

# WHAT IS THE KINGDOM GOSPEL?

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When Jesus comes announcing the ‘good news’ of the kingdom, he declares the fulfillment of Isaiah’s vision: a messenger running over the hills to announce the ‘good news’ to Zion that “Your God reigns” (Isa. 52:7). *When Jesus proclaims the kingdom, he is announcing the rule of YHWH, the God of Israel.* Moreover, Jesus does not simply announce the arrival of the kingdom, as John did before him; he claims that his life, ministry, death, and resurrection inaugurate the reign of God upon the earth. There are three main ways he accomplishes this.

First, Jesus inaugurates the kingdom through revelation: he embodies and teaches his followers what life in the realm of God looks like. Immediately after Jesus goes throughout Galilee proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Mt. 4:23), he sits on a mountain and paints a picture of what the kingdom looks like in terms of Torah-obedience. In the realm of God, reconciliation and forgiveness reign instead of anger (5:21-26; 6:15); purity and faithfulness displace lust and divorce (5:27-32); keeping one’s promises triumphs over duplicity (5:33-37); love for one’s enemies replaces retaliation of evil for evil (5:38-47); and sharing wealth defeats the tendency to hoard one’s wealth (6:19-24). At other times, Jesus emphasizes that the kingdom of God looks like caring for the marginalized (Lk. 4:18; 7:22; 14:14) and like giving away one’s possessions (Lk. 12:33; 18:22). The kingdom looks like healing the sick (Mt. 4:23; Lk. 4:20; 10:9). In the kingdom, the greater serves the weaker and younger (Lk. 22:26-27), and people lay down their lives in service to their king (Lk. 9:23-24; 14:27), ultimately embodied by Jesus laying down his life at the cross. In short, the kingdom looks like reflecting and emulating the character of the King: a people living into the image of God (Mt. 5:3-11, 48). This is why when John and Jesus proclaim the coming of the kingdom they call for repentance (Mk. 1:4, 15; Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Lk. 3:3; 5:32). Humans, even the people of Israel who received God’s law, have manifestly *not* reflected God’s character, so they need to repent, to realign with his ways revealed through Jesus’ life and teaching.

Second, Jesus inaugurates the kingdom by defeating the powers of sin and death. Before his ministry begins, he is tested by the Devil and is victorious—not because he has overwhelmed the Devil by his own great power, but because he has remained faithful to YHWH. After these events, Jesus (and later his followers) go about ransacking the Devil’s ‘house’ by rebuking and exorcising demons. Jesus claims that defeat of the Devil serves as evidence that the “kingdom of God has come among you” (Lk. 11:20). Jesus gains final victory over the devil through his death (ironically the place where his kingship is emphasized most in the gospels) and resurrection. In-so-doing, Jesus accomplishes a new exodus for his people, not from the powers of Egypt, but from the powers of sin and death. He frees the people from sin so that they may come into the kingdom—to be a part of his mission of announcing and spreading the sphere of YHWH’s reign.

Third, Jesus inaugurates the kingdom by sending his Spirit. Jesus promises to send his Spirit in the Gospels (Lk. 11:13; 24:49; Mt. 3:11; Jn .16:4-15; 20:22). This Spirit, according to Jesus, empowers Jesus' followers to join in his mission of proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations (Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8)—it is the sign of the kingdom.

While Jesus inaugurates this kingdom and announces its presence, the Gospels still expect the kingdom to come in the future ('already, not yet'; cf. Lk. 17:20-21). There is more to be done. Having received revelation about what the kingdom looks like, been freed from sin and death, and empowered by the Spirit, those who follow Jesus may repent, believe, and join in Jesus' mission of expanding the sphere of God's reign to all peoples. This involves announcing the kingdom as Jesus did, calling for repentance (Lk. 24:47), baptizing in the name of Jesus, and teaching others how to live in the reign of Christ (Mt. 28:20)—all the while praying "Your kingdom come" (Lk. 11:2) and looking forward to its final fulfillment.