

The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet

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The sovereignty and rule of God has always existed and will always exist ([Psalm 47:7](#), [1 Chronicles 29:11](#), [Exodus 15:18](#), [Psalm 103:19](#)).

He is Almighty God, maker of the earth, sovereign over all, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He alone claims the title of the One and Only God and that there is none like Him in all the earth. The Psalmist declares the wonder and worthiness of this Eternal God, who is clothed in light, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, and who walks on the waves of the sea (Psalm 104:2, Job 9:8). All of creation bows in obeisance to His majesty, for all things owe their existence to Him (Psalm 104:30, Psalm 6:4, Psalm 96:11, Luke 19:40).

He is the God of promise, at whose Word the universe came into being and whose Word will never return to Him void, not accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent (Genesis 1:3, Isaiah 55:11). His loving devotion endures forever. He is faithful, true, just, and all glorious (Psalm 136:3, 1 Timothy 1:17).

His sovereignty is over and above all other kingdoms and His rule absolute (Isaiah 37:16, 1 Timothy 6:15). All the earth is His and everything that is therein (Psalm 24:1). This glorious and absolute rule and reign of the only wise and faithful King is what the New Testament terms the '*kingdom of God*'.

In The Beginning

This is the reality of the story in the beginning. Affirming God's sovereignty gives shape and purpose to the role for

which humanity was created, that is, to rule wisely and well on behalf of earth's Sovereign.

"Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." | Genesis 1:26, CSB

"Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD." | Numbers 14:21, ESV

Adam and Eve were given the authority and privilege of ruling over God's good creation, filling all the earth with His glory and accomplishing His purpose (Genesis 1:26). However, instead of partnering with God, they choose to undertake this rule on their own terms, enacting their own will instead of the will of the Eternal One.

As a result, they experienced disruption in their relationship with the King, and the consequence of their disobedience was catastrophic. The evil of sin entered God's good world, and would eventually spread like a dark, cancerous mass across the surface of the earth, setting in motion the destructive cycle the world has been subject to ever since.

Another kingdom was willed into existence, the kingdom of this world; earthly, transient, and dispensing death instead of life. It's ruled over by the spirit of corruption; where envy, murder, anger, and strife find footing and flourish. It's a dominion of darkness, from which there is no escape.

Every human is born into this kingdom, enslaved to the ruler of this world. We're born physically alive but spiritually dead. Without our spiritual connection to the King of all the earth, we're nothing more than 'dead men walking', living in darkness and far from the eternal life God intended for us.

Theocracy, Monarchy, Liberation + Redemption

For centuries, God's story of liberation and redemption – part of His 'Kingdom Mission' – has been enacted in the history of the world. He wants to save and rescue His creation from this dominion of darkness, in which labour is futile and the only outcome is death.

God is for us; He loves us and wants to reconcile and transform us so that we can live the life of purpose for which He created us.

“For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's children to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of him who subjected it – in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children.” Romans 8:19-21, Christian Standard Bible

This liberation and redemption was brought into sharp relief firstly by covenants made to [Abraham](#), through whom God promises to bless all the world ([Genesis 12:1-3](#), [Genesis 13:14-17](#), [Genesis 15:1-21](#), [Genesis 17:1-11](#)).

Abraham's twelve sons and their descendants, those who came to be known as the nation of Israel, were further witnesses to God's promises; the people through whom all the world would come to learn of the One and Only Sovereign over all. God ruled His people at this time through *theocracy*, a system of law and priesthood, and the intention was that the surrounding nations would look upon His chosen people, blessed and ruled over by God, and turn to worship Him also (Isaiah 41:20, 43:10).

The nation of Israel struggled with their unique and privileged identity. They would worship and serve God for a

season and then, when things were going well, they would become complacent and selfish, turning aside to worship gods made of wood and stone, like the nations around them. They abandoned their covenant with their King, over and over again, but He did not abandon them (Judges 17:6, Jeremiah 9:6).

Reestablishing His sovereignty over their lives, He reiterates His promises of liberation and freedom, through His just and righteous rulership, to the famous shepherd-boy-turned-king, [David of Bethlehem](#). He makes David king to rule over His people, and promises that, through him and his family, He intends for all nations to find blessing and peace. Ruling by way of *monarchy*, the nation of Israel was to be once again a blessing to all the world and witnesses of the Creator and King of all the earth (2 Samuel 7:8-12).

The tides of human history rose and fell. Israel's fortunes ebbed and flowed with these tides, experiencing periods of glorious peace and stability, as under King Solomon, David's son, but, also, periods of terrible wickedness and decline. In the final days of the monarchy, Israel demonstrated a complete deterioration in both faith and witness until, finally, they were enslaved and forcibly removed from their land under Babylonian conquest and occupation (Psalm 78:10-11, Jeremiah 32:30, 2 Kings 17:18-20).

The final book of the Old Testament, [Malachi](#), offers a glimpse into the hearts of those who had been specially chosen by God as His witnesses. Even with the perspective of their glorious history and events like the Great Exodus from Egypt, they had completely given in to apathy. They had neglected God's promises; and spiritual lethargy and a corrupt priesthood had spread unfaithfulness, cancer-like, throughout the nation (Malachi 1-4, Ezekiel 21:27).

God reigned still but His people had long since rejected Him. The glory of His presence departed from them and would not return again for over 400 years (Ezekiel 10:15-19).

I Am

It is into this vast length of silence that the King finally speaks, announcing His impending arrival into the story of not just Israel, but the entire world (John 1:19-23,28 cp Isaiah 40:3-10). His rule and sovereignty and indeed, His purpose – that all the earth be filled with His glory – was now to be fulfilled through *christocracy*; a system of rulership in the name of His Son, the Christ, the Messiah.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone....for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” | [Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV](#)

The message was clear. God was still King – He has always been King – and His reign, fractured early on in human history (Genesis 2), was going to be properly reinstated through His Son, Jesus. The Word of God had been sent out and it would not return to Him void. God’s kingdom, advancing for centuries, was now being planted right in the heart of hostile territory, ground that, in the past had not only been dangerous to the King’s messengers but, in many cases, fatal (Matthew 21:27).

[The Word became human, like us](#). Anyone who saw him saw all the radiance of God’s glory; the exact representation of His being and the imprint of His nature ([Hebrews 1:3](#), [John 14:10-11](#)). The glory of the King had returned to take up residence amongst His people.

Jesus, who was in the very nature of God, emptied himself and took the form of a servant, made in the likeness of humans that sin ([Philippians 2:6-7](#)). He was God-With-Us. who became the representative of us all and in his human body, the war against the ruler of this world would be waged and won.

In Jesus Christ, it would become possible for all families of the earth, of any nationality, to find liberation, redemption and experience the righteous rulership of the King of Kings.

[The gospel](#) was the announcement of good news that Jesus, God's only Son, is both Lord and King of the kingdom and that, in him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose. The work that God had been at for a long time now culminated in a tiny, obscure town in the middle of the demoralised and Roman-occupied nation of Israel.

*Earth in shadow, restlessly hold.
Labour's waiting, in silent hope.
For the promise, it longs to know, what heaven holds.
Then the angels, in holy haste.
Lift their anthem, your Saviour lays,
in a manger, in humble form.
Your King is born.*

Prince of Heaven | Hillsong Worship

Repent, For The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Hand

When Jesus arrived on the scene, he went and resided in the land of Naphtali, the 'way beyond the sea', so that the words spoken so long ago by Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: "*the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned*" (Matthew 4:15-16, ESV). The implications are clearly profound, with deeply spiritual overtones. The light and life of humanity had finally arrived and the hope of

liberation and redemption would be realised.

Then, he began preaching, saying *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent of your willfulness, your self-governing, your persistence in finding identity in false gods who cannot save and who do not, in reality, rule or even exist. Repent and turn to the One who rules heaven and earth, the maker and creator of all things, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”*

*“To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to statistical analysis. The term *basileia* (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven” occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. “After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” ([Acts 1:3](#)). | SBC Life*

Jesus demonstrated the power and reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, through the miraculous – evidence that he was Lord of all; healing sickness, forgiving sins, multiplying bread and fishes, walking on water...raising the dead (Matthew 15:30, Matthew 14:13-33, Luke 8:49-56).

He qualified what the Kingdom of Heaven looked like; a kingdom defined by mercy and love, failure and forgiveness, exile and homecoming. The citizens of this kingdom, he said, were otherworldly; children of light and salt, whose transformed lives of goodness and steadfast confidence would witness to the glory and power of this kingdom (Matthew 5:2-11, 13-14, Luke 15:11-32).

He stated plainly the way to this kingdom; by believing in him

and being born again of water and of spirit, further expanded on throughout his ministry as referring to the representative death in baptism and [regeneration of new life by the Spirit](#) (John 3:5, 16, John 8:24).

He taught that the kingdom was not in some far-off place, out of sight, but here, right now, in their midst (Luke 17:21).

“The kingdom, Jesus taught, is right here – present yet hidden, immanent yet transcendent. It is at hand – among us and beyond us, now but not yet. The kingdom of heaven, he said, belongs to the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, the merciful, and those who hunger and thirst for God. It advances not through power and might, but through missions of mercy, kindness, and humility. In this kingdom, many who are last will be first and many who are first will be last. The rich don’t usually get it, Jesus said, but children always do. This is a kingdom whose savior arrives not on a warhorse, but a donkey, not through triumph and conquest, but through death and resurrection. This kingdom is the only kingdom that will last.” | Rachel Held Evans, 1981-2019

Other places in scripture, particularly the writings of Paul the Apostle, affirm that the revelation of God’s original plan of creation, the redeeming, recreating, and re-ordering of all things, together with the reconciliation of creation to its Creator, all find their true and most meaningful significance in Jesus Christ [the King], the Word-Made-Flesh (Ephesians 1:3-10; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

The invisible God, the King of all the earth, was now revealing Himself visibly through His Word-Made-Flesh, in whose hands the world and all that is therein, has been placed and who is Lord of all (John 3:35; Acts 2:36, Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20).

The Church Of Christ Is Born

“When Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, he was preaching much more than personal salvation for the individual. He was preaching “a new day in an old story” – the story of God the King – and God as king in King Jesus. The one gospel is about Jesus the Lord, the King, the Messiah and the saviour. This is the story that alone makes sense of Jesus’ choice of the word ‘kingdom’ to explain the mission of God to the world.” (Scot McKnight)

When people give [allegiance to Jesus the King](#), they are transferred out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of light, the Kingdom of God that has always existed and will always exist (Colossians 1:13). To be born again is to be [regenerated](#); the termination of people of the old creation, people enslaved to the ruler of this world, and the germination of them in the new creation with the divine life (Ephesians 4:17-24).

All of the darkness, the failure, the chaos, and ruin of our life is surrendered to the King, who erases it in the water of baptism (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6). Light enters the darkness. New life is ignited in us and the new human is reborn.

“The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. It insists that we are saved for a purpose.” – SBC Life

These collective ‘citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven’ are the community of believers that the New Testament calls the church, whose guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ, the King. They are his witnesses, empowered

and commissioned by him to represent him and the sovereign reign and rule of God to all the world (Acts 8:12-16,36-38, Luke 24:47).

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” | Acts 1:8. NIV

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19, NIV

‘Kingdom’: King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land

1. A kingdom is a people governed by a **king**. In truth, there is only one kingdom that reigns over all, whose king is God. He has always been king, ruling firstly through *theocracy*, then by *monarchy* and now through *christocracy*. The kingdom of God has gone through many phases and a reasonable chunk of the Old Testament is dedicated to the telling of this story. You can read more about this in the article [‘Jesus, King Of The World](#).
2. The king must **rule** over the kingdom. In biblical language, this is always firstly redemptive, and then secondly through wise governing. As Scot McKnight, historian of early Christianity, theologian, and author comments, *“kingdom redemption’ is the work of God, through Jesus, and by virtue of his sin-solving cross and new-life creating resurrection, unleashed to those who are needy because of their sins. Any kind of “redemptive” activity that does not deal with sin, that does not find strength in the cross, that does not see the primary agent as Jesus, and that does not see it all as God’s new creation life unleashed is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and good and for*

the common good.”

3. There has to be **people** for there to be a kingdom. In the Old Testament (OT), this was the nation/kingdom of Israel. But Israel, like a tree, has deep roots and grafted-in branches, seen in the New Testament (NT) to be the church (Romans 11:1-28).
4. A kingdom must have a governing **law**. In OT times, this was achieved through the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses. When Jesus arrived, scripture takes care to tell us that he didn't destroy this law but fulfilled it completely. By his life, death and resurrection, a greater law came into being – the Law of Cruciformity; loving as Jesus loved. Jesus stated that the entire law of the new covenant, the law which governs people of the kingdom, is summarised in these words “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love others as much as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40).
5. A kingdom must have a **land**. In the past, this has been, at various phases, in literal places like the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel. But right now, ‘the land’ is wherever the church (the community of kingdom people) takes up physical space. Wherever kingdom people reside, God, in Jesus, rules. One day, this ‘tree of the kingdom’ will fill all the earth and God's rule and glory will be seen in all things – as He intended from the beginning (Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 6:10, Revelation 21: 1, 4, Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:3-32).

“[This] good news is as epic as it gets, with universal theological implications, and yet the Bible tells it from the perspective of fishermen and farmers, pregnant ladies and squirmy kids. This story about the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity smells like mud and manger hay and tastes like salt and wine...It is the biggest story and the smallest story all at once – the great quest for the One Ring and the quiet friendship of Frodo and Sam.” | Rachel Held

What About God's Promises To Israel?

Jesus was [born King](#), destined to inherit the ancient throne of David, his royal ancestor through his human descent. He will rule wisely and well, not just over Israel but over the whole world. Not only was he the descendant of King David and therefore the legitimate heir to the throne of Israel, he was also the Son of God and therefore the promised saviour and King of the world. The confluence of these two aspects is no coincidence and we can only be astonished at how God chose to bring all these things together to achieve His purpose.

God has in no way forgotten His promises to individuals or to groups of people and implicit in that are literal promises to the people of Israel, elements of which still await fulfillment ([Isaiah 52:7-9](#), [Luke 2:25](#), [Acts 26:6](#)).

“And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” [Isaiah 11:12, NASB](#)

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” – [Micah 5:2, NIV](#)

Jesus left his [fledgling church](#), those first disciples who represented the expansive and diverse family that God would build through him, with a promise: that He would one day return, to take them to himself, to restore and renew all the earth, to overthrow all the different manifestations of the kingdom of this world, and to fully establish the Kingdom of

God, filling the earth with His glory. Those who confess him as Lord, Saviour and Christ [King] will be saved, including those from the nation of Israel (John 14:3, Acts 1:10-11, Romans 10:9, Titus 2:13, Revelation 1:7, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 1:10, Revelation 5:13).

When he returns, *to bring salvation* to those who eagerly wait for him (Hebrews 9:28), Israel, the people who had been God's witnesses, and indeed all the peoples of the earth, will hear the final entreaty of the King of Kings: *"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

"By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.' "All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the LORD and will make their boast in Him." | Isaiah 45:22-25, NIV

One day, all the earth will be filled with the glory and sovereignty of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and God will once again dwell with His people. *"The kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).

What God began in the [resurrection of Jesus](#) is what He intends to do for all of creation; to regenerate, to restore, and to fully dwell with His creation in all His glorious sovereignty.

"One day the veil will be lifted; earth and heaven will be one; Jesus will be personally present, and every knee will bow at his name; creation will be renewed; the dead will be raised; and God's new world will at last be in place, full of new prospects and possibilities." | N T Wright

“In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever.” | Daniel 2:44, Christian Standard Bible

The kingdom is described in the Bible in several ways, such as ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (the gospel of Matthew), ‘the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 1:11), ‘the kingdom of Christ and God’ (Ephesians 5:5) and ‘the kingdom of God’ (the gospels of Mark and Luke). You can read more about its people in the article ‘[The People Of The Kingdom](#)’. You may also enjoy [this podcast](#), produced by The Bible Project: Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

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Beyond The Pale

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“By the 14th century, the Norman invasion of Ireland was struggling. Too many Normans had “gone native”, assimilated into Irish life. The remaining settlers had retreated to just four eastern counties: Louth, Meath, Dublin, and Kildare. These four “obedient shires” were the only part of Ireland still under the control of the English crown. The king’s perimeter was marked with wooden fence posts pounded into the Irish turf. These were called “pales,” from the Latin palus, meaning “stake.”

Over the following centuries, the English settlement

fortified its boundaries by turning the fenceline into an impressive barrier: a ten-foot-deep ditch surrounded by eight-foot banks on each side and ringed by a thorny hedge. These ramparts were never meant to be an impregnable wall, but they did provide a daunting obstacle to raiders stealing across the borders for English cattle. Within the Pale ditch, settlers lived under the protection of the crown. But once you passed "the Pale," you were outside the authority and safety of English law, and subject to all the savageries of [rural Ireland](#). "Beyond the pale" then became a colloquial phrase meaning "outside the limits of acceptable behaviour or judgment." | [C N Traveler](#)

I [recently wrote about my separation from](#) the religious community I grew up in and the overwhelming response to my article was both encouraging and thought-provoking.

Many people wrote to me, both publicly and privately, to let me know that the article had deeply resonated with them. They expressed that they, too, have had many questions over the years, wrestling with inconsistencies while attempting to find their place in a system they secretly suspected they didn't fit.

Not many people feel free to speak publicly of their reservations or doubts and I understand this fear and hesitancy. They want to avoid similar censure and they know the penalty for dissenting is potentially severe; loss of relationship, rejection, and ostracisation.

Many also wrote expressing their distress at my experience (regardless of whether it had been theirs or not) and offering their blessing on my continued journey. I deeply appreciated their warmth, kindness, and understanding.

Others expressed dismay that I was no longer part of the community; how would I receive *nurture and support*? With whom would I now *fellowship*? Couldn't I have just stayed to *change*

the culture? Beneath their words there seemed the suggestion of a more serious question; wasn't this just the beginning of a descent into loss of faith and the inevitable and eventual drift from God?

Others were less complimentary with their feedback. My article was deemed to be slanderous and inaccurate, and I, the author, simply a narcissistic, bitter ex-member, obsessed, while I was "in", about my 'rights' being impinged upon or 'the (annoying) call of true discipleship interfering with my personal life'.

Now that I was "out", I was simply an aggressive and confrontational vandal, looking to break something with whatever stones I could throw.

My 'questions' were excuses, and, they implied, I ought to be cancelled.

While I thought a lot about the people for whom this article resonated, and I deeply appreciated that they had shared their thoughts with me, I thought more about the other two kinds of responses.

Firstly, I wondered about those who had simply dismissed me and what I had to say. I pondered the mentality that refused to acknowledge any part of my experience as valid, believable, or worthy of discussion.

I wondered at the psychology that would paint me as the intolerant troublemaker rather than the wounded truth-teller.

And I wondered at such blind certainty of their supposed privileged position and their categorical dismissal that God could legitimately be found anywhere outside their own walls. Their confirmation bias was on full display by the way in which they chose to interpret and respond to my narrative.

I thought, secondly, about those who now considered me beyond the pale, out beyond the protection and comfort of the only

community that was able to provide such things. Blessings and opportunities galore had been mine for the taking, had I only just remained within the palisade walls. No such blessings or opportunities (or if there were some to be found, they would be few and far between), awaited me outside those walls.

No one survives out there, they seemed to be whispering to one another. She'll die, for sure.

Well, I didn't die.

It hasn't been an easy journey, I'll not pretend otherwise, but outside those walls is not the wilderness you might imagine it to be. I'd been told that there was nothing worthwhile out there, but I discovered those are simply the words of fearful men, hemmed in by their own definitions and not living free in the Spirit of Christ.

God is out there. He is everywhere, and the more you listen for Him, the clearer He speaks. He is with us always, even when it feels like we're wandering through a wilderness, even if we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Beyond the pale, I found men and women, fellow Christians, who deeply love Jesus and are committed to following him. I found people who are not afraid of difference but are compelled by the love of Christ to listen, to reason together, and sharpen iron one with another. To my astonishment, I discovered that *they knew the names of the faithful; Abraham, David, Deborah, Isaiah, Mary of Magdala, Paul, and many more.*

I discovered my place in the history of the church and learned the names of people from long, long ago – *Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Polycarp, Junia, Prisca, and Quintilla*, brothers and sisters in the great family of God.

I became reacquainted with Scripture in new ways, seeing the Bible as a book to marvel at and pore over, the spirit-breathed and living words of Heaven's Creator, active and able

to deeply transform our hearts and lives, shaping us for His purpose. I learned to loosen my grip on needing *to know and understand everything* right now, and learned instead to say, "God, show me more of *You*."

My way of thinking about the Christian life shifted dramatically. It became very simple (note that I use the word *simple*, not *easy*): *Confess Jesus is Lord and Saviour (believe the story of Jesus as told us in the gospel) and then take up your cross and follow him, bearing the fruit of a life of repentance.* All else is just noise.

I discovered the messy but vital reality of the local church; filled with sinning and flawed humans who are being renewed daily by the grace of God, asking their questions and voicing their doubts along the way.

I learned what it felt like to be pastored to and personally prayed over, concepts that, bizarrely for a Christian, felt foreign and strange to me.

I discovered some churches that weren't for me and found others that were. The Christian world is nothing if not perfectly imperfect and there's a lot of diversity out there. It's not for me to judge the legitimacy of their place as one of the Lord's lampstands (Revelation 2:5), but it is my responsibility to use discernment when choosing a church home (1 John 4:1-5).

I found myself asking: what am I responsible to *bring* and what am I responsible to *nurture*? *In this sea of Christianity, how do I best serve and represent Jesus in the place where I now find myself?*

Let me now answer some of the questions that have been put to me. It may be that these are questions on your mind too.

Who Do I Fellowship With?

Well, other Christians of course. A Christian is someone who has “*confessed that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead.*” (Romans 10:9). They’ve demonstrated their belief by repenting of their former way of life and by being baptised into the saving name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). They’ve been transferred out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love, [a kingdom of life and light](#).

The first letter of John puts it this way:

“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. If we say, “We have fellowship with Him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. **If we [walk in the light](#) as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**” | 1 John 1:1-7, CSB*

If we abide in Jesus, then we are in common union – community – with all those who are also abiding in him, both in our present time and throughout the ages, a great cloud of faithful witnesses of the risen King, [the people of the kingdom](#) (1 John 2:28, John 15:1-27, Hebrews 12:1-2). We are

connected to one another by the precious blood of the lamb and nothing can separate us from the love of God, apart from us choosing to leave the light and walk again in darkness (Romans 8:31-39).

The [ordination of communion](#) – taking bread and wine together – is an important part of our Christian life, as members of Jesus' body and God's family. It is a key element of Jesus' covenant with each one of us individually and collectively as his church, the price of which was his own blood.

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, [the Apostles' Creed](#) summarises the foundational Christian beliefs taught by the early church and is a bold declaration of Christian faith in Jesus Christ. It particularly affirms the teachings regarding Jesus, that of his virgin birth, his crucifixion, his death, and his subsequent resurrection; core elements of the gospel of good news.

It is a primary statement of faith shared by Christians around the world, uniting them in common with the work achieved in and through Jesus. No Christian worth their salt denies this creed.

The church, the universal church, exists outside denominational walls and extends beyond historical boundaries. There is only *one body* of Jesus Christ, and holding to this spiritual reality means holding to the reality that *fellowship with the body happens when we abide in the body*.

Why Couldn't I Stay And Change The Culture?

Cultures don't happen overnight. Made up of an interconnecting set of goals, roles, processes, values, practices, attitudes, and assumptions, the culture of an organisation is practically its DNA.

Changing a culture takes committed leadership, and often requires years of concerted and consistent effort, including intensive work to communicate and reinforce new ways of thinking, desired values, and changed behaviours. In fact, in the case of organisational transformation (such as church), it can take a minimum of seven to 10 years to change the culture.

But we humans are very resistant to change in general and attempting to change the culture of an organisation is particularly difficult as it's deeply embedded in the system. When people believe that their culture is superior to other cultures, they tend to resist any influence other cultures may bring (you can read more about this [here](#)).

I came to realise that I didn't have 15 years, or 10 years or even seven years up my sleeve. My children had reached their formative and impressionable years and there were many aspects of this culture that I didn't want them to absorb or be absorbed into. I also realised that while I had been hopeful of the possibility of a shift in culture, I had not fully understood how deeply embedded it was in the heart of a system so strongly resistant to change.

This was a culture that has existed for years and years, unchanged and unchallenged. It did not want to change and it saw no need for change. I began to understand it would take many years of sustained and concentrated effort by many more persons than myself, to see any kind of tangible difference.

I felt I had more hope of reaching the moon than I did of changing this culture by staying.

Have I Lost My Faith?

I said that this journey hasn't been easy. And it hasn't.

When a person experiences loss of community, they also have to contend with what can feel like loss of identity. While we would all agree in theory that our identity rests, or should

rest, in Jesus, in practice we are also deeply shaped by our place within community, in knowing and being known by the people who surround us.

Beyond the pale is initially daunting and lonely. Everyone you ever knew is on the other side of that fence.

I was [reminded during this time](#) of the story of Hagar, who had been driven into the wilderness by the harsh treatment of her mistress Sarah (Genesis 16:6-13).

Miserable, lonely, and afraid, the Lord found Hagar beside a spring in the wilderness and spoke words of comfort and hope to her. She names God in that place as 'El Roi', meaning, "You are the God who sees me."

I have repeated this to myself many times in the past few years when doubt and discomfort has crept in. Not doubt *in* God, but doubt that He still had His hand over my life, that He was the God who looks after me, that I was still seen and known.

Having faith is firstly a posture of the heart, an orientation of trust in or towards something or someone. My faith was placed in Jesus at 16 years old and my trust in God remains firm. I remain confident that the Spirit will lead me in all truth and that the important things God wishes me to know, He will make known.

I trust Him, even when I am confused about His plans for me, even when I don't understand the lessons He's teaching me, even when I can't see what the future holds.

I trust Him even when I'm wracked with anxiety and overwhelmed by uncertainty. I trust Him even when life is challenging and change is necessary. I trust Him because I believe that the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead *lives in me*. If God is for me, who can be against me?

This journey has challenged me in ways I never imagined and I've wondered many, many times, *how did I get here?* But I know, for sure, He is still the God who sees me and takes care of me.

I have not lost my faith.

Where Would I Find Nurture And Support?

The wilderness is an unforgiving landscape, where all reliance on self is brutally highlighted for what it is, inadequate, insufficient, a lie. To my dismay, I initially found myself echoing the murmurs of the children of Israel in the wilderness. I wondered, had God brought me out here to die?

This was the first lesson I had to learn: Jesus never promised this Christian life would be easy.

The second was this: God always provides.

It was not the wilderness I imagined it to be. God sent people into my life during this time: good, loving, solid, Jesus-loving people, who prayed with me, ate with me, opened their homes and shared their lives with me.

They personally testified to God's goodness in both good times and bad. They encouraged me to persevere in faith, nurture forgiveness, run after grace, and ground myself in God's love. *"Love bears all things"*, they reminded me, *"believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*

Like the children of Israel who had wandered in the wilderness, God had ensured I was still provided for.

***"There's honey in the rock
Water in the stone
Manna on the ground
No matter where I go
I don't need to worry now that I know***

Everything I need You've got"

Honey In The Rock | Brooke Ligertwood

Where To From Here?

I am a Christian for the rest of my days. *I believe in Jesus Christ, descended from David, risen from the dead. This is my gospel.*

But as to the next step? *I don't know* what God has in store for my future.

I hope to be a part of a flourishing and vibrant church. I hope to serve and witness alongside people whom I get to love and know deeply, and by whom I feel seen and loved in return.

I hope to be a worthy example of faith for my children and a trusted companion and woman of valour to my husband.

I hope that God uses me in many small, indiscernible ways to help grow His kingdom here on earth. If He has larger, more visible plans in mind, I hope I have the courage to step into His calling for me.

I hope to avoid pain and difficulty and loss, but I know these will inevitably come my way, so I hope to be brave and true when they do.

And in all these things, I recognise that I will be flawed, always flawed, but I continue to give thanks for the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, which cleanses us from all sin.

Most of all, I hope to hear the words of the king on that final day: *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Lord."*

People Of The Kingdom

[Deciding to become a Christian](#) has its origins in believing the things about Jesus, certainly, in an intellectual sense; who he is and what he came for – but there's more to it than that. We are also choosing to surrender to his guidance and leadership in our life as a willing subject of God's designated king.

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he becomes the first claimant on our affections, the motivating force in our decisions and the final judge of our soul (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22. 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).

Becoming a Christian is, therefore, primarily a matter of the heart; a reorienting of our life and decisions in line with our allegiance to the king.

The People Of The Kingdom

An intrinsic part of our identity as Christians is to recognise that we have given our allegiance to the king and that we have been transferred into his kingdom (Colossians 1:13). This kingdom's advancement, day by day in the lives of those who surrender to King Jesus, is demonstrated in a kingdom community that we call 'the church'. **The church is the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom of God.** Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that *"are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity"* (Ecclesiastes 3:11) (Matter Of The Heart)

Yet, for many Christians, the 'kingdom of God' is something that takes place solely in the future. Jesus' words "*the kingdom is near*" (Luke 17:20-21) are understood to mean, in reality, "the kingdom is coming at some later time, that time being hundreds or even thousands of years away". The idea of 'the kingdom' is as a future hope for faithful Christians, only realised at the return of Jesus, and not as a present reality. Entrance to this 'kingdom' (in the future) is by believing in Jesus now, receiving the forgiveness of sins in baptism, and then living a morally faithful life; and this is commonly described and preached as 'the gospel of good news' (in its entirety). In other words, "*I am a sinner. I need saving. I believe Jesus came to save me. In Jesus, I am forgiven (I hope! – one can never be too sure) and I hope to be in 'the kingdom', at some point in the future (again, all going well).*"

Yet the kingdom of God – the sovereignty and rule of God – has always existed and will always exist (Psalm 47:7, 1 Chronicles 29:11, Exodus 15:18, Psalm 103:19). 'The kingdom' existed in the past, it exists now and it will exist in the future. Our hope, as Christians, is not just some distant, far-off expectation but a reality that exists right now as we choose to yield to Jesus' rule and live 'kingdom lives' under his dominion. Believing in Jesus and being baptised doesn't just grant us forgiveness of sins; through God's grace, we also receive an entirely new identity; our small, individual stories becoming part of the much bigger story that is being told. We become kingdom people right now! (Matthew 13:38, Philippians 3:20-21, Ephesians 2:19).

Five Things That Make A Kingdom

Kingdom = King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land. Here are some thoughts about the idea of 'kingdom' in the Bible:

1. A **kingdom** is a people governed by a KING. The king is God; He has always been king, ruling firstly through *theocracy*,

then by *monarchy* and now through *christocracy*. The kingdom of God, therefore, has gone through many phases, one of which was the phase exhibited during the time of Israel's monarchy. A reasonable chunk of the Old Testament is dedicated to the telling of this story. You can [read more about this in the article 'Jesus, King Of The World'](#).

2. The king must RULE over the **kingdom**. In biblical language, this is always firstly redemptive, and then secondly by governing.

3. There has to be PEOPLE for there to be a **kingdom**. In the Old Testament (OT), this was the nation/**kingdom of Israel**. But Israel, like a tree, has deep roots and grafted-in branches, seen in the New Testament (NT) to be the church (which does not replace Israel but expands it) (Romans 11:1-28).

4. A **kingdom** must have a governing LAW. In OT times, this was achieved through the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses. When Jesus (God's perfect king) arrived, he didn't destroy this law but fulfilled it completely, and by his life, death and resurrection, a greater law came into being – the Law of Cruciformity; loving as Jesus loved. Jesus stated that the entire law of the new covenant, the law which governs people of the kingdom, is summarised in these words "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love others as much as you love yourself." (Matthew 22:37-40, CEB)

5. A **kingdom** must have a LAND. Land is big in the OT and moving into the NT, we see the 'tree of the kingdom' expanding to (eventually) encompass the whole world (Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:3-32). In the past, this has been, at various phases, in literal places like the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel. But right now, 'the land' is wherever 'the church' (the community of kingdom people) takes up physical space. Wherever kingdom people reside, God, in Jesus, rules. One day, this kingdom will fill all the earth and God's rule and glory will be seen in all things – as He intended from the beginning (Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 6:10, Revelation 21: 1, 4)

This reality – that church people are kingdom people – is one of the most **exciting and empowering aspects of a Christian's existence in this life** – we are living for the king! So why don't we talk much about kingdom living or being kingdom people? And why don't we speak more often of the church as the kingdom community?

Soteriology: "Small-Story" Gospel

Well, here's what I think the reason might be. For many Christians, the gospel of "the good news of the kingdom of God" (which, incidentally, is what Jesus came preaching!) has unfortunately been reduced to simply a system of personal salvation and sin management. It has become a **gospel of soteriology alone**; a doctrine of salvation which has somehow become disconnected from the larger big-story **gospel of ecclesiology; theology about the nature and structure of the church.**

The truth is; when we are saved by Jesus, God also brings us into family and puts us in community! The gospel is not just about our own personal salvation but includes larger theological implications of ecclesiology – that Christian people, gathered together, are church people, who are kingdom people!

"The movement that has long called itself "Evangelical" is in fact better labelled "Soterian." That is, we have thought we were talking about "the gospel" when in fact we were concentrating on "salvation." | Scot McKnight

If we have a small-story gospel understanding, our trajectory as a Christian may go something like this: we (individually) repent, we (individually) are then baptised...and then life gets kind of weird for a lot of Christians. We're saved – but what now?

At this point, Christians can become obsessed with getting

other unbelievers 'over the line' (saved!) but still aren't really sure what to do with them after that. Our Christian lives seem mostly about sin management (ourselves or for others) and we can tend to also be a little self-absorbed in this. All we know of 'gospel' is that we're sinners who need saving. Others are sinners who need saving. 'Christian living' (gospel living) is only about being, firstly, saved from sin and then executing a moral life thereafter.

Christianity can take a sudden and exhausting turn into the territory of works-based living, eventually leading to [church burnout](#) and, for many Christians, [the question of whether church-going is even relevant anymore](#).

Don't get me wrong. **Sin is absolutely a problem for us, as is mortality.** It is the thing that separates us from a whole relationship with God and absolutely needs addressing in our individual lives as well as in the collective human experience (Isaiah 59:2, Isaiah 53:6, Acts 3:19, Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 5: 12-21, Hebrews 7:25).

But the problem with thinking the gospel is only about personal salvation or forgiveness of sins is that we fail to recognise we are being invited into something much bigger than just a solution for our own individual stories. When we receive the good news of the gospel, our little stories are actually becoming intertwined and woven into God's larger kingdom story. We are supposed to begin experiencing life, personally and collectively, as people of the kingdom, connected to something that extends far into eternity. The fascinating reality of the gospel is that *"we are invited into a story that is bigger than our culture, bigger even than our own imaginations, and yet we get to experience it and tell that story to others with the particularity of our own moment and place in time"* (Rachel Held Evans).

"The good news is as epic as it gets, with universal theological implications, and yet the Bible tells it from the

perspective of fishermen and farmers, pregnant ladies and squirmy kids. This story about the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity smells like mud and manger hay and tastes like salt and wine...It is the biggest story and the smallest story all at once – the great quest for the One Ring and the quiet friendship of Frodo and Sam.” | Rachel Held Evans

When we become a Christian, we become a kingdom person, living in a fellowship with other kingdom people. Church isn't just something we go to, it's the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom. Church isn't just an event we attend, it's a fellowship we belong to. It's the Fellowship of the King! (1 John 1:3, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9)

A New Day In An Old Story

While our individual salvation is absolutely bound up in what we have come to describe as the gospel, the good news that was preached in the first century had its roots in a much older, much larger story, that of the long-promised king and saviour of the world. The power of Jesus' sacrifice and the wonder of [his resurrection](#) form the foundation of a Christian's faith and hope but it is the fact that Jesus is **the Christ** (“the anointed one”), that is at the heart of the gospel (2 Timothy 2:8). Our forgiveness and redemption sits inside this much larger gospel message – that of the rule and dominion of the king. Recognising the gospel as “the good news of the kingdom of God” (which, in the gospel of Matthew is also called the kingdom of heaven) helps correct our gospel theology and realign it to the larger story that's being told. **You are part of a much bigger story than your personal salvation alone!**

Author Scot McKnight argues that Western Christians conceive 'the kingdom' too individualistically.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God's kingdom is defined

in terms of God's people. This reality means that one may not put the kingdom and the church in antithesis. On the contrary, "you can't be kingdom people without being church people". McKnight, in fact, claims that "there is no kingdom now outside the church" and that "there is no kingdom mission that is not church mission" (The King Jesus Gospel pages 79, 87, 96). Kingdom living consists, then, of the church being the church – "liv[ing]" together "as a fellowship under King Jesus" (p.99). | Scot McKnight

"When Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God, he was preaching much more than personal salvation for the individual. He was preaching "a new day in an old story – the story of God the King – and God as king in King Jesus. The one gospel is about Jesus the lord, the king the messiah and the saviour. This is the story that alone makes sense of Jesus' choice of the word kingdom to explain the mission of God to the world." (Scot McKnight)

"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." | Matthew 11:11, NASB

"From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" | Matthew 4:17, NIV

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, Repent and believe in the good news! | Mark 1:15, NIV

"Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For

behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” | Luke 17:20-21, NASB

The Significance Of “The Kingdom”

“To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to a statistical analysis. The term *basileia* (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven” occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. “After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. **It insists that we are saved for a purpose.**” – SBC Life

‘Kingdom redemption’ is the work of God, through Jesus, and by virtue of his sin-solving cross and new-life creating resurrection, unleashed to those who are needy because of their sins. Any kind of “redemptive” activity that does not deal with sin, that does not find strength in the cross, that does not see the primary agent as Jesus, and that does not see it all as God’s new creation life unleashed is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and good and for the common good. | Scot McKnight

The kingdom of God is more than social justice or personal salvation. ‘The kingdom’ is the promise of God from the beginning to fill the earth with Himself and to rule justly in the hearts and lives of all humanity. It includes the promise

of total reconciliation with humanity; only made possible in Jesus (Ephesians 1:11-12, 1 Timothy 1:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 4:11, Romans 11:36, Revelation 1:16).

And if we want to know how Jesus understands the collective Christian life – ‘church life’ – the place to begin is with what he called the kingdom of God. When we think of the church – the one body of Christ, the community of believers, we need to understand how this connects in tangible, relatable ways to the ‘kingdom of God’ and how we see this illustrated in the people of the kingdom today. A true and full telling of the gospel must include the reality of the church, not as individuals gathered together in a building but as a kingdom of people – priests, rulers and images bearers on behalf of the King – King Jesus.

“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” | Colossians 1:13, ESV

Author’s Note: This article should in no way be taken to imply that ‘the kingdom of God’ is merely spiritual. Jesus’ context was, clearly, the nation of Israel and historical implications are at work for these people who had been chosen to be God’s witnesses. The idea of ‘the kingdom of God’ was certainly consistent with the Jewish hope of a saviour and the arrival of the one who would be the ‘consolation of Israel’. The prophet Isaiah speaks poetically about the one who would bring peace, justice and righteousness again to Israel. This national hero would be from David’s royal line and Isaiah predicted that his kingdom would have no end.

Jesus was born to be king, destined to inherit the ancient throne of David, his royal ancestor, and to rule wisely and well, not just over Israel but over the whole world. Not only was he the descendant of David and therefore the legitimate

heir to the throne of Israel, he was also the Son of God and therefore the promised saviour of the world. The confluence of these two important aspects is no coincidence and we can only be astonished at how God chose to bring all these things together to achieve His purpose.

God has in no way forgotten his promises to individuals or to groups of people and implicit in that are literal promises to the people of Israel that still await fulfilment (Isaiah 52:7-9, Luke 2:25, Acts 26:6).

“And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” Isaiah 11:12, NASB

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” – Micah 5:2, NIV

“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” – John 4:42, NIV

There are many layers to God’s great story, which finally converge in Jesus. “Jesus is all of Israel’s major leaders and more, he’s a new Moses and especially a new David and a new Solomon and a new servant and a new son of man and whole new redemptive order. His name – *Yeshua* – means ‘he will save his people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21). The story is that in Jesus God now rules and God’s kind of ruling is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, and reconciling.” (Scot McKnight)