

West Auckland Vineyard Church

An introduction to Vineyard
'Kingdom theology & practice'

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What is a Kingdom?

1. The Kingdom Jesus preached

To understand what Jesus meant by the phrase, “the kingdom of God,” we must first understand what a kingdom is. When we in the Western world hear the word, we may think of kings and queens ruling in empires like England. A regent over a kingdom is someone who has authority in that kingdom. That kingdom is a place where they actively *rule* and *reign*. So, what did it mean when Jesus said that God has a kingdom, and that it has come *near*?

a. What is the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God, as Jesus spoke about it, was not limited to a physical city, country, or land mass – even to the borders of ancient Israel. Rather, the kingdom of God was the dynamic reign of God over heaven and earth; all things visible and invisible.

For the ancient Jews, the idea of the “kingdom of God” was an accepted theological reality. Taught by prophets like Isaiah, the people of Israel believed that God is the one true King and Creator of the world. As King, he rules the cosmos (Ps. 24:8-10), and will one day express that rule fully on earth through his selected regent – an anointed one (Is. 61:1).

On that day, God’s people, Israel, will be delivered from their oppressors and brought home from their long exile. The world will be set to rights, brought under God’s shalom (peace) again as it had been in the beginning. God’s anointed, appointed King will rule the people of the world with justice, mercy, and love. This was the day for which they hoped, prayed, and persevered.

b. Jesus inaugurates The Kingdom

Jesus, a simple carpenter’s son and a Jew, is born in 1st century Palestine. One day, as a young man, he steps forward in a synagogue to read the Old Testament. He chooses a revered text that speaks of the anointed King to come. It is from the revered prophet Isaiah, chapter 61.

Here is the account:

“He stood up to read, and 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 proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’ 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. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:17-20).

**By his resurrection from the dead (Luke 24:1-6),
God would verify that Jesus was indeed the true**

Jesus was declaring *himself* to be the anointed King for whom they had been waiting! He would proclaim, in word and deed, that God's kingdom was truly among them. He would demonstrate that kingdom in signs, wonders, and the transformation of every life he touched. Then, by death on a cross, he would offer himself as a sacrificial lamb, the "suffering servant," for the sins of humanity (Is. 53). By his resurrection from the dead (Luke 24:1-6), God would verify that Jesus was indeed the true King of the world. Jesus was *inaugurating* the rule and reign of God on the earth, and God's purposes for the world from creation would begin to be realized.

2. Your will be done

a. Why is the world in such bad shape?

One of the most challenging questions confronting Christian faith is simply this: If Jesus really was who he said he was, if he really was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, then why is the world still in such bad shape? Why do so many people still die of hunger and cancer? Why are there still so many wars and suicide bombings? Why is there still so much slaughter taking place in Syria, in Iraq and in Afghanistan? Why is rape used as a common tactic of war across the African continent?

Let me make this really simple. If Jesus is Lord and he has all power and we have the Holy Spirit, and we have this powerful message called the Gospel, then why aren't we more successful than we are? Why are so many marriages, even among church-going, supposedly Bible-believing Christians, in such bad shape? And why do some Christian marriages end in divorce? Why do so many kids raised in Christian families end up barely connected to church? Why are so many church-goers living double lives, hopelessly addicted, unhappy, unfulfilled?

The bottom line is if Jesus is really true and is really risen, why is the truth not more obvious? Why don't more people believe what Christians believe? Why is the world not in better shape if the Messiah really did come? Haven't you wondered about this?

b. Jesus responds brings the Good News!

Have these questions crossed your mind? For the last hundred or so years New Testament scholars have been unanimous in saying that the basic message of Jesus concerned the kingdom of God. Jesus came preaching that through his person and his ministry the kingdom of God had broken into the world. So we read lots of texts like this one:

'After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"' (Mark 1:14-15).

So what is the kingdom of God? What did Jesus mean when he said, "The kingdom of God has come near?" Is he saying Christianity has come near in my person? Is the kingdom of God the Christian religion? No. Is the kingdom of God the church? Is Jesus saying the church has come near? Not at all. Is the kingdom of God heaven? Not really.

**Very simply, the kingdom of God is what things
would be like if Jesus ran everything. -Rich Nathan**

What are we Christians praying when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?' Very simply, the kingdom of God is what things would be like if Jesus ran everything and if his will was done everywhere. The kingdom of God is what things would be like if Jesus was in charge. When we pray "your kingdom come," we are saying that we want this situation to be like what it would be like, if you, Lord, were in charge, if your will was done. We say the kingdom has come when the Lord totally has his way, when he is running the show.

c. The Kingdom: both hidden & obvious

There is a secret that God has kept for all eternity, but has now disclosed. Everyone who listens to Jesus hears the secret that God's kingdom is going to come in two stages. In the first stage the kingdom is going to be hidden. It is not going to be obvious. You have to look for it and search for it. In the second stage God's kingdom will be evident and open. It is going to be overwhelming, like a boulder from heaven. In the first stage God's will doesn't displace every other will. In the first stage of the kingdom coming into the world, God's will is done, but so is the will of sinful human beings, so is the will of Satan.

In the second stage of the coming of the kingdom, when Christ returns, there will be only one will done on earth, the will of God. Right now, during this era, God's will doesn't always win the day. God's will can be resisted. God's will can be ignored.

The mystery of the kingdom is that the kingdom of God is here, but it hasn't replaced every other kingdom. The will of God is being done, but so is the will of sinful men and women, and so is the will of Satan. In this age, we're running on parallel tracks. When Christ returns creation is going to run on a monorail. Our world is going to run on the will of God.

3. The now of The Kingdom

a. God's rule breaks into our world

Through Jesus' life and ministry, God's future world – and its entire value system – was breaking into our human experience. Using a theological phrase, we call this inaugurated eschatology. Put simply, this means that Jesus inaugurated (ushered in) the gifts of God's future, perfect world (eschatology is about the "end" of the world).

God's future kingdom, where healing and justice and love will reign supreme for eternity, was being brought into the present through the ministry of Jesus. In Jesus, humanity was experiencing the presence of God's future (George Ladd).

The kingdom of God, God's rule and reign, was being established in hearts and lives as Jesus not only proclaimed the good news of God's plan to crush the works of Satan (1 Jn. 3:8), but he also demonstrated that good news by healing the sick, casting out demons, offering radical forgiveness, extending compassion, and delivering the oppressed. Every act of physical healing, every act of forgiveness, every action addressing poverty, is a foretaste of God's kingdom that will come one day. God's kingdom has broken into the world, is breaking into the world, and will break into the world one day.

In Jesus, humanity was experiencing the presence of God's future (George Ladd)

b. Two ways of talking about the Kingdom

As Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God that he was demonstrating, he seemed to speak about it in two different ways. The kingdom of God, for Jesus, seemed to be both now and not yet. In other words, the kingdom was something that was invading the earth through his ministry in the present. But then he would talk about the future kingdom, when all wrongs would be made right, and he would reign forever and ever.

In the Vineyard we call this “living between the times.” We as human beings live in the tension between the kingdom touching us now, and the kingdom that will be fully revealed at the end of time.

c. The Kingdom now

What does it mean for God’s kingdom to come “now”? Wherever Jesus taught, signs and wonders followed him. Children were raised from the dead. Lepers were cleansed of their diseases. The lame walked. The blind were given sight. Multitudes were miraculously fed with small amounts of food. Prostitutes were shown mercy and kindness. Arrogant religious leaders were rebuked for their lack of compassion. The poor were treated with dignity as fellow image bearers of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Women were afforded equal dignity as men. Compassion was shown to beggars, thieves, and drunkards.

The hand of God was touching the world through Jesus, and God was confirming Christ as his royal regent through signs, wonders, and miracles (Heb. 2:2b-4). He was a living, breathing revolution – and hearts were being changed everywhere.

d. Jesus starts a Kingdom Apprenticeship

But it didn’t stop there. Jesus then commissioned his disciples to do the same things that he was doing. They were going to proclaim, preach, and demonstrate God’s rule and reign. Working with their obedience, the Holy Spirit then extended the kingdom into people’s lives. Jesus never meant for the miracles to end with him! This rag-tag band of fishermen, tax collectors, and Jewish laymen were participating with Jesus in the revealing of the kingdom.

Every miracle, every act of justice and compassion, was pointing to the future day when God would completely set the world upside right again. The “presence of the future” was truly upon them – God’s kingdom had come near and the disciples were participating in his great restoration project. In the Vineyard we believe that God acts in healing, power, and deliverance today. We also believe that the kingdom apprenticeship Jesus began has never stopped – and is an invitation open to every Christ-follower.

4. Implications of The Kingdom

a. Rediscovering Jesus in history

By kingdom theology I refer to an approach to the primary message and mission of Jesus as enacted, inaugurated eschatology.

This, in turn, forms part of the rediscovery of Jesus in the last century and this century that places him in the context of Second Temple Judaism. It can truly be said that since the

discovery and translation of the literature of that period, Jesus research has been able to place Jesus in his historical context in a manner that was not possible in previous centuries. This rediscovery of Jesus is of major significance, since the way we see Jesus affects everything: the way we see God, salvation, mission, the Christian life, and the church.

b. Kingdom expectations and eschatology

The world into which Jesus came preaching the kingdom had expectations that had grown through the centuries. These expectations were based on the coming of the kingdom in the Exodus event, the conquest of the Promised Land and the Davidic Monarchy. They were further shaped by the loss of the kingdom in the exile and the prophetic promises of Isaiah and Daniel in particular.

A day would come when God would again intervene for Israel, in a final, overwhelming moment, which would terminate history as we know it and begin life at a totally new level in the Messianic age, or the age to come. The Day of Judgment would be the event that would terminate this age (the end) and usher in the coming age. From the prophetic language regarding this 'end,' we derive the word 'eschatology' (the Greek *eschatos* means 'last'). The prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord, the last days, or that day.

Jesus came announcing that such a day had dawned with his arrival. Yet the way he announced and taught about the kingdom had a sense of mystery. He spoke of it as being near, present, delayed, and future. The only way we can bring all of this together is to understand that something mysterious, unexpected (especially to the prophets of Israel) and miraculous occurred in Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

c. The breakthrough of The Kingdom

The power of the future age broke through, from the future, into the present, setting up an altogether new dimension. Before this age has finally ended, the future age has already begun. The result is an 'already' and 'not yet' dimension, where the coming of the kingdom in Jesus and Pentecost is 'already,' but in the final sense, the coming of the kingdom is 'not yet.'

The mysterious breakthrough of the kingdom was particularly manifest in the ministry of Jesus, as he announced it, taught about it and demonstrated it, in the cross, resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of Pentecost. All these are demonstrations of the future breaking into the present. Between the coming of the kingdom in Jesus ('already') and the final coming of the kingdom in Jesus ('not yet' – at his Second Coming) is the time we now live in as Christians and the church in the world. Around us is a world that lives in one dimension, in this present age, while we experience Jesus and the life in the Spirit in a new dimension, the life of the coming age, or eternal life lived now.

**...the kingdom was particularly manifest in
the ministry of Jesus. -Derek Morpheu**

From this definition of the nature of the kingdom, we have developed a set of initial implications:

1. The end has come in Jesus; therefore, Jesus is God.

2. The last days begin with Jesus and Pentecost, and continue until the very end, so the whole period, from the first to the Second Coming, is the last days.
3. Every revival is a fresh in-breaking of the kingdom.
4. Every part or aspect of the kingdom is available every time it breaks through.
5. The veil torn when Jesus died shows that the separation of the present age and age to come has been torn, or opened up.
6. Therefore, the powers and presence of the future age are continually available. We live in a dimension where it is always near, present, delayed and future.
7. Church history bears witness to the increasing in-breaking of the kingdom as we approach the end of the end.
8. This is the framework for understanding world missions.
9. This is the framework for understanding the Christian life, in the 'already' and 'not yet,' making us 'already ... not yet' people.
10. This is the framework for understanding healing, why it occurs, yet does not always occur.
11. This is the framework for understanding the church in the world.

5. The now and the not yet of The Kingdom

a. The Kingdom not yet

While the kingdom of God was breaking into the world through Jesus, all human suffering, pain, and difficulty did not disappear. In fact, it still remains with us to this day. For Jesus, while the kingdom of God was happening in the present, it was also yet to come in all its fullness in the future.

Through Jesus, God had inaugurated the kingdom on earth, but he would consummate it one day in the future. In practical terms, this means that when we pray for the sick (a hallmark of the Vineyard from the beginning), some will be healed and others will not. Yet, with faith, we pray confidently for healing and entrust the results to God.

b. The dynamic tension we live In

In the Vineyard, we embrace this dynamic tension. While we believe that God's kingdom can invade any moment of our lives, not everyone will experience God's love the way we want for them. We rejoice when one person experiences a miracle of healing, while we grieve as another person succumbs to the effects of cancer or poverty.

Some Christians respond to this tension between the now and the not yet of the kingdom by saying that God does not do miracles today. They contend that the gifts given by the Spirit of God were just for Jesus' time and are not available to us now.

Some Christians respond to this tension by largely ignoring the reality that suffering continues in the world. These groups triumphantly declare that the kingdom should always be experienced demonstrably in the here and now – or something is wrong. If we don't experience a moment of physical healing or personal transformation, it is probably our fault.

For them, unanswered prayer reveals a lack of faith in us – and we had better work up more if we want to see God do what he has promised to do.

c. How we carry this tension in The Vineyard

In the Vineyard, we choose to respectfully step away from both of these extremes. John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard, was well known for encouraging us, “Love the whole church.” But we have certain values and practices as part of our common heritage, and they are what cause us to love being in this kingdom-centred movement together.

We believe that a necessary tension will always exist between the now and the not yet of the kingdom. We pray for the sick, and we have seen many healed. We do the work of compassion, and we have seen the poor restored to hope. But we do not always see the results we want to see this side of heaven. Yet we believe that every faith-filled act of prayer puts a deposit of love in to the person who is suffering. And we have testimonies from every corner of the earth that, at times, the kingdom of God does break through with power to heal those who are sick.

We believe that a necessary tension will always exist between the now & the not yet of the ...

As we live in this interim time, the kingdom of God to come is our future hope. It is a day when the Scriptures tell us that “all things will be made new” (Rev. 21:5) and every tear will be wiped away from the face of the broken-hearted (Rev. 21:4). It is the day Isaiah prophesied would come (Is. 35:1-10), and John describes in his vision in Revelation 21:1-5. There will be no more innocent girls enslaved in the sex trafficking industry. There will be no more cancer. There will be an end to poverty. God will one day right this world. Toward that day, we trust, we hope, and we pray in the way Jesus taught us to pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

6. Shalom

a. Our world as God would have it

What is the kingdom of God? How might we experience it? Recently, in a conversation with a friend, he offered an interesting definition of the kingdom of God, describing it as ‘our world as God would have it.’ Our personal ministry focus within the Vineyard is primarily international, and it is evident to us that the world is often not as God would have it. Far too often it is scarred by poverty, brokenness, and violence. The following story provides a glimpse into God’s kingdom work in our world.

Myriad storefronts and ramshackle dwellings, crowded with a cacophony of humanity, surrounded us as we wove our way through the rutted streets of Cebu City, Philippines, in route to the ‘mission house.’ We entered the concrete space, the ubiquitous ‘white vinyl, stacking chairs’ lining the room in preparation for the morning service. Filipinos, expats, missionaries, and visitors slowly congregated in friendly camaraderie, and soon began to sing in both English and Cebuano. We, both visitors and locals alike, were united in our shared experience of God’s dynamic presence invading our gathering as we worshipped the Prince of Peace.

After lunch we visited a barangay named Lorega. This slum, only steps from the mission house, had long been distinguished by poverty and violence with, until recently, many of its residents building their homes in the graveyard. After a devastating fire three months earlier, its denizens were now rebuilding, although still living in crowded plywood shacks without running water, electricity, sanitation facilities, or gainful employment. But what was truly surprising was to see so many familiar faces from church among its residents! Within the church community economic and social disparities weren't in evidence. The wealthy and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' became one as we worshipped together – a paradigm of 'our world as God would have it!'

b. The Shalom of The Kingdom

Walter Brueggemann's exposition on the Old Testament concept of shalom (peace) connects it with the New Testament teaching on the kingdom of God expressed by Jesus in both his words and actions.

Jesus' ministry to the excluded (see Luke 4:16-21) was the same, the establishment of community between those who were excluded and those who had excluded them. His acts of healing the sick, forgiving the guilty, raising the dead, and feeding the hungry are all actions of re-establishing God's will for shalom in a world gone chaotic by callous self-seeking.

Shalom...is the task and burden of the well off & the powerful. They are the ones held...

Shalom is about wholeness, prosperity, well-being, harmony, and goodness in the face of adversity. It is about when our world is as God would have it, everything is complete, all is as it should be, and nothing is missing. Our responsibility is to lean into shalom – the kingdom in our own lives – and to align ourselves with God's work in the world. As Brueggemann argues: 'Shalom in a special way is the task and burden of the well-off and the powerful. They are the ones held accountable for shalom' (Brueggemann, *Living Toward A Vision: Biblical Reflections On Shalom*, p. 19).

7. How do we become Kingdom people?

a. The words & works of The Kingdom

John Wimber had this to say about Jesus' kingdom activity:

"... 'Kingdom' is translated from the New Testament Greek word *basileia*, which implies an exercise of kingly rule or reign rather than simply establishing a geographic realm over which a king rules. ...The kingdom of God is the dynamic reign or rule of God. When Jesus said that the kingdom of God had come in him, he claimed for himself the position of a divine invader, coming to set everything straight: 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's works' (1 John 3:8)" (Wimber, *Kingdom Evangelism*, p. 12).

In other words, Jesus not only spoke words about the kingdom – he went around Israel doing the works of the kingdom. He was destroying the works of the evil one that bring physical and spiritual death to human beings. Jesus had a message of Good News (that is what the word "Gospel" means), but he also had a ministry to back it up. As he trained his disciples, they became apprentices to his work, "doing the stuff" of the kingdom of God.

b. Commissioned & empowered

In the Vineyard family of churches, we believe that Christians are commissioned and empowered by the Spirit of God to do the works of the kingdom. With Jesus, we are empowered by the Spirit to bring “the presence of God’s future” to our streets, neighbourhoods, towns, and cities – in the hospitals, homes, and hearts to which he sends us.

...we believe that Christians are commissioned and empowered by the Spirit of God to do the works...

Will you say “yes” to God – will you become a person who works with Jesus, in word and works, to demonstrate that the kingdom of God is truly near?

8. Both/And

a. Experiencing healing in The Kingdom

In her early thirties Eleanor had severe meningitis and was prayed for by some faithful Christian friends – and she was healed . . . instantly. The rule and the reign of the King, the reality of his kingdom, had burst upon us!

We immediately went back to the Bible, because my experience called for an explanation. And there we re-read the first recorded words Jesus spoke: ‘The time has come, the kingdom of God is near, Repent and believe the good news’ (Mark 1:15).

This is momentous. Jesus Himself announcing Himself. The King proclaiming the kingdom. Herein lies great drama. With the coming of Jesus, the King has arrived, and thus the kingdom has come. But Jesus spoke of the kingdom come and the kingdom coming. The idea in Mark 1:15 is of the kingdom almost here, about to arrive any minute. This is exciting and tantalizing, but it is also mysterious and – to be honest – (sometimes) frustrating.

This is the now and the not yet – the already and the not quite. Only when we grasp this reality does the explanation make sense, the experience resonate.

b. When some are not healed

We had dinner only last night with people who were puzzling over why some people are healed and others are not. It was only as we began to talk about the Bible’s understanding of the kingdom, which we first heard articulated by John Wimber at his most ground-breaking, that any possible answers seemed to satisfy.

Over the centuries as the Church has struggled to understand this idea of the now and the not yet, the pendulum has swung from one extreme to the other. Some Christians have said all healing is available now and all the time, and unhelpfully have gone onto suggest that if you don’t experience it, there’s something wrong with you. Other Christians, probably in reaction, have said ‘no, no, it’s not yet’ and have pushed it all off to the future. But in the Vineyard we are convinced it’s not either/or but both/and. The truth lies at both extremes. It’s both ‘now’ and ‘not yet.’

Both the 'now' & the 'not yet' are realities and the tension in which we will always live...

And this makes sense to us. It explains why some people are dramatically healed by the power of God and others get sick and die. It explains why for every Peter who was released from prison by an angel, there was a James who languished and died there.

c. Now and not yet

It explains Hebrews where we read of those heroes of the faith who conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fire of the flames, escaped the edge of the sword. And yet in the very same verse (Hebrews 11:35) . . . 'Others were tortured, other faced jeers and flogging, others were chained and put in prison...put to death.'

Only our theology of the kingdom of God can explain why some are carried from the field of battle shoulder-high, while others are dragged off...dead. Both the 'now' and the 'not yet' are realities and the tension in which we will always live this side of Heaven.

9. The reign and rule

a. God's Rule Breaking In

The kingdom of God is about all I think about now, but it wasn't always that way. When I used to read the phrase, 'the kingdom of God' in the Bible, I always thought of the idea of a realm, like Camelot in the legend of King Arthur. Later, a seminary professor showed our class that while the Greek word, *basilea* (kingdom) can mean realm (e.g., Mt 19.24), its primary usage in the first century was "reign" or "rule." The professor then went on to show that when Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, he was saying that God's rule, as King, had broken into the present age of evil to defeat the kingdom of Satan.

The kingdom announcement, therefore, signalled the renewing of creation. After the sacrifice of Jesus' death, his resurrection to new life, and his ascension to God's right hand, he poured out the Spirit upon the people of God. Through these events the end of the age had arrived. Like the climber who reaches the top of Mt. Everest and plants a flag for cause or country, in Christ, God was planting his flag and declaring, "THE UNIVERSE IS MINE!"

...declaration & signs were evidence that the future had broken into the present. -Bill Jackson

When Jesus told his disciples to do what he had been doing, to announce the kingdom, heal the sick and cast out demons, this declaration and accompanying signs were evidence that the future had broken into the present. In the words of another professor, Jesus came to bring his people back from exile to bring the world back to rights; salvation was not only for the whole person but also for creation itself.

b. In Christ, God rules as King

Yet the kingdom has only just begun. As in Jesus' day, we still see rampant evil all around us. The road to salvation is narrow and it often seems that Satan has the upper hand—but not so with those who have put their faith in the one who has defeated all demonic powers. While God's people must learn that suffering will be with us until the return of Christ, the kingdom of God advances through pain as well as power. Kingdom warriors remain undaunted by

defeat because in Christ, God rules as King. He is most glorified when the Church of Christ advances the kingdom in the midst of sorrow.

In a small group recently someone received a word from God that there was someone there that had weak legs. I have peripheral neuropathy in my feet and it has been slowly moving up my legs. It is a very painful and potentially crippling condition. I have probably received prayer for it over 400 times. Why do I keep getting prayer? Because the kingdom of God has broken in through Christ! God loves me and loves you. His sovereign rule could burst in any minute to break the power of Satan, sickness, and the unjust systems over us. In this mindset I got up and received prayer for the 401st time. The next morning, while I still felt nerve damage in my feet, I had feeling in my legs for the first time in two years. That's the already and not yet of the kingdom of God. Believe and never give up. Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is at hand.'

Let us 'Repent and believe the good news!'"