

## STANDARD A: WHO IS JESUS AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW HIM?

### Lesson 3: What Is the Kingdom of God?

#### Introduction

Jesus and His disciples traveled about in the country where they lived. As they traveled Jesus preached and taught all who would listen. He did many wonderful things. He healed sick people, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. Jesus taught many things. One of the most important things Jesus talked about was the kingdom of God. He talked about this topic many times.

One time Jesus and His disciples journeyed through some villages (Luke 8:1). In each village He stopped and told the people the kingdom of God had appeared in Him. God had brought the kingdom of God to earth in His Son Jesus. People should receive the Kingdom as Good News from God. The Good News was that God loves all people and wants all people to be His children.

This was very good news for people who thought because they were sinners God did not love them. Many people thought they were hopeless before God. They feared the kingdom of God would be bad news for them. They thought God wanted only to punish them for their sins. Some poor people thought God had already punished them by making them poor. They thought they had been left out. So they were greatly surprised to hear what Jesus said about God. Hopeless people flocked to Him. They listened carefully as He told them about God's love.

Jesus surprised many people when He said the kingdom of God belonged to the poor and the hungry (Luke 6:20-21). This made many people angry. They thought God should love only them. Because of their good deeds, they thought only they should receive the Good News of the Kingdom. They thought they were already good. So, God should limit His love to them. Instead, Jesus turned to sinners and told them about God's grace. He told them about God's desire to bring all people to himself. Anyone who would receive the rule of God and let Him change them could enter the kingdom of God.

So the kingdom of God came to earth in Jesus, who was crucified and raised to new life. The Good News that Jesus preached was that the kingdom of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness had come. All who would repent, turn from their sins, and receive the Kingdom as little children could enter the kingdom of God. The Kingdom would come to them. To those who heard and understood, this was good news. Those who did not love and long for God's kingdom in this way

were angry. In fact, the enemies of God's kingdom of mercy and love finally put Jesus to death.

### **A. The Kingdom of God Came in Jesus.**

The picture of the kingdom of God can be seen in all that Christ said and did. (See Luke 1:47-55.) In this scripture, Luke tells us that Christ extends God's mercy to all who will receive Him. He scatters the proud and arrogant who think they do not need God's grace. He brings down arrogant people from their thrones. The King fills the hungry with good things according to the promises He made to Abraham and his descendants.

To receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ means we will embrace the kingdom of God in all things. Apart from the Kingdom there is no good news. Apart from accepting the kingdom of God, a person just remains in his or her sins. Unless God's kingdom becomes the pattern for one's life, he or she has neither really heard nor received Christ.

In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, He showed perfect obedience to the reign of God. In perfect obedience to His father, Jesus was the means through which the kingdom of God came to earth. Luke describes a number of instances in which Jesus said that in Him God's kingdom had come to earth. Some of these instances are as follows:

1. Jesus sent His disciples to preach in the confidence the kingdom of God had come (Luke 9:1-16).

2. On one occasion some Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus told them they were looking for the wrong signs. In Jesus the kingdom of God was already present among them. But they could not see it (Luke 11:16-30).

3. Once some enemies said that Jesus cast out demons by the power of the demons. Jesus rebuked them and said He cast out demons by the "finger of God." This is proof the kingdom of God has come. He showed how human life appears when lived in obedience to God. The reason Christians say Jesus was sinless is that He lived in unbroken obedience to His Heavenly Father (Luke 11:20).

Whenever we hear what Jesus said and did, it shows what God's reign on earth should look like. When Jesus was baptized, He showed His submission and obedience to His Father. The same was true when Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). He obeyed His

Father by forgiving sinners (Luke 5:20), raising the dead (Luke 7:11-17), and blessing children (Luke 18:15-17).

Jesus' perfect obedience to His Father led to His crucifixion. Jesus was crucified by those who rejected the kingdom that He presented. Even the real prospect of His death could not turn Jesus away from His radical obedience to the Father's kingdom. He even spoke to His Heavenly Father about removing the horrors of trial, rejection, and death. Nevertheless, His desire to obey His Father was even stronger (Luke 22:39-42). On the Cross, forsaken by His disciples, falsely condemned by His enemies, Jesus gave His life. He willingly surrendered His all for the kingdom of God. He even took upon himself our sins. Through His death and resurrection, Christ provided salvation for us all.

**Question:**What is the Good News Jesus proclaimed?

**Question:**What is the kingdom of God like? Give some examples.

**Question:**How did God show people what the kingdom of God is like?

## **B. The Kingdom of God Is in Jesus' disciples.**

Through Jesus' radical obedience to the kingdom of God, Jesus made a way of salvation for all persons everywhere. Our salvation comes through Christ's obedience. Part of His obedience to His Father was to take upon himself our sins. He willingly took upon himself our sins, which causes our separation from God. And He made a way for sinners to return to God.

Jesus was crucified by people who rejected God's reign that Jesus proclaimed and practiced. (Read again Luke 1:47-55.) God rebukes the arrogant and puts down those who hate justice and mercy. God shuts the mouths of those who are proud of the salvation they can create and boast of. He rebukes those who seek power so that they can abuse others. God rebukes those who brag about their own accomplishments, or who love wealth more than they love Him and others (Luke 18:18-25). He casts out those who try to use God for their own selfish purposes (Luke 19:45).

But God receives all those who will receive His Kingdom (Luke 6:20-21). He lifts up the fallen (Luke 7:36-50). He shows tender mercy to those who repent of their sins (Luke 15:18-24). He honors those who will live in radical faith and obedience (Luke 9:23-26). God gives himself to those who will receive Him as obedient children (Luke 18:15-17). He restores to His fellowship all those who will turn from their evil ways and live in obedience to Him (Luke 19:1-10).

Throughout our lives we will continue to grow as Jesus' disciples. Even Christians who have been Jesus' disciples for many years want to learn more about how to follow Him. One mature disciple of Jesus in the New Testament described His Christian growth in this way: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Growing as Jesus' disciples will involve many things. The most important part is that we learn more and more what Jesus taught us about God. And we then permit Christ to make our increased understanding a part of our lives. Learning more means to be changed more. The picture of God Jesus gives us is the most important way to learn and grow. He is the one who shows us what God is like. We say that He reveals God. So we study the first four books of the New Testament in which the life of Jesus is presented. But the rest of the New Testament is very important also. In the rest of the New Testament some great Christian teachers were inspired by God. They enlarged our understanding of what it means to be in Christ and to be a part of His Church. All of the New Testament and all of the Bible teach us how to be God's people.

**Question:** Who are the people God receives into His kingdom? Think about the Bible verses you studied in the Book of Luke.

**Question:** How do we grow as Jesus' disciples?

## **Conclusion**

In the Book of Luke, we learn many things Jesus taught us about God. As we go through the three standards of *Following Jesus*, we will learn more and more about the life of Jesus. We will learn how He reveals God to us. And we learn how to follow Him in all things. Most importantly, as the Book of Luke teaches us, God loves all sinners and wants to forgive them of their sins. He permits nothing to stand in the way of reaching people who are lost. Like the good shepherd, He searches until He finds the lost sheep. Like the loving father, He forgives and restores the lost son (Luke 15).

But the Book of Luke and all of the New Testament teach us more than what God is like. They also teach us what God wants His disciples to be like because of His Kingdom in them. In Christ's resurrection, God makes clear He has won the battle against all that stands against His rule in us and in the world. His Son fought against all those powers that try to separate us from God, from one another, and from ourselves. But in Christ, all those powers have been defeated. In Christ's resurrection God publicly humiliated all things that challenge God's righteous reign. Through Christ, God sets up His righteous reign in us.

**Activity:** Think of one way you can show someone else what it means to be part of the kingdom of God. Now, share this with your teacher or discipleship group.