**Are you ready for the Kingdom of God?**

**Introduction**

The coming of the kingdom of God was the teaching of the original gospel message. This was first taught by John the Baptist; *“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven has come near’”* (Mat 3:1-2). Jesus taught the same message; *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming* ***the******good news of the kingdom****, and healing every disease and illness among the people”* (Mat 4:23). The message of John and Jesus was a proclamation of the kingdom. It was good news for the people. The people needed to be ready for it.

Jesus told his 12 disciples to teach the same message; *“As you go, proclaim this message: “The* ***kingdom*** *of heaven has come near””* (Mat 10:7). The same advice was given to the 70 disciples (Luke 10:9). When Jesus rose from the dead, this was his final message to the disciples before he went to heaven; *“After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the* ***kingdom*** *of God”* (Acts 1:3).

It is clear it is the teaching of the kingdom of God is of fundamental importance to those who follow Jesus. The kingdom was the message of Jesus. He taught that the kingdom of God is coming and this requires a response from the people. The question for the hearers is ***“Are we ready for the kingdom of God?”***

Before we can answer this question, we need to know something about the kingdom.

**The Promise of the Kingdom**

It was the angel Gabriel who first taught about the kingdom in the New Testament. When he appeared to Mary, he spoke about the future role that Jesus would take; *“the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the* ***throne*** *of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants for ever, his* ***kingdom*** *will never end”* (Luke 1:30-33). From this we learn;

* Jesus would sit on the throne of his father David.
* Jesus would reign over Jacob’s descendants (that is, over the people of Israel).
* Jesus’ kingdom would never end.
* Jesus was born to be a king. As Jesus said; “*You say that I am a king. In fact, (this is) the reason I was born.”* (John 18:37).

Gabriel spoke about a promise that God made to king David way back in the Old Testament. God had said to king David; *“I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you: when your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish* ***his kingdom****. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish* ***his throne*** *for ever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and* ***my kingdom*** *for ever;* ***his throne*** *will be established for ever”* (1 Chron 17:10-14). In this promise, God said that:

* One of David’s offspring would be a great king.
* His kingdom would last for ever.
* He would build a house for God.
* God would be his father.

When the angel Gabriel came to Mary, Gabriel told her that this promise of long ago was going to be fulfilled through Jesus. Jesus would be the king who would reign on David’s throne. Since David’s throne was in Jerusalem, the throne of Jesus would also be in Jerusalem. And like David, Jesus would reign over the land of Israel and the people of Israel.

The importance of the promise to David was highlighted in the first great speech of the Christian era. Peter said; *“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch* ***David*** *died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that* ***God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.*** *Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah…Therefore let all Israel be assured of this; God made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah”* (Acts 2:29-31, 36). In this important speech Peter refers to the promise to David and how it was being fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus was to sit on the throne of king David.

Just like John the Baptist and Jesus, Peter spoke about the kingdom. This message was not just for information. It required the people to respond to the message of the kingdom and get ready. Peter told them, *“Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”* (Acts 2:38). Preparation for the kingdom required the repentance from sins as a first step. The sins of the people were the problem. It would be a problem for the people if the kingdom came and they were still in a state of sin.

The promise to David was in the Old Testament. In fact, many Old Testament passages teach about the king and the kingdom. The king was to come riding on a donkey is spoken of in the book of Zechariah; *“Say to Daughter Zion, “See, your* ***king*** *comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey”* (Mat 21:5 quoting Zechariah 9:9). Jesus would not be a typical king, riding on a horse with great power. Instead, like the donkey he rode, he would bear the burden of the people.

Jesus came to fulfil the promises and prophecies about him as God had planned. We will look at some of the other prophecies about the kingdom. These will help us get a picture of what the future kingdom will be like. Before then, we will consider the world we live in – the kingdoms of this world - which is a contrast to the kingdom of God.

The kingdoms of the world will be replaced by the kingdom of God. This is taught in the book of Daniel; *“Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His* ***kingdom*** *will be an everlasting* ***kingdom****, and all rulers will worship and obey him”* (Dan 7:27). The kingdoms under heaven, that is the kingdoms of the earth, will be replaced by “his kingdom”, that is God’s kingdom.

The same message is given in Daniel chapter 2; *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever*” (Dan 2:44). The kingdom of God will replace the kingdoms of this world.

**The Kingdoms of our World**

Our world has many big problems that no politician or nation is fully and completely able to solve. Consider the following:

* Oppression
* War
* Extreme poverty
* Crime
* Famine and changing weather patterns
* Disease
* Death
* Injustice
* Ignorance

No man can solve these world problems. So we are taught; *“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save”* (Ps 146:3).

God has a solution for all these problems. The solution is the kingdom of God. This is why it is good news for people.

God tells us what the kingdom will be like in the Bible and especially in the Old Testament. He gives us pictures of this future time.

**Pictures of the Kingdom of God**

The Bible gives us pictures of the kingdom of God. From these we can understand what the kingdom will be like. The following give the verses in full and then the main points of teaching from the verses.

1. Isaiah 2:2-4

*“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more*”.

This teaches:

* There will be a temple in Jerusalem.
* People from all nations will visit this temple.
* God’s word and law will be given from this temple.
* He will judge between the nations and solve disputes.
* The result will be peace among the nations. There will be no war, no armies and no weapons.
1. Isaiah 11:3-9

*“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will not harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”*.

This teaches:

* There will be true justice, especially for the poor.
* The wicked will be punished.
* It will be a time of righteousness and faithfulness.
* There will be peace even among the animals.
* The earth will be full of the knowledge of God.
1. Isaiah 35:5-10

*“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. Only the redeemed of the Lord will walk there and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away”*.

This teaches:

* There will be healing for the sick and disabled.
* The deserts will have water.
* There is a road for the holy people to travel in that leads to Zion (ie Jerusalem).
* The unclean and wicked will not go to Jerusalem.
* At Jerusalem there will be joy and happiness and singing.
* There will be no more sorrow for the righteous.
1. Isaiah 65:17-25

*“’See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain. Says the Lord”.*

This teaches:

* There will be a new heaven and a new earth.
* The sadness of the old heaven and earth will not be remembered.
* There will be joy based around Jerusalem.
* The people will be blessed with long life and own their own houses and land.
* God will answer their prayers before they are asked.
* There will be peace among the animals.
* There will be no destruction on God’s holy mountain (ie Jerusalem).

The fact that there will be a new heaven and new earth does not mean that the current literal heaven and earth will be replaced. What it does mean that the order of human rulership (the heavens) and ruled (the earth) will be replaced. The fact that people are called ‘heaven and earth’ in the Bible is found in Deuteronomy 32:1 and Isaiah 1:2.

The heaven and earth were replaced previously at the time of Noah when *“the world of that time was deluged and destroyed”* (2 Pet 3:6). The world itself was not destroyed, but the people on it were. This is how it will be when Christ comes back. Peter says; *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare”* (2 Pet 3:10). The planet will survive, but the order of the people (the heavens and earth) on it will be replaced.

These 4 quotations above teach us that the Kingdom of God will be a literal place. Many of the problems of man will have been reduced or even solved completely:

* Disability and sickness cured.
* Death of the young stopped.
* Long life for people.
* The formation of deserts solved so that famine is solved.
* Warfare solved.
* Dangerous animals solved.
* Injustice solved.
* Ignorance of God reduced and eventually solved.

The removal of sickness is also taught by Jesus when he said; *“If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the* ***Kingdom*** *of God has come to you”* (Mat 12:28). The use of the spirit of God to remove the demons and sicknesses is a feature of the kingdom of God. The use of the spirit gifts to do this is called the *“power of the age to come”* (that is, a power of the kingdom age, Heb 6:4-5).

The kingdom of God is the answer to our own problems and to the problems of the world. If we sometimes despair over the world today, then cheer up, because God has a solution for the problems. And if you despair over the difficulties of your own life, then cheer up, because God has a solution to your own personal problems. This is why the Kingdom of God is ‘***good news***’. It is good news for us and good news for the world.

The kingdom is called a ‘Paradise’ in Luke 23:43. The word ‘paradise’ means a watered garden. The Garden of Eden was a watered garden or Paradise. The kingdom will be a reestablishment of the paradise of the Garden of Eden (see also Ezek 36:35).

In the Gospels we have a famous incident called the ‘Transfiguration’ where the form of Jesus was changed. The transfiguration was another picture of the kingdom. It is described as like the *“Son of Man coming in his kingdom”* (Mat 16:28), like seeing the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27) and like seeing the *“Kingdom of God come with power”* (Mark 9:1). In all three gospels, these words about the kingdom were followed by the transfiguration (Mat 17:1-8, Mark 9:3-10, Luke 9:28-36). The event of the transfiguration was a foretaste of what the kingdom would be like. The following are features are like what we know of the kingdom of God:

* Jesus was present on a high mountain.
* Jesus appeared in bright glory.
* The faithful (Moses and Elijah) appeared with him in glory.
* God revealed His pleasure in the work of His son Jesus.
* Jesus and the faithful appeared in a cloud.

**The two stages of the Kingdom of God**

You will notice that not every problem is solved immediately in the kingdom of God. There is still death. There are still wicked people who need to be judged. This is because there are two stages to the Kingdom of God.

In the first stage, many of the problems of the world are reduced or solved. These are described in the references in the previous section. This first stage will last 1000 years. This is the teaching of Revelation 20; *“Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years”* (Rev 20:6).

Then there is a second period. At the end of the first 1000 year period, Jesus will hand the kingdom over to God; *“Then the end will come, when he hands over the* ***kingdom*** *to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For he ‘has put everything under his feet’. Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all”* (1 Cor 15:24-28).

The work of Jesus is to prepare the people of the world by removing sin. When sin has been removed, then there is no barrier to God living with man. Currently our sins separate us from God (Is 59:2). But when sins are removed, man can live with God. This is the final stage of God’s kingdom.

In the final stage of the Kingdom of God, all the problems of the world have been solved. Death is no more. The wicked are no more. Sin is no more. This second stage is described in Revelation and Isaiah:

*“Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth’, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling-place is now among the people, and God himself will be with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death” or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”* Revelation 21:1-4.

*“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he will save us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’”* Isaiah 25:6-9.

This teaches:

* There is no more death.
* There will be no more crying.
* Everything will be new.
* This plan is centred on the city of Jerusalem.
* The people will know God.
* The people of God will have been made beautiful like a bride.
* God will come down and live with man on earth.
* There will be a feast.

In the end, Jesus will have removed all sin and death from the earth. This means that God and man can live together at last.

**Repentance**

There is no automatic entrance into the kingdom of God. Everyone is invited to prepare for this time in order to be accepted into the kingdom.

John the Baptist taught the people that they must repent before the kingdom comes; *“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, ‘****Repent****, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”* (Mat 3:1-2). Jesus confirmed the need for repentance; “***Repent****, for the kingdom of heaven is near*” (Mat 4:17).

Repentance means to change of one’s mind and to change one’s ways. Put simply, repentance means to change. If one is doing evil, then repentance means to stop doing evil. True repentance is always demonstrated by a change in behaviour. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John, John told them; *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”* (Mat 3:7-8). The fruit that John was referring to was the deeds of the Pharisees and Sadducees. John was concerned that they would not change and so would not truly repent.

All people on earth are required to change their ways and repent (Acts 17:30). We all need to change because we are all sinners (Rom 3:23). We all need to prove our repentance by showing that our behaviour has changed. As the apostle Paul said; *“I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance* ***by their deeds****”* (Acts 26:20).

True repentance comes with a blessing. If one really turns from the old ways and follows Christ, then God is willing to forgive us of **all** our past sins. No matter how bad, we can find forgiveness. This is demonstrated by the forgiveness of prostitutes and tax collectors, some of whom became Jesus’ closest disciples. This is such a wonderful and merciful offer that we would foolish not to accept. However, if we do not change our ways and forsake sin, then God will not forgive us.

For those who do repent and turn from evil, there is joy in heaven, even if there is just one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7,10). God wants all people to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

The Kingdom of God is not a place where sin is welcome. It is not a place where evil can exist in fellowship with God. Jesus said; *“The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his* ***kingdom*** *everything that causes sin and all who do evil” (Mat 13:41).* Sinners must stop sinning if they are to be in the kingdom of God. We must all stop our evil ways if we are to enter the Kingdom. The kingdom of God will be a place where evil doers and sinners have been removed. This is one reason why the kingdom will be such a good place.

**Baptism**

In order to show our repentance, Jesus requires us to be baptized. Baptism is a demonstration that we have changed from our old ways and now follow the ways of God. Both John the Baptist and Jesus taught their disciples to be baptized. Peter told the people at Pentecost, after speaking about the promise of the kingdom; *“Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”* (Acts 2:38). All of us are required to be baptized to show our repentance and to wash away our sins.

Baptism is not an option. We cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are baptized. Jesus said; *“I tell you the truth,* ***no one can see the******kingdom of God*** *unless he is born again. ‘How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’ I tell you the truth,* ***no-one can enter******the******kingdom of God*** *unless he is born of water and the spirit”* (John 3:3,5). When it speaks of being born of water, it refers to baptism in water. Baptism is a symbolic rebirth in water. We must no longer remain a child of the world, but we must be born as a child of God. If we are not baptized, then we are not reborn as a child of God.

Baptism occurs after someone is taught about the kingdom. We read this in Acts 2 when Peter taught the crowd. Later in Acts, we are told that we need to know more than just the kingdom of God; *“when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the* ***kingdom of God******and the name of Jesus Christ****, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12). It is important to understand about the things of Jesus as well as the kingdom. The apostle Paul also did this; *“He proclaimed the* ***kingdom of God*** *and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 28:31). Believers must believe in the message of the kingdom of God and about Jesus Christ.

In the examples of baptism, there was the teaching first. Then, when the message was believed, there was baptism. Baptism was a response to the teaching. A good example of this is the response of the Ethiopian later in the same chapter (Acts 8:26-9).

Baptism takes place where there is a lot of water because baptism requires full immersion in water (Acts 8:36, John 3:23). In the description of the baptism of the Ethiopian, we are told that they went down into the water (Acts 8:38) and then came up out of the water (Acts 8:39). This indicates that the whole body was covered with water. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were baptized when they went down into the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:2). This again indicates that baptism is by full immersion in water.

Full immersion in water is required because baptism is a washing away of sins (Tit 3:5, 1 Pet 3:21). One does not wash a body by only washing part of it. The whole body must be washed in order to make it clean. When Naaman was cured of his leprosy, he had to wash his whole body in the Jordan river in order to be clean (2 Kings 5:24). This practice was the same in the Law of Moses for certain types of ceremonial uncleanness. This needed to wash the whole body in order to be clean (eg Lev 15:16).

Baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:3-4, Col 2:12). When one goes into the water, one acts out the death of Jesus. And when one comes up out of the water, one acts out the resurrection of Jesus. Full immersion in water is required in order to symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus. One does not partly bury a body at death – it needs to be fully covered.

The Christian practice of christening cannot be found in the Bible. It does not involve full immersion. It does not involve repentance of sins. It does not involve knowledge of the kingdom and Jesus. So christening is not the baptism as described in the Bible.

**The Parables of the Kingdom**

We will now look at what the New Testament taught about the kingdom. The parables of Jesus taught the kingdom. When the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables, Jesus said; *“Because the knowledge of the secrets of the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven has been given to you, but not to them”* (Mat 13:11). The parables of Jesus taught about the kingdom.

Parables are stories which teach a message. In order to understand the message, one needs to understand the story. Not everyone would understand the story. Some would understand and some would not. As Jesus explained, the message of the kingdom was not for everyone. Only for those who sought to understand the message who would find it.

The key parable was the parable of the sower. In the parable, a sower sowed seed on different soils. The parable itself was about *“anyone who hears the message about the* ***kingdom****”* (Mat 13:19). The seed that was sowed represented the message of the kingdom. The different soils represented the different responses to the message by the hearers.

The parable of the sower taught that not everyone would receive the kingdom message in the way God wanted. Only those who received the message, persevered and produced fruit would be accepted into the kingdom. On the other hand, there were those who did not believe (the seed on the path), those who believed but fell away because of persecution and trouble (the seed among rocks) and those who believed but fell away due to worries and wealth (the seed among thorns). The parable raises questions for all hearers:

1) Do you believe the kingdom message?

2) Do you persevere in your faith through troubles and the dangers of wealth?

3) Do you produce spiritual fruit?

The parable is a challenge to all who hear it. What type of reaction do we have?

The following are the main messages from the other parables of Jesus:

* The parable of wheat and tares (Mat 13:26-30, 36-43). There are good and bad believers living together. These will be separated at the judgement, when the bad will be destroyed and the good will enter the kingdom.
* The parable of mustard seed and yeast (Mat 13:31-35). The kingdom starts small but then grows to fill the whole world.
* The parable of the hidden treasure and fine pearls (Mat 13:44-45). The kingdom is so valuable that it is worth selling all we have in order to gain the kingdom.
* The parable of the net (Mat 13:47-52). There will be a separation of good and bad people at the judgement.
* The parable of the unforgiving debtor (Mat 18:21-35). We must forgive each other if we want God to forgive us.
* The parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mat 20:1-14). God is calling people to the gospel at different times. When the day of reward comes, they will receive the same reward.
* The parable of the wedding banquet (Mat 22:1-14). Many people are offered an invitation to God’s kingdom, but many people will refuse it.
* The parable of the 10 virgins (Mat 25:1-13). Not everyone will be ready for the coming of Jesus. Those who are not ready will be excluded from the kingdom.
* The parable of the 10 talents (Mat 25:14-30). Lazy believers will not enter the kingdom of God.
* The parable of the sheep and the goats (Mat 25:31-46). Only believers who are active in their faith will enter the kingdom. In the parable we have the examples of those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked and visited those sick or in prison.

These parables describe how many are called to the gospel message but few respond in the way God wants. Only those who believe the message and live in the way God wants will be welcomed into the kingdom.

There are only two categories at the judgement day – acceptance or rejection. There will be no class of ‘not decided yet’. We must all make sure we hear the message, believe it and live it. The kingdom is so great that it is worth us giving everything in order to gain it. If we do so, then we will be welcomed into the kingdom.

**The Teaching of the Kingdom**

The greatest teaching of the kingdom comes in what is known as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. This information also occurs in Luke, although in less detail. The teaching begins with saying that the kingdom is made for

1. those who are ‘poor in spirit’ (Mat 5:3). This means that those who are humble (see Isaiah 57:15, 66:2).
2. Those who are meek (Mat 5:5).
3. Those who suffer and are insulted for doing what is right (Mat 5:10,12).

The kingdom is not for the rich, comfortable and popular (Luke 6:24-26).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom; ***“Your kingdom come.*** *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*(Mat 6:10). The kingdom was something that the disciples should be looking forward to and praying that it would come. Whenever the Lord’s prayer is recited, it is an appeal to God for the kingdom to come.

The prime object of the disciple of Jesus is that they would seek to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus told them; ***“****But* ***seek first his kingdom*** *and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”* (Mat 6:33). The most important thing in the life of the believer is for them to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness that comes from God. The words *“his righteousness”* means following God’s teaching of what is right and wrong. In order to do this, we need to know the commands of God.

If we seek the kingdom, and do what is right, then God will bless us with the things we need in this life (Mat 6:31-32). If we do not seek the kingdom first, we show that it is not the most important thing in our life. Wherever we are in our life, whatever stage we are in, whatever position we are in, we must seek FIRST the kingdom. Everything else is not as important.

Jesus puts this teaching a different way; *“And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the* ***kingdom*** *of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell”* (Mat 9:47). Obtaining the kingdom should be such a priority that it is even worth losing bodily wholeness. The reference to the word “hell” is the Greek word ‘gehenna’ meaning “Valley of Hinnon”. This is a place outside Jerusalem where they used to burn the rubbish. We need to do all we can to get to the kingdom, otherwise we will be burnt with the rubbish.

The importance of the kingdom is put in another way by Jesus; *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the* ***kingdom****. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys”* (Luke 12:33). Obtaining the kingdom is worth more than the possessions we have in this life. It is worth more than money. Like the teaching of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl, we should do are all to obtain the kingdom. If we do this, God will take pleasure in giving us a place in His kingdom.

The letters of the apostles pick up the teaching about the kingdom. In particular, they highlight the fact that evil doers will not be in the kingdom;

*“Do you not know that the* ***wicked will not inherit the kingdom*** *of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God”* (I Cor 6:9-10).

*“The acts of sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkardness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this* ***will not inherit the kingdom*** *of God”* (Gal 5:19-21).

*“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater –* ***has any inheritance in the kingdom*** *of Christ and of God”* (Eph 5:3-5).

 All these verses are consistent and clear. We know what is wrong and we should not do it. These things will exclude us from being in God’s kingdom. God does not want His kingdom compromised by evil doers.

We must live as holy people if we are to be members of God’s holy kingdom. We must make the kingdom the priority in our lives. We must give it our all.

**Different Responses to the Kingdom**

There were many different responses to the message of the kingdom at the time of Jesus. In general terms, the generation of Jesus’ day did not believe the message. This is what is taught in Matthew; *“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others: “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn”* (Mat 11:16-17). Jesus had played and sung but the listeners had not responded. Jesus highlighted the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for special criticism, because Jesus had performed many miracles there and yet they still did not believe (Mat 11:21-23).

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not respond well. They claimed that the miracles Jesus did were the work of an evil god called Beelzebul rather than God Himself (Mat 12:24). . Not only did they not believe, but they responded in the worst possible way - they plotted to kill Jesus (Mat 12:14). Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus said to them; *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to”* (Mat 23:13-14). The teachers of the law and the Pharisees and their followers will not be in the kingdom.

The chief priests and elders of the people did not respond well. Jesus said to them; *“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the* ***kingdom*** *of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him”* (Mat 21:31-32). The chief priests and the elders will not be in the kingdom; *“I tell you that the* ***kingdom*** *of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit”* (Mat 21:43). The kingdom will be given to those who produce the fruits of repentance. In other words, it will be given to repentant sinners who have truly changed from their ways of sin and produce spiritual fruit.

Surprisingly perhaps, it was the ‘sinners’ who did respond well to the message of the kingdom. It was the tax collectors like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9) and Levi (Luke 5:27-31). It was the prostitutes like the one who visited when Jesus was at the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). It was like the Gentile centurion, to whom Jesus said; *“I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven. But the subjects of the* ***kingdom*** *will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Mat 8:11-12). There is room in God’s kingdom for repentant sinners from all around the world.

God’s people, the Jews, thought that they would be in God’s kingdom because they were the children of Abraham and therefore heirs of the promises to him. However, Jesus makes it clear that this assumption was wrong; *“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from the east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 13:28-29). Jews will not get into the kingdom because of their descent from Abraham. In order to enter the kingdom with Abraham, they must show the faith and works of Abraham (John 8:39-40).

Even among those who respond positively to the kingdom message, there are dangers. The rich young man believed the message but had a problem with riches. His great wealth was a barrier to him. He was not prepared to give them up and follow Jesus. Jesus highlighted the problem of riches to his disciples; *“Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the* ***kingdom*** *of God”* (Mat 19:24). Riches can take believers away from God. On the other hand, the poor will be in the kingdom. James tells us; *“Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the* ***kingdom*** *he promised those who love him?”* (Jam 2:5).

Believers must be on guard against the danger of pride. When the disciples argued over who would be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus respond with the following lesson; *“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven”* (Mat 18:2-4). The proud will not be in the kingdom of God. They must change and become little in their own eyes if they are to enter the kingdom. The kingdom was made for the ‘little children’ of God.

Believers must beware of the danger of putting their own family before the kingdom of God. Jesus says; *“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”* (Mat 10:37). If our father or mother says we must not believe in the kingdom message, then we must not listen to them. If our husband or wife or brother or sister says we must not believe in the kingdom message, we must not listen to them. If our whole family is against us believing in the kingdom, we must not listen to them. Those who put the kingdom first, despite family pressure against it, will be blessed; *“everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life”* (Mat 19:29).

Overall the response of the people to the kingdom message showed that people did not react as expected. Those who should know better did not respond well. These people were those who were educated on Bible teaching – the Pharisees, teachers of the law, Sadducees, scribes, chief priests and elders. They did not believe. These groups were the rich, the comfortable and the popular that were mentioned in Luke 6:24-26 as not being in the kingdom. We must not be like them; *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven”* (Mat 5:20).

Even a teacher of the kingdom is not guaranteed a place in the kingdom. As Jesus said; *“Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”* (Mat 7:21-23). Knowledge of the kingdom is not enough to get us into the kingdom. Performing miracles in the name of Jesus does not guarantee a place. Teachers are known by what they do - their fruits – rather than by what they teach (Mat 7:15-20). Teachers must produce spiritual fruits as well as teach.

Immediately after these words, Jesus gave a parable to explain the importance of doing the word *in addition* to believing (Mat 7:24-27). The parable of the wise and foolish builders teaches us that only those who put God word into practice will be in the kingdom. The foolish man is a man who learns God’s teaching but does not put it into practice. He is like a house in a storm that was built on sand that crashes down. However, a wise man is one who learns God’s teaching and puts God’s word into practice. He is like a house built on rock, which never falls. When the storm comes, the foolish are gone (see also Prov 10:25) and the wise remain.

There were exceptions among the educated people who did receive the message of the kingdom - Nicodemus (John 19:39) and Joseph of Arimathea. We are told that Joseph was “*waiting for the* ***kingdom*** *of God”* (Luke 23:51). The fact that we only know of these two, out of all the educated and spiritual elite, should serve as a warning. Not many of the worlds spiritual leadership will be in the kingdom (Mat 11:25, 1 Cor 1:36).

It was the sinners who rejoiced at the message of the kingdom. They were not happy with their own lives. The kingdom offered them hope of a better life and a fresh start. These sinners repented and changed. There are two great examples of this.

Firstly, the thief on the cross. Although a thief, he accepted that he deserved to die. On the cross, he changed and showed such great faith that he is a lesson to us. As he saw Jesus dying, he declared his belief in the kingdom; *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your* ***kingdom****”* (Luke 23:42). For him to believe that Jesus would be king, he had to believe that the dying Jesus would be resurrected. He also believed that Jesus would come as the king of God’s kingdom.

The question that the thief had asked Jesus was for Jesus to remember him ***when*** Jesus came to set up the kingdom. Jesus’s reply was that the thief did not have to wait until the kingdom to find out. Jesus told him there and then that the thief would be with him in the kingdom. He said; *“Truly I tell you* ***today*** *you will be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). The thief will be in the kingdom of God. Now if Jesus can forgive the thief on the cross, then he can forgive us when we repent.

The second example is the apostle Paul. Previously he had persecuted the believers and helped put them to death (Acts 26:9-11). He later repented after he had a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus. When he looked back on the sins of his previous life (1 Tim 1:13), he tells us that if God can be merciful to him, then God can be merciful to us; *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst”* (1 Tim 1 :15). This is a great comfort to sinners. Providing we repent and change, then our sins can be forgiven.

**When will the kingdom come?**

This is the big question. The disciples asked Jesus this question before Jesus went to heaven; *“Lord, are you* ***at this time*** *going to restore the* ***kingdom*** *to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6). In reply, Jesus said; *“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority”* (Acts 1:7). We are not to know the time or date when the kingdom will be established. In fact, only the Father has this information; *“But about the day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”* (Mat 24:36). If anyone claims to have this knowledge, then do not believe them.

Following the question about when the kingdom will be set up, Jesus was taken up into heaven. As the disciples witnessed this, two angels said; “*‘Men of Galilee’, they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’”* (Acts 1:11). Jesus will return. He will set up the kingdom when he returns. This is confirmed in Matthew*; “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne”* (Mat 25:31).

Because we do not know when Jesus will return, we must be ready all the time. The parable of the 10 virgins teaches this. They were waiting for the bridegroom, but the *“bridegroom was a very long time coming”* (Mat 25:5). When the bridegroom arrived, 5 virgins were not ready. Jesus told the lesson of the parable; *“Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour”* (Mat 25:13). We must learn the lesson and be ready for the return of Jesus. He will come like a thief in the night at a time we do not expect (Mat 24:42-44).

The parable of the 10 talents (Mat 25:14-30, or 10 minas in Luke 19:11-26) was given because people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately (Luke 19:12). The parable teaches that the master went away for a long time and that the servants need to be ready for his return. The return of the master was at a time that the servants did not know. In the parable, the master returned and found a lazy servant. Lazy servants are of no use to a master. He was thrown out. We must ensure that we are active in our faith, otherwise we will also be thrown out.

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. In reply, Jesus said; *“The kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the* ***kingdom*** *of God is in your midst””* (Luke 17:21). There is no point us spending all our time looking for the coming of the kingdom. It will come when we do not expect it. We cannot predict when the kingdom will be set up and get ready at the last minute. This strategy will fail.

In his reply, Jesus said that the *“kingdom of God is in your midst”* (Luke 17:21). The original Greek word for *‘in your midst’* means ‘*inside’* and is used in Mat 23:26 for ‘inside’ of the cup. It is the opposite of the word meaning ‘outside’, which is also used in Mat 23:26. We have already established that whether we enter the kingdom of God is dependent on the response of our hearts. This is what is meant by the kingdom of God being ‘inside’. There is no point looking for the kingdom by observing things outside. What is important is to concentrate on our inside. We need to make sure we watch our own heart to ensure that it is right.

The same understanding applies to the phrase the kingdom *“has come near”* (Mat 3:1, 4:17, 10:7, Mark 1:14, Luke 10:9). It means that the offer of the kingdom has come near the hearers. Whether we will be in the kingdom depends on us believing the message and doing what it says. People are being called to the kingdom every time the gospel message is preached. Whether they turn out to be people who get into the kingdom depends on the response of their hearts. The actual literal kingdom will not be set up until Jesus returns.

**Where will the Kingdom of God be?**

We learnt that the kingdom of God is a fulfillment of God’s promise to King David. David was to have a great son who would sit on his throne. The throne of David was in Jerusalem. This means that the throne of Jesus will also be in Jerusalem. It will be a restoration of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6), but this time with the greatest king on the throne over Israel. This means that the kingdom of God will be on earth.

It is not just the promise to David that teaches that the kingdom of God will be on earth. Before David, God made a promise to Abraham, which also teaches that the kingdom will be on earth. The promise God made to Abraham included the promise of land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants; *“The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give it to you and your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that is anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you”* (Gen 13:14-17).

Although Abraham was promised the ‘Promised Land’, he did not inherit it during his lifetime. Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham did not receive the promise. After speaking about Abraham in Hebrews 11:8-12, it says; *“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth”* (Heb 11:13).

If Abraham has not received the Promised land yet then when will he receive them? We are told that Abraham will be in the kingdom; *“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from the east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the* ***kingdom*** *of God”* (Luke 13:28-29). It will be in the kingdom that Abraham and his children will inherit the Promised Land. This means that the kingdom is on earth.

The fact that the kingdom of God will be on earth is famously taught by the Lord’s prayer, it says; *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your* ***kingdom*** *come, your will be done on* ***earth*** *as it is in heaven…”* (Mat 6:9-10). The kingdom is going to come and be a time when God’s will is done on earth. That is, the kingdom will be on earth.

The teaching of the return of Jesus to the earth means that Jesus is coming to the earth rather than remaining in heaven. As the angels told the disciples; *“This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11). Jesus is coming back to the earth to set up the kingdom on earth.

Here are a number of other passages which teach that the kingdom of God will be on earth. Some of these teach that the kingdom of God will replace the kingdoms of man on earth.

*“You have made them to be a* ***kingdom*** *and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the* ***earth****”* (Rev 5:10).

*“The* ***kingdom*** *of the* ***world*** *has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and every”* (Rev 11:15).

*“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the* ***earth****”* (Mat 5:5).

*“Those the Lord blesses will inherit the* ***land****, but those he curses will be destroyed”* (Ps 37:22).

*“The highest heaven belong to the Lord, but the* ***earth*** *he has given to the human race” (Ps 115:16).*

 *“In the time of those* ***kings****, the God of heaven will set up a* ***kingdom*** *that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever”* (Dan 2:44).

*“Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms* ***under heaven*** *will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His* ***kingdom*** *will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him” (Dan 7:27).*

The earth has always been part of God’s plan for the people of God. It *was “formed it to be inhabited”* (Is 45:18). His ultimate plan with the earth is spoken of by the prophets; *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”* (Hab 2:14, see also Is 11:9 and Num 14:21). The earth has not yet been filled with the knowledge of God, but it will do when the kingdom has been fully established.

**Passages which seem to teach a kingdom in heaven but do not**

There are some passages that have confused people about the location of the kingdom of God. This has resulted in many people believing that the kingdom of God will be in heaven. These misunderstandings are discussed below.

The kingdom of God is called the ‘kingdom of heaven’ in the gospel of Matthew. We note that the kingdom is never called the ‘kingdom ***in*** heaven’. It is the kingdom ‘***of***’ heaven - that is, the kingdom ‘from’ heaven. It is called the kingdom ‘of heaven’, because it is ‘of God’. This is how the language is used in Matthew’s gospel when speaking about the baptism of John; *“John’s baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin*?” (Mat 21:25). It was from God and not from man so it was called heavenly rather than earthly. The same is the ‘kingdom of heaven’. It is from God and not from man.

The kingdom of God is not like man’s kingdoms. It is fundamentally different. It is a kingdom designed by God. This is what is meant when the faithful people in Hebrews; *“were longing for a better country – a heavenly one”* (Heb 11:16). They were looking forward to a godly kingdom rather than a worldly kingdom.

The fact that the kingdom of God will be a very different type of kingdom from man’s is clear from the words of Jesus. When Pilate was examining Jesus as a king, Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom would be quite different; *“My* ***kingdom*** *is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by Jewish leaders. But now my* ***kingdom*** *is from another place”* (John 18:36). Jesus is saying that his kingdom is not like the kingdoms that have been so far on this world ruled by man. Worldly kingdoms are gained and maintained by the military. If the kingdom of God was worldly, then his servants would fight for his kingdom. Instead, God’s kingdom is a kingdom of peace and righteousness. The phrase *“from another place”* in John 18:36 is better translated as *“not from here”* and carries the same sense as not being like other worldly kingdoms.

John 14:2 is supposed to teach us that Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven; *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”* (John 14:2). However, the next verse explains this verse; *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* (John 14:3). Jesus is preparing a place for us but is coming back in order to be with us. He will be with us when he comes back to the earth. The reward is being prepared in heaven (Mat 5:12) but will be given when Christ comes to set up the kingdom on earth; *“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done”* (Mat 16:27).

The prophet Enoch is supposed to have gone to heaven without dying. We read of Enoch in Hebrews; *“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God”* (Heb 11:5). However, we are told that Enoch died. In a verse which refers to all the people in the chapter before it, including Enoch, it says; *“All these people were still living by faith when they* ***died****. They did not receive the things promised”* (Heb 11:13). Enoch died and has not yet received the blessings of the righteous.

What does Hebrews 11:5 mean when it says Enoch was taken from this life? The word used for ‘taken’ from this life in Hebrews 11:5 means ‘transferred’. Enoch was transferred or transported from one place to another to save him from a deadly situation that he was in.

The prophet Elijah is supposed to have gone to heaven without dying. The description of Elijah going to heaven is given in 2 Kings 2:11; *“As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind”*. Elijah went to heaven. However, we need to know which heaven Elijah went to, because there are three heavens. There is the heaven of the birds (eg Gen 1:20). There is the heaven of the stars (eg Gen 1:15:16). And there is the heaven where God lives (eg Ps 115:16).

We can work out that Elijah went to the first heaven, the heaven of the birds. God often took Elijah from one place to another through the air, as Obadiah says; *“I don’t know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me”* (1 Kings 18:12). In fact, when Elijah went to heaven in a whirlwind, the prophets wanted to look for Elijah in other valleys; *“Let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley”* (1 Kings 2:16). After the events Elijah was found alive and wrote a letter to Jehoram (2 Chron 21:12). God had picked him up from one place with the chariot of fire and taken him to another place. Elijah is covered by all the reference to “prophets” mentioned in Hebrews (11:32). These did not receive the promises when they died so we know that Elijah died (Heb 11:39).

Elijah, like Enoch, was taken from one place to another by the spirit of God. This is a rare event, but it does happen. Philip was taken through the air when he was taken from the Ethiopian eunuch to Azotus (Acts 8:39-40). These people were taken through the air as part of the purpose of God.

It is said that the thief on the cross went to heaven when he died. But this is not the case. Jesus said that the thief would be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43). Jesus went to the tomb that day and so the thief did not go to paradise. The thief died on the cross and awaits the return of Jesus to set up the kingdom.

We are told that no one has gone to heaven except Jesus; *“No one has ever gone to heaven except the one who came heaven – the Son of Man”* (John 3:13). This confirms that Enoch, Elijah and the thief did not go to heaven. And we are told specifically that David did not go to heaven; *“For David did not ascend to heaven”* (Acts 2:34).

**God’s Final Invitation**

God is inviting us to be in his kingdom. It is like receiving an invitation to a wedding. We have received an invitation to a time of joy and happiness. The parable of the wedding banquet speaks about this (Mat 22:1-14). However, we cannot attend this wedding unless we have prepared for it. Anyone wearing the wrong clothes will be thrown out (Mat 22:11-13). In the parable of the 10 virgins all went to the wedding, but some were not prepared for it (Mat 25:1-13). They did not have their lamps burning with oil, so they were excluded from the wedding (Mat 25:10-12). In the same way, everyone is invited into the wedding but not everyone will be allowed to go in.

Jesus invites us to be in the kingdom; *“And I confer on you a* ***kingdom****, just as my Father has conferred on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my* ***kingdom****”* (Luke 22:29). Jesus said he would not drink again from the fruit of the vine with his disciples until he drunk it new in the kingdom (Mat 26:29). He will eat and drink with his true disciples in the kingdom.

We have been invited to the wedding feast of the kingdom of God. It is now for us to respond to this invitation by repentance, baptism and living like Jesus. The kingdom will contain many people from all over the world; *“many will come from east and west and will take their place at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in kingdom of heaven”* (Mat 8:11). We can all have hope of being there.

The kingdom is such a time of joy and peace that we should do all we can to be there. Getting there should be the priority in our lives. We should pray for its coming; *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your* ***kingdom*** *come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Mat 6:9-10).

The kingdom will come because God will make it happen. Nothing can stop it. We need to make sure we are ready for it.

May you respond to the gospel call to a place in God’s kingdom, make it the priority in your life and have the wisdom to live as in a godly and holy way now.