



SESSION 4

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

God's kingdom includes the "now
and not yet" reign of King Jesus.



WORSHIP

READING PLAN

Read through the following Scripture passages this week. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses.

Day 1

Genesis 12:1-9

Day 2

Jeremiah 31:31-40

Day 3

Daniel 2:27-45

Day 4

Matthew 6:19-34

Day 5

John 18:28-40

Day 6

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Day 7

Revelation 22:1-21



GOD'S KINGDOM IS "NOW AND NOT YET"

As we've seen, if someone were to ask you the same question the Pharisees asked Jesus in Luke 17—When will the kingdom of God come to earth?—it would be hard for you to give a wrong answer. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus both spoke of God's kingdom as something that "is among you" and something that is yet to come. Accordingly, modern theologians have helpfully described God's kingdom as both "now and not yet."

The kingdom of God is already here in the sense that every Christian is a part of that kingdom. Those who follow God have placed their lives under the reign of King Jesus, and every church is an outpost of His kingdom. Yet God's kingdom is also obviously not yet here—not in full, at least. Our world is marked by pain, brokenness, wickedness, and death. It bears all the marks of still awaiting the rightful king's ascent to the throne.

Some day, King Jesus will return to finally conquer all His enemies and set up an eternal and perfect kingdom. While His kingdom is among us, that day is yet to come.

How has the presence of God's kingdom on earth benefited those who are not part of that kingdom?

In what ways have you felt the tension of living in the world as a member of God's kingdom?

This theme of "now and not yet" continues in the New Testament as we move beyond the Gospels:

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good reserve for the age to come, so that they may take hold of life that is real.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

Here again we have two specific periods of time: “the present age” and “the age to come.” Paul warned his readers against living as if the present age was all that mattered. Instead, he encouraged them to set their priorities based on the age to come.

Paul offered similar instructions to Titus, another one of his disciples:

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people,
¹² instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live
in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, ¹³ while
we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great
God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave Himself for us to redeem us
from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people for His own
possession, eager to do good works.

TITUS 2:11-14

What are some expectations from these Scripture passages that you can apply in your everyday life?

It’s important to remember that our world is currently in a time of transition. When Jesus came to earth in human form (what we call the incarnation), He began the process of moving the world out of the present age and into the age to come. It’s been a long process. Two thousand years later, society is still broken—still suffering the pains of the present age—and yet every day God’s people join in His work to advance His kingdom further and deeper into the world.

When Jesus returns to the earth, He will complete the process. His return will end the present age and finally establish the age to come in fullness and glory. Until that day comes, however, the world will remain caught in the tension between the “now” and the “not yet.” And so will we.

What disciplines and practices will help you live well in the tension between the present age and the age to come?



CHRISTIANS LIVE AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM

To be a Christian is to gladly place every area of your life under the reign of King Jesus—to kneel before Him and say, “Everything in my life is negotiable except You.” That’s the price of citizenship in the kingdom of God. But what do we gain? What are the benefits of membership in God’s kingdom?

The apostle John gave us a glimpse of what it means to enjoy life in the kingdom of God.

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea no longer existed. ² I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

³ Then I heard a loud voice from the throne:

Look! God’s dwelling is with humanity,
and He will live with them.
They will be His people,
and God Himself will be with them
and be their God.

⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will no longer exist;
grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer,
because the previous things have passed away.

REVELATION 21:1-4

What emotions do you experience when you read these verses?

John was describing heaven, of course. God gave him a vision, a glimpse, of what life will be like when God’s will is fully accomplished throughout the universe—when His kingdom comes to earth without rebellion, corruption, or compromise.

This is our future as followers of God and members of His kingdom. This is what we look forward to as we live and minister in this present age of sin.

Until that day comes, however, we have work to do. Being a member of God's kingdom is not a passive experience—at least, it shouldn't be. We are not simply passengers on a cruise-liner called Earth, waiting in comfort until we arrive at our heavenly destination.

Instead, God has called us to give our time, talents, energy, resources, and even our very lives—all for the goal of advancing His kingdom in the world.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about our responsibilities as earthly members of God's kingdom.

Matthew 22:37-40

Matthew 28:18-20

John 17:20-26

Acts 1:4-8

Of course, there are also immediate benefits to being citizens of God's kingdom. We are blessed with the forgiveness of our sins, for example. We can experience the joy of true community. And we have the unbelievable privilege of connecting with and relating to the Creator of the universe.

Case Study: Imagine you are speaking with a friend about what it means to be a Christian—a citizen of God's kingdom. How would you answer the following questions?

What are Christians supposed to do?

What are Christians not supposed to do?