

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

WE VALUE CHRIST'S KINGDOM

The reign of Jesus is both a present and future reality.

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BY DOUG BEACHAM





Proclaiming the 'Unknown Kingdom' in GODLESS CULTURE

Many Americans today have no knowledge of the Bible—but this creates a huge opportunity for us.



BY DOUG
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries. You can follow Bishop Beacham on [Facebook](#) or Twitter [@DougBeacham](#).

John Bradshaw, an IPHC minister and public school teacher, recently told me the story of when he was teaching world history to a class of eighth graders. As part of the class they were studying Judaism.

When the teacher retold Genesis 22—the story of Abraham taking his son Isaac to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah—a 14-year-old girl on the front row (who normally displayed a lack of attention during the class) sat spellbound.

After finishing the account, the young lady enthusiastically said, “Wow, thank you for telling me that story. No one ever told me that Abraham Lincoln did that to his son!”

When John told me that story I was stunned. On one hand her remark was comical, especially for those of us who know the Bible and assume the context and ending. On the other hand, it was profoundly disheartening and sad to realize that the most basic and elemental aspects of the Bible are no longer widely known in our culture.

In his 2017 book, *Generation Z*, James Emery White describes the generation of this young lady as the first generation in America to have no collective memory of the Bible. It's not that they forgot; they have never known. They get “winter breaks” instead of a Christmas vacation, and “spring breaks” instead of the Easter holiday. But they have no clue the

celebrations are about the birth or the resurrection of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God.

The loss of biblical consciousness now reaches into classrooms. There are at least 1,200 references (a conservative estimate) of biblical allusions in William Shakespeare's plays. Sadly, efforts to teach and understand Shakespeare are thwarted by a lack of biblical understanding. And now, in some universities, political correctness is forcing Shakespeare out of the classroom because it is too "Eurocentric."

On a similar vein as Rev. Bradshaw's experience, IPHC Chief of Staff Terry Fowler had a similar experience. While on a flight from Baltimore to Oklahoma City, he opened his Bible and began preparing for his upcoming Sunday school lesson.

Next to him was a graduate of a major university in Pennsylvania. The young man kept glancing at the book. He finally asked Terry what he was doing, and what book was he was reading from. In the ensuing conversation, Terry discovered that the man had never seen a Bible and knew nothing about it.

Terry began to talk about the Bible, and more importantly, the message of the Bible. The man had no idea he was a sinner; he had no idea that God loved him or that Jesus had died for him. The Holy Spirit was at work at 30,000 feet in the air orchestrating a divine appointment. Before they landed Terry had led this man to Jesus Christ!

These two incidents are striking reminders that as Christians we are serving Jesus in a land that has forgotten the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We want righteous and justice but we have forgotten the Source of that righteousness. We are Kingdom people in a foreign land and in a world unmoored from its Source.

Psalm 137:4 is our lament: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

Our current emphasis on the kingdom of God is important considering this reality. During the first months of 2017, Dr. Ryan Jackson has clearly demonstrated the Hebrew background to Jesus' preaching and teaching on the kingdom of God.

With that Jewish background, we see the nation of Israel called to live as God's obedient servant among the nations, to witness to the kingdoms of this world about the Kingdom of the King. Israel was called to bless, to worship and to proclaim the reality of the creator King.

That is our role today. The church exists "so that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities

and powers in heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10 MEV). Though the world may seek to marginalize us, we do not marginalize ourselves by hiding in "holy enclaves." We do not hide in fear, uncertainty or embarrassment. Instead, we live as salt and light as we publicly follow Jesus.

In many nations, including the United States, knowledge of God's Word is at a minimum, if present at all. We can easily blame government and media.

But so what? If government refuses to allow the Bible to be taught, or if media distorts its message, we can still teach and live the truth of it.

God's Spirit is not bound by government mandates and social conventions. God's Spirit can operate at 30,000 feet, or across the two feet of a Starbucks coffee table, or across the few yards separating us from neighbors.

It's easy to be discouraged and assume all is lost. That is an extreme reaction that should be tempered by several factors, including:

1. There is a deep river of God's presence known to all humanity through our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and through creation (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20).

There is a strong witness to Christ

Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

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2. in social media and contemporary media, including movies, television, YouTube, etc.
3. Christianity is growing rapidly in the nations of the global south. Through immigration, many evangelists and church planters from these nations are impacting major cities in the global north.

Lack of knowledge, like the little girl in school or the professional on a plane, is not a reason for laughter, ridicule and mockery. It is an opportunity to re-connect the old, old story.

In some ways, ignorance of the Bible in our culture may actually be a gift. It may be that the uninformed don't have negative preconceptions and defenses. They may actually be far more open to transforming truth than we have ever imagined. Oddly enough, the pervasive biblical ignorance may help us convey the new, new story of Jesus and His love. □

The Difference Between the CHURCH and the KINGDOM

In the New Testament, the kingdom is ironically both a present and a future reality.



BY RYAN JACKSON

DR. RYAN JACKSON holds a Bachelors of Religion from Emmanuel College, a Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and both a Masters of Philosophy and a Ph.D. from Cambridge University. Throughout these academic pursuits, he has been actively involved in serving the church locally and globally. He currently serves senior pastor of The Capital Church near Raleigh, North Carolina. He lives with his wife, Emily, and their three daughters.

Jesus came to declare the good news of the kingdom of God, and He gave an invincible promise to establish His church. If the church and the kingdom were so important to Jesus, it is worth asking about the relationship between them. What is the connection between the church and the kingdom of God?

Jesus only used the word “church” three times in the gospel accounts of His teachings. Our understanding of the word is somewhat diminished because it has come to be associated with a building or with a denomination. Yet, as Jesus used the term, it meant neither of those things.

The word we translate as “church” is the Greek word *ekklesia*. This is where we get our English word “ecclesiology,” which refers to the study of the nature and structure of the church. *Ekklesia* literally means “called out ones.”

When Jesus said He would build his church, He was referring to a community of people called by God to a holy expression of His character and His love. The kingdom of God—or its synonym, “the kingdom of Heaven”—primarily refers to the sovereign reign and rule of God.

The Jewish people of Jesus’ day understood God’s redemptive reign to require an immediate political manifestation. Jesus’ own understanding was different. For Him, the kingdom wasn’t limited to a particular geographical location, nor was it confined to a specific ethnic group.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was the fulfillment of God’s saving purposes for the entire world. Entrance into the kingdom was obtained by faith, and the community of believers would be the people through whom the righteous reign of God would be demonstrated.

In the New Testament, the kingdom is ironically both a present and a future reality. There is clear New Testament teaching that the kingdom is a future hope. There would be a future resurrection, a final judgment and even physical changes to the universe (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 13:40-43; Mark 13:24-25).

The book of Revelation envisages a glorious future of a renewed world recreated without pain and suffering where God dwells among His people in splendor and majesty. At the same time, there is also an indication in the New Testament that the kingdom has already come.

Jesus taught that His authority to exorcise demons was proof that “the kingdom of God has come upon you (Mat 12:28 ESV).” He understood His own ministry to be the invasion of the future reality of God’s new creation into the chaotic and compromised present.

What was confusing about this was that it didn’t happen in the way it was expected to take place. The messianic hope of a conquering warrior to defeat Israel’s enemies was left hanging. Sickness, sin, and death were quite obviously still operative in the world. The powers of darkness had clearly not been fully subdued.

It is easy to see how the people of Jesus’ time may have missed what was beginning to happen right before their eyes. Even John the Baptist wasn’t fully convinced!

John baptized a lot of people, but there was one baptism that stood out among all the others. When Jesus showed up at John’s evangelistic crusade, John dropped his microphone and invited Jesus to the front. He said, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36)!”

Then something unusual happened, unusual even for John, who wore camel skin suits and ate honey straight from the hive! When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened. The Spirit of God descended on him in the form of a dove; and a voice from heaven declared, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased (Luke 3:22 ESV).” This was not the usual baptismal announcement.

Yet, despite such an auspicious introduction, the end-time events that John expected with the coming of the Messiah did not happen, and John found himself in Herod’s prison. He had to know if he had been mistaken about Jesus. So, he sent some of his followers to go find out what was

going on and to report back to him.

Finding Jesus, they asked him the question that burned on John’s mind, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus’ response was not in the form of a theological lecture or a sermon.

Jesus immediately began to heal diseases and set free those who were demonically oppressed. And, He instructed John’s disciples to go tell John what they had seen and heard (Luke 7:18-23). Jesus was demonstrating that the kingdom of God, which John longed to see, had begun to arrive because the King had come and was plundering the darkness.

So, the kingdom of God is both something that will happen in the future and something that is already here. Theologians call this *inaugurated* (or, *now-and-not-yet*) *eschatology*. There are aspects of the kingdom that await future fulfillment (*not yet*), but the New Testament also speaks about the presence of those future realities in our current experience (*now*).

The most powerful evidence for this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached that the coming of the Spirit was the fulfillment of Joel’s end-time prophecy. Therefore, the Last Days had already begun to arrive since God was pouring out his Spirit upon his people.

This reality explains what Paul means when he talks about the Spirit being a deposit or firstfruit of our inheritance. The Holy Spirit deposits the life-giving breath of eternity (*not yet*) into our present experience (*now*).

The church is not the kingdom of God, but it is part of it. Jesus never said, “The church is among you.” Nor did he ever say, “The church is at hand.” Nevertheless, the church is

the community of people in which the saving purposes of God have begun to be fulfilled. It is therefore the community in which the future restoration (the *not yet*) has already (the *now*) begun to appear.

The old age has been dealt a decisive blow in the victory of the cross, and the new age has begun. Yet, there are aspects of the old age that still linger; and there are elements of the new age that we don’t see in fullness.

We have to deal with sin, sickness and death. These are all characteristics of the old age. Yet, we can have victory over sin. We have access to healing, and Jesus gives us

life—even though we must still await the perfection of the future.

Getting the *now* and the *not yet* out of balance always leads to trouble for the church. Too much emphasis on the *now* means that we are disrupted or disappointed when the old age makes an inconvenient appearance.

Too much emphasis on the *not yet* means that we are closed to the present miraculous working of the Spirit. Holding them together means that the church is an outpost community on the frontier of God’s end-time renewal of the entire cosmos.

The church is a subversive, countercultural society that demonstrates the righteous, life-giving reign of Jesus in the face of this world’s powers. The church unmask the pretenses of the worldly authorities, and it declares that Jesus Christ is Lord, not Caesar! The kingdom of God has begun in and through his eschatological community—the church—and it will be ultimately consummated when He returns in power and glory. ■

“The kingdom of God is both something that will happen in the future and something that is already here.”

How to Find Jesus in the Passover Meal

The deepest truths of our Christian faith are hidden in the ancient feast God gave the Jews.



BY WILLIAM
HEPFNER

WILLIAM M. HEPFNER Th.D., is senior pastor of Life's Destiny Church (LDC) in Mesa, Arizona. Ten years ago he planted the IPHC's first Messianic church, Yeshua HaMashiach Messianic Congregation (YMMC). Currently he pastors both LDC and YMMC. Last year, YMMC planted another Messianic congregation, Beth Mayim Chaiyim, in San Tan Valley, Arizona. Bill also serves as the Arizona District Evangelism Director and is an equipping leader on the Tikkun America Team of Tikkun Ministries' International, a Messianic organization.

Many Christians are aware that Passover, or *Pesach*, is traditionally a Jewish festival. However, a growing number of Christians in the United States want to learn more about the significance of this special Jewish holiday.

This warms my heart because I have been involved in teaching Jewish feasts and festivals to Jewish believers in Christ (and to Christians wishing to learn about their Jewish roots) for the past ten years. During that time I have discovered rich symbolism in the traditional Jewish ceremony, also known as the seder meal.

As we approach Passover in 2017, I want to encourage all Christians to experience a Passover ceremony. You will discover many prophetic elements that will help you understand why God wanted His people to celebrate Passover until the end of time.

God commanded the Jews to participate in an annual reenactment of the Passover night. He said in Exodus 12:14: "Ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever" (KJV). The seder was to be a ceremony appreciated by all ages. Today's Christians should also take special note, because the Passover ceremony was to commemorate our Lord's redemption of Israel from the bondage of Egyptian idolatry and slavery.

God's intent was for this ceremony to be stamped on the hearts and minds of all future generations. Thus, Passover has become God's object lesson for the present and future generations of Jews and Christians.

When I begin discussing Passover, most Christians ask: "How is this festival relevant to me?" My answer to them always includes an explanation of the symbolism of a section called *matzah tash*.

This term refers to a bag that holds three pieces of 10-inch squares of unleavened bread called *matzah*, or matzo. Each piece of bread is

individually wrapped with a fine-linen white cloth. Here is the order of this ceremony:

1. The head rabbi picks up the *matzah tash* and places it in the hands of a second rabbi, then opens the bag and takes out the middle piece of *matzah*.
2. He turns and places this wrapped *matzah* onto the open hands of a third rabbi. He unwraps the linen, picks up the *matzah* and breaks it into two pieces. He places one of the pieces back onto the linen held by the third rabbi.
3. He takes the other broken piece, traditionally named *afikomen*, and wraps it in a new fine-linen white cloth. He calls forward an elder, hands him the wrapped *afikomen* and tells him to go and hide it somewhere within the house. The elder leaves and hides the wrapped piece of *afikomen*.
4. The rabbi turns to the second rabbi, takes the remaining broken half of *matzah* and passes it around the group. Each person breaks off a piece so they may take part in the blessings for the bread and wine.
5. Once everyone has broken off a piece of *matzah*, the head rabbi collects the leftover bread, wraps it in linen and puts it back into the bag held by the second rabbi.
6. The head rabbi instructs the children to go throughout the house, find the *afikoman* and bring it back to the head table where they will receive a reward.
7. The head rabbi then leads the congregation in the blessings said over the bread and wine.

This *matzah tash* section was faithfully re-enacted during Old Testament times, and is still performed worldwide by Jews to this day. While the entire *matzah tash* ceremony may appear to be simple, Christians recognize the importance of communion and faithfully fulfill that sacred step of the ceremony. However, there is so much more to Passover.

For example: This *matzah tash* section became relevant during New Testament times when the Apostle Paul was teaching the Corinthian congregation about sin. He mentioned the well-known example of a man having his



A holy meal: The Passover seder foreshadows the death, burial and resurrection of our Messiah.

father's wife, and urged the Corinthians to purge the sin from their congregation.

Paul continued with exhortations that they were to keep the feast, remember Christ our Passover, and to be unleavened. All these instructions are found in the 1 Corinthians 5. As we read these Scriptures today, let's keep in mind that Paul is implying the importance that is incorporated in the Exodus 12:14 Scripture to "keep the feast."

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (KJV).

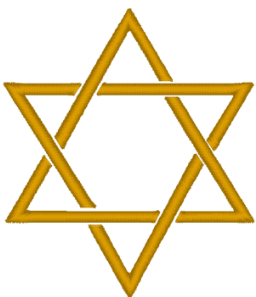
The Christian church has done a wonderful job of teaching about communion. However, there are many more significant revelations to ponder about the *matzah tash*.

First, the *matzah* represents our Savior. Next, notice that He is "wrapped in a fine-white linen cloth." Then, when the rabbi reveals the word *hide* has the Hebrew meaning of *buried*, you see that the *afikomen* is representative of Christ being buried.

The *afikomen* comes during the twelfth step of the Passover seder. The name *afikomen* has two camps of interpretation wherein only one Messianic camp states, "I have come." The other mainline Messianic camps, because of the children's tradition of returning the *afikomen* to the head table, uses the interpretation of "I will return."

When the rabbi explains that the word *afikomen* means "I will return," you see the wonder of the "children of God" sent to find the *afikomen*. They have found the *afikomen* and gather at the head table to receive their reward. This is a symbolic picture of the return of our Messiah.

This is only a brief look at the meaningful symbolisms in the Passover. I hope this will give you the understanding of why God commanded all generations to "keep the feast" and to teach the burial and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ. I pray you all have a joyous and blessed Passover! □



"Passover has become God's object lesson for the present and future generations of Jews and Christians."

Why Physical Fitness Needs to Become a Spiritual **PRIORITY**

Too many ministers neglect their health—and they pay for it with low energy and illness. It's time to adopt a new fitness regimen.



BY J. LEE
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who directs The Mordecai Project, an international outreach focused on confronting gender-based violence. For 18 years he served as an editor with Charisma magazine, and he is the author of several books including the newly released *Set My Heart on Fire*, a Bible study on the Holy Spirit. He and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia.

More than a year ago I faced a sad reality in the mirror: I was getting fat. I was beginning to resemble the overweight preachers I had seen going back for third helpings at the Sunday afternoon all-you-can-eat buffet line.

At first I tried to ignore my weight gain by cropping photos and adjusting my belt. But the numbers on the scale weren't lying. I told myself I didn't have time to exercise or eat right because my ministry kept me too busy. I had more "spiritual" things to do than exercise.

But finally I made a powerful decision to reclaim my life. I got ruthless, sort of like when Jesus went into the temple with His whip. I slashed all white bread, sugar, junk food and sodas from my diet. I joined a gym. And I started an exercise routine that I can do anywhere, even in a hotel room.

After one year, I've lost weight and gained muscle—and I feel better than I have in years, even though I faced enormous stress in 2016 because of a move. My progress has motivated me to get even more fit in 2017. And it has helped me realize that physical

fitness is not something optional—especially for those of us in ministry.

I won't win a popularity contest for saying this, but it's true: The American church is fat—and ministers are sometimes the biggest sinners when it comes to overeating. This may be one key reason we don't address bad eating habits from the pulpit. If a preacher is hiding his huge stomach with his Sunday jacket, he's certainly not going to deliver a sermon about gluttony.

The result? Sometimes our congregants copy our undisciplined lifestyles. Too many Christians today are fat, out of shape and sick.

We preachers eat out often—and restaurants are notorious for serving unhealthy foods. We also tend to eat late. We have crazy, unpredictable schedules so we have no time for workouts. And we often stay emotionally drained because of the demands of preaching and counseling—which means we are tempted to snack on comfort foods.

So here's my attempt to confront this issue. Here are three reasons why physical fitness needs to move up your list of priorities:

1. BECAUSE YOU SHOULD GLORIFY GOD WITH YOUR BODY.

I know Christians who would love to go on a mission trip, participate in a three-day fast or lead a weekly discipleship group for teenagers. But they never do these things because they are limited by their physical stamina. Some of us are simply too overweight, too tired or too out of shape to engage in any type of rigorous ministry.

Yet the New Testament teaches that our spirituality can't be separated from the physical. The apostle Paul wrote: "What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Paul's powerful words, in their context, refer to the importance of sexual purity. Sexual sin is wrong because we should never do with our bodies what would offend the indwelling Holy Spirit. So if this is true for immoral types of sex, is it not also true when we fill our bodies with drugs, alcohol or unhealthy food?

In New Testament times, Gnostic heretics taught that a Christian can love God and yet engage in any kind of immoral sin because it is physical, not spiritual. Yet Paul denounced this by saying: "Therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20b). Today we still preach against sexual sin, yet gluttony is no longer considered a sin in most churches. Instead, we laugh about it while we pass the cheesecake and the onion rings.

2. BECAUSE HOW YOU CONTROL YOUR APPETITE AFFECTS EVERY OTHER AREA OF YOUR LIFE.

Part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control (see Gal. 5:23). Yet in the church today, we have created a culture of overeating—and then we wonder why some Christians fall into porn addiction, adultery or gambling. The truth is that we have sanctioned food addiction as "acceptable flesh"—and we are reaping the consequences.

Jacob's brother, Esau, sold his birthright for a bowl of stew because his appetite controlled his judgment. Many Christians have done the same. We forfeit certain spiritual blessings simply because we can't say no to food.

3. BECAUSE YOU WANT TO LIVE A LONG AND FRUITFUL LIFE.

I decided to get serious about fitness last year because I'm getting older, and I want to make the biggest possible mark on the next generation before I die. It's a lie that you can't be fit in your 50s or 60s. I want to be like the biblical Caleb, who testified that he was as strong at age 85 as he was at age 40.

God has promised the righteous a long life, but that isn't an automatic

guarantee. Long life requires wisdom, which includes healthy eating, regular exercise, proper rest and stress management.

When we binge regularly on pizzas, sodas and glazed donuts and fill our bodies with processed foods full of

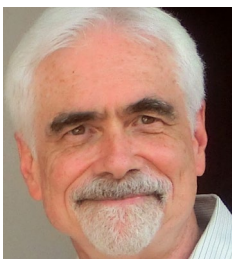
chemicals, we shouldn't be surprised when we end up with diabetes, heart ailments, high blood pressure and an early funeral. Don't eat for the moment. Always keep tomorrow in mind when you are looking at the menu.

Jesus called His followers disciples, a term that means "disciplined ones." Yet how many of us would honestly say we are disciplined in the area of food and fitness? I challenge you to make this your goal in the coming year. Be a disciple. The decision you make today to get healthy will reap countless benefits—not only for you, but also for those you love. ■

"Gluttony is no longer considered a sin in most churches. Instead, we laugh about it while we pass the cheesecake and the onion rings."

The Kingdom of God is Here ... and **IT IS COMING**

How can God's promised reign be now—and in the future? We are witnessing a glorious process.



BY RUSSELL
BOARD

RUSSELL BOARD and his wife, Sandra, have served with IPHC World Missions for more than 30 years. Since 2002, Russell has served as Continental Director of World Missions for the Asia/Pacific region, overseeing IPHC work in 19 countries. He authored Sunday school curriculum for LifeSprings for 15 years, and his books *First Things First* and *Grow* are used by many IPHC churches in the United States and abroad. Russell and Sandra reside in Saitama, Japan.

What did Jesus preach about more than anything else? The kingdom of God. Jesus began His itinerant ministry by proclaiming: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17, NASB). Over the next three and a half years He elaborated on this theme, and it became the major focus of His teaching and His parables.

Matthew, in his gospel, usually spoke of the kingdom of heaven rather than the kingdom of God, but the expressions are equivalent—and we can be confident that Jesus used both.

Unfortunately, the phrase “kingdom of heaven” can reinforce a mistaken idea held by people in Jesus’ day as well as in ours. The thinking goes like this: I’m on earth, not in heaven, so the kingdom of God is not here. Heaven is in the future, not the present, so the kingdom of God is not yet.

But Jesus’ words were aimed specifically at this misconception. “The kingdom is at hand,” He said. In the person of the King, the kingdom is here and now.

The present reality of the kingdom of God necessitates an immediate response of repentance, a fundamental change in thought and behavior. The present reality of this kingdom calls for

a radical reevaluation of the assumptions and priorities that guide our choices and direct our lives.

In the minds of many today, religion deals with a fantasy world, disconnected from reality as they know it. Religion represents going to church, singing hymns, saying prayers, practicing rituals, reading stories and obeying rules from an archaic book—fine for people who have faith.

But religion has no place in the halls of government, the classroom, the workplace, the science laboratory, the corporate boardroom, the newsroom or the city street. Religion may have something to say about the afterlife, but it is cut off from real life here and now.

To those who think like this, Jesus' words come with jarring force. The kingdom of God is not pie in the sky for the remote future, nor a spiritual dreamland imagined by people with their heads in the clouds. The kingdom of God is at hand. It's a reality now.

Jesus did not preach about His kingdom only in the temple or synagogue. He preached it to everyone, everywhere—to the fishermen by the lake, to the tax collector at the tollbooth, to the merchant in the marketplace, to the massive crowds on the hillside and to the lonely woman at the well.

Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God is not about religion, however we might define that term. It cannot be sealed off within the walls of a church or compartmentalized to certain sectors of life. The kingdom of God is not religion, but reality.

Its presence permeates the halls of government, the classroom, the workplace, and all the rest. As Abraham Kuyper said: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

Wake up to reality, Jesus urges us. Wake up to the kingdom of God. Its reach and its power are limitless. To be sure, the power of His kingdom is not political, martial, financial or technological. His Kingdom operates through more potent forces that are sourced in the heavenly realm: faith, hope, and love.

But don't expect the works of the kingdom of God to be reported on the nightly news. God usually works behind the scenes, not in front of the cameras. From time to time He will part a Red Sea, tear down the walls of a Jericho or Berlin or bring down apparently invincible evil empires (such as Persia, Rome, Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union).

But more often He works quietly, in and through

anonymous individuals. As a rule, it requires eyes of faith to see what is going on in His kingdom.

Though the kingdom of God is present in our midst, most remain blind to it (see Luke 17:20–21). Indeed, Jesus said only those who have experienced spiritual rebirth can see His kingdom in operation (John 3:3). But the blindness or ignorance of those who are spiritually dead does not affect the reality of God's reign, or hinder the accomplishment of His purposes in the world.

We might wonder why, if Jesus declares that the kingdom of God is a present reality, He also instructs us to pray for the coming of the kingdom (Matthew 6:9–10). Why do we need to pray for something that is already present?

It is because the kingdom is not yet here in its fullness. It is progressive like Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:33, "...

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." It must permeate the whole earth.

Paul reminds us that God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). The kingdom of God is not the only kingdom in town. The presence of the kingdom of darkness is all too evident, and its works are reported in the news daily.

That is why Jesus preached: "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Repentance entails a change of allegiance from one kingdom to another.

Though we live under the shadow of darkness, we live as children of the light, children of the kingdom of God.

We pray for and look forward to the return of Christ our King, who will eliminate the kingdom of darkness once and for all. He has already defeated the powers of darkness, and won total victory over sin, death and the devil. The outcome is not in doubt. But His victory is not yet manifest as it will be, when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10).

Now we live in the age between the victory and its consummation. The kingdom is here, but not in its fullness. The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Wherever God has placed us, we demonstrate our allegiance to Christ by living with kingdom vision, kingdom values, kingdom priorities and kingdom purposes.

In next month's article, we will examine what this means in more detail. □

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