kingdom & Rule

This description of salvation unites the Four Gospels with the Book of Acts & the Epistles through the repeated message about the Kingdom of God. In the pages of Acts, salvation was presented to people living in the Roman Empire (which happens to be everywhere the New Testament was written from and to) as *entering a new kingdom: **God's***; and *becoming the subject of a new king: **Jesus***; and *living under a whole new way of life, which could be called: **Kingdom Living***.

JESUS TAUGHT THAT SALVATION WAS COMING UNDER GOD'S KINGDOM & RULE

Today, join me starting in Acts 1:1-3; and as we walk through this passage we will learn another dimension of disciple-making, which is: "Seeing, Understanding, Entering, Living & Seeking the Kingdom of God".

Acts 1:1-3 (NKJV) The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and **speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God**.

It seems that the theme and content of what Jesus Christ asked His disciples to go out and share was a continuation of just what He had already taught and explained in His teachings about the **Kingdom of God** (the term used by Mark, Luke, John) & the **Kingdom of Heaven** (the same thing only described with a Jewish term by Matthew).]

THE APOSTLES TAUGHT THAT SALVATION WAS COMING UNDER GOD'S KINGDOM & RULE

Entering God's Kingdom is what the New Testament believers presented as they swept across each town of the Roman world where they lived, worked, traveled, and most of all: served God everywhere and anytime they could. As we watch this "kingdom message" in Acts, we realize that this message is nothing less than a continuation of all that Jesus Christ began to preach and teach as He trained His disciples. The more we learn the discipline of discipleship, the more we will understand how vital this kingdom living component really is to our lives and the lives of those we explain the Gospel to.

Acts 8:12 (NKJV) But when they believed Philip as he **preached the things concerning the kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Phillip who came straight from the Jerusalem Church, and as an apostolic-affirmed, early servant of Christ's church, declared the truths of Christ's Kingdom as part of the message of salvation.

Acts 14:22 (NKJV) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations **enter the kingdom of God.**"

Paul here describes both the beginning and the end result of salvation as the kingdom of God, that causes us to suffer many afflictions for being part of God's team.

Acts 19:8 (NKJV) And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, **reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.**

Paul started his ministry in Ephesus with the continuation of what Christ preached, what He taught the disciples in those last days before His ascension: the things of the kingdom of God. Paul seemed to use that term to describe what he taught everywhere.

Acts 20:25 (NKJV) "And indeed, now I know that you all, **among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God,** will see my face no more.

Paul distilled down his nearly three-year ministry in Ephesus as preaching the Kingdom of God. Think of the content of the Book of Ephesians as being all about the Kingdom of God.

Acts 28.23 (NKJV) So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he **explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God**, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

Paul, at the end of his public ministry on those missionary journeys, as he is starting to write epistles back from prison to Ephesus, Colosse & Philippi, describes his message as being about the Kingdom of God.

Acts 28.31 (NKJV) **preaching the kingdom of God** and teaching the things, which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Again, the last words about Paul is describing what he taught, affirmed, and preached as being things about God's Kingdom and the implications that has on humans for salvation.

Now, go back with me to Acts 19, as we continue to analyze the messages given in the Book of Acts describing and declaring the way of salvation.

SALVATION IS: ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM & FOLLOWING GOD'S WAY, WHICH PEOPLE FOLLOW INSTEAD OF THEIR OWN WAY

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN (Paul): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 19:8-20 where salvation is described as *a Kingdom, following a Way, which people follow instead of their own way.*

Acts 19:8-20 (NKJV) And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning **the things of the kingdom of God**. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of **the Way** before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. 11 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists **took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus** over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. 15 And the **evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"** 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and **fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.** 18 **And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.** 19 **Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.** And they counted up the

value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 **So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.**

One of the ways that God describes us who believe and are saved is that we seek His Kingdom, where He is our King, and we are subject to Him. As John the Baptists said in His first sermon: “repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mt. 3:2); and Jesus continues in His first sermon (Mt. 4:17), and reinforces in the Sermon on the Mount: “seek ye first the Kingdom of God & His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33); and so this description of salvation continues through the Gospels and into Acts.

Look at how closely tied the Gospel is to the rule of Christ within the lives of believers, described as the Kingdom of God.

Acts 19:8 (NKJV) And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and **persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.**

This is nothing less than a continuation of Christ's final lesson at the opening we saw of the Book of Acts in 1:3 (NKJV) to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and **speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.**

What exactly would the “things pertaining to the kingdom of God” be? Jesus taught that believers come under the rule of God for their lives. They seek His control over more and more of their lives, until as He said in Mt. 7:22-24, they want to “do the will of My Father in Heaven”.

God’s rule is through Jesus Christ and His Word. Those are the two ways that God is mediating or dispensing His rule. That is the Gospel we preach: *believe in Christ, hear His Word, and submit to His rule over your daily life.*

Again we see the proclamation of submission to the rule of Christ is at the heart of the Gospel message. Move onward in Acts to the next description of salvation.

SALVATION IS: REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD, FAITH TOWARD JESUS CHRIST, & THE GOSPEL OF GRACE THAT LEADS TO ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM.

MESSAGE NINETEEN (Paul): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 20:21-25 where salvation is described as *repentance, faith, and entering into God's Kingdom.*

Acts 20:21-25 (NKJV) testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, **repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.** 22 And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to **the gospel of the grace**

of God. 25 “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone **preaching the kingdom of God**, will see my face no more.

Now, look at this amazing continuity we see in the message, from cover to cover in Acts, starting in Christ's messages. How did Jesus start His ministry? Turn with me to Matthew 4.

JESUS PREACHED THE GOSPEL OF GOD’S RULING AS KING OVER PEOPLE’S LIVES

Matthew 4:17,23 (NKJV) From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” 23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Mark 1:14-15 (NKJV) Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God**, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.**”

Matthew 5:3, 10, 19-20 (NKJV) “Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the **kingdom of heaven.** 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the **kingdom of heaven.** 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be **called least in the kingdom of heaven;** but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be **called great in the kingdom of heaven.** 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means **enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness**, and all these things shall be added to you.

What is Jesus saying in Matthew 6:33? That:

ONLY PEOPLE WHO SUBMIT TO GOD’S RULE GO TO HEAVEN

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV) “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Matthew 7:23-24 (NKJV) And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who practice lawlessness!**’ 24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, **and does them**, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

Matthew 9:35 (NKJV) Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Jesus trained and sent His disciples at the start of the Book of Acts, as we already saw. That means that the Apostles Heard, Learned & Preached Christ's Message that God's Rule Is the Entrance to Salvation. Going on from Acts and into the Epistles:

PAUL AFFIRMED & PROCLAIMED CHRIST'S MESSAGE THAT GOD'S RULE IS THE ENTRANCE TO SALVATION

In Paul's first epistle to a local church (1 Thessalonians 2:12, NKJV), Paul explains salvation as being called into God's Kingdom:

that you would walk worthy of God who **calls you into His own kingdom and glory**

To the Corinthians Paul warned that anyone whose life was an unbroken pattern of slavery to sin would never receive eternal life (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NKJV), with these words:

Do you not know that **the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,[a] nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will **inherit the kingdom of God.**

Paul also explained to the Ephesians the same warning in Ephesians 5:5, NKJV):

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has **any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

To the Colossians that Paul never met, he explains salvation as being placed into God's Kingdom, and that life is being a fellow-worker for the Kingdom in Colossians 1:13; 4:11, NKJV):

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and **conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love**, 4:11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers **for the kingdom of God** who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

So when Jesus spent those days after the Cross, explaining and teaching the disciples about Kingdom Living, how can we distill that down for us today? One way we could do that is through the most well-known, and most-quoted "Kingdom" passage in the Bible. Remember what we learned about the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6?

JESUS GAVE THE PRAYER OF THOSE IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Look again with me, now that we understand what the Gospel of the Kingdom of God really means, at the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is cry to stay each day with the heart's desire God wants in us, from those who are in the Kingdom of God.

As we turn back to Matthew 6, may I remind you of one of the simplest and yet most profound spiritual exercises that Jesus prescribed for us? The Lord's Prayer was an exercise designed to keep each of us in step with God's plan for our lives. Remember that simple prayer?

Matthew 6:9- In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

CHRIST WANTS US COMING & ASKING FOR HELP EACH DAY

The seven petitions that we are to live by, are found in the natural phrase divisions of this prayer:

GOD, FOCUS ME ON WHO YOU ARE.

“Our Father, Who art in Heaven, Hallowed by Thy Name”: Focus me on the reality of Heaven, and the holy scene of constant adoration and worship around the Throne of God in Heaven. Focus my heart, my life, my mind upon You as My King. I bow before You. I adore You. You are the King of My Life. You my God are the Great King of all the Universe. You sit enthroned in Heaven. I bow with all of creation before Him.

AS I SEE YOU, CONTROL ME EACH DAY.

“Thy Kingdom come”: Control my life is what this petition is all about. Our bowing started when we bowed in the humble repentance of salvation to Him as our Lord, Master, and Savior. I want to live a life of reverent submission. I want to walk in the Spirit, pleasing You my God. I want the life of Your progressive sanctification.

AS I SEEK YOU TO LEAD ME THROUGH ALL THE MYRIADS OF CHOICES LIFE PRESENTS EACH DAY.

“Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven”: This third phrase bridges the scene of us in Heaven worshipping around the Throne, and us here on Earth growing in our desire to love, serve, and follow our Lord and our God. Lead my steps in your pathway, is My heart cry

as the one You redeemed. I need You as my Master to lead me. Show me Your way, and guide me through life.

Then I will trust that You will **supply me** with whatever I need to accomplish Your will. Then I will know that I need to ask for You to: **Cleanse me** so I stay in close touch with You and Your plan; and **Protect me** from everything that seeks to keep me from You; and **Empty me** so You get all the glory and honor for my life.

So as we live each day Jesus left us with the:

THE PRAYER OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

Focus me back upon who you are as God;

Control me as my Master;

Lead me in doing what pleases You;

Supply me with whatever I need to do Your will;

Cleanse & protect me from anything that displeases You;

Empty me so You get all of the credit from my life.

Please stand with me, and invite God to rule over every moment of our days through that prayer Christ left us to pray!

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.