

GROWING IN GOD PODCAST



GIG26 – Seek Ye First the Kingdom

As we begin this new year, I'm burdened to talk about the Kingdom of God. So I want to name this podcast, "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God." In this podcast I want to show the emphasis in the Gospels that Yeshua (Jesus) and the disciples had on the Kingdom of God. It was their central theme and focus. In Christianity today it seems that the central focus really is on the Church. And as I listened to the teaching of many, I don't believe that the term *Church* and the Kingdom of God can be used interchangeably with the doctrines that are being described. It would be important at this point to teach on the Greek term *ekklesia*, which is translated in the English Bible as "church." And to define what Yeshua meant by that term the three times that He used it in the Gospels. He did speak that term *ekklesia*, but what did He mean? Well, for that we will have to wait for another podcast, but it would be important to get to.

So now let us turn our focus to God's Kingdom. In Matthew 6:33, it says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." It is also in Matthew 6 that Yeshua teaches the disciples to pray. And how are they taught? They are taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, KJV). So let us study this emphasis then that Yeshua had and that the Gospels give on the Kingdom of God and see how we can make it our focus today.

First we begin with John the Baptist who came preaching the Kingdom of God. Yeshua then of course followed up after his arrest and continued to preach the Kingdom of God. We begin in Matthew 3:1–3,

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said,

"THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"

We continue with Mark 1:14–15,

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Just to clarify, in case there is any confusion, there is no difference in the Gospels between the terminology *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God*. They are referring to the same thing. Now according to Yeshua, His calling in ministry was to proclaim that the time was complete and now the Kingdom of God is at hand.

In Luke 4:43–44, we see,

But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

That is a powerful statement that Yeshua Himself would say, "I was sent for this purpose." What purpose? The purpose of proclaiming and preaching the Kingdom of God. Now in this day and age of two thousand years of Church, I think that our emphasis is on Church. Yet that was not the emphasis that Yeshua proclaimed, and it was not the purpose that He proclaimed. He was sent to preach and to speak that the time was fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God was at hand.

In Luke 8:1, it says,

Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him.

So the disciples were following Yeshua, and they were learning this focus of proclaiming in every city and preaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Yeshua also commissioned His disciples and sent them out to preach that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

In Matthew 10:5–7, it says,

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

So Yeshua taught and commissioned the disciples to preach the gospel, that is, the good news of the Kingdom of God. Following His resurrection and prior to His ascension, Yeshua commissioned the apostles to make disciples of the nations. What were those disciples to be doing? They were to preach the good news, the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 28:19–20 says,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The apostles were to make disciples of the nations and teach those disciples to do all that Yeshua had commanded them to do. What had He commissioned and commanded them to do? He had commanded them to go and preach saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7). The disciples understood exactly what the term *kingdom of God* meant in their day and age and what it meant to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand. However, without being educated in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jewish understanding and teaching about the kingdom, it is not easily understood.

Someone today who was only reading from the New Testament, which most believers do only read the New Testament. But when you only look at the New Testament, it is difficult to grasp what Yeshua is teaching about the Kingdom of God. They find themselves sometimes confused by the very terminology. The Kingdom of God is not necessarily defined or described in the Gospels because Yeshua was an observant Jew in His day. And He was speaking and teaching primarily to the Jews as He told the disciples, "Look, don't go into the Samaritan cities. Don't go into other cities, only go into the Jewish cities." They were doing this proclamation about the Kingdom of God within the context of Judaism, within the context of the Jewish people, the Jewish cities that were established at that time—that was the primary focus. And since Yeshua was raised as an observant Jew, and He was speaking primarily to a Jewish audience who already had the Hebraic understanding of the Kingdom of God, the concept of the Kingdom of God and the purpose of the messianic appearance in Israel for them was very clear in that day. The Jews understood. They listened to the teaching of Yeshua. In fact, they were anticipating that

teaching and they were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. So none of this to them in their day and in the context of their lives was unusual, and it was not a confusion to them. They absolutely understood the terminology the *kingdom of God*, the *kingdom of heaven*.

As we find the Lord coming and beginning to teach in the Gospels, we see over and over again these terms being used. We see parables being taught about the Kingdom. We see teaching about the Kingdom. We see so much discussion about the days of the Kingdom of God, the days of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet really as we go read of it today in the Gospels, it is not thoroughly described to us because again, the Lord was addressing an audience which already had that understanding. So they were understanding the teaching of Yeshua. Not only that, as I said, for years all of their lives they had been anticipating the coming of Messiah. And the coming of Messiah signaled to them the coming of the Kingdom of God, which He was to inaugurate, which the Messiah was to inaugurate when He appeared.

This is clearly seen in the conversation between Christ and His apostles in Acts 1:3–8. “To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). After the resurrection what is Yeshua teaching to the disciples and discussing with them when He appears to them? He is speaking to them of the things concerning the Kingdom of God. And verse four goes on to say,

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” (Acts 1:4–8)

This is very, very telling. The understanding of those apostles, of the disciples, was that when the Messiah appeared that He would announce and then begin to bring about the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in Israel. So they believed He was the Messiah. Obviously, they were anticipating the next step, which they understood the Kingdom of God being restored to Israel as they discuss with Him in verse 6, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” So they knew of the Kingdom that had existed in Israel under King David, under Solomon. They knew the prophecies that had come about the Kingdom of David. They knew the prophecies from the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel that related to the Kingdom of God. And they are asking Him, “Will you now bring about and establish in this earth, the Kingdom that was prophesied to be and to be manifest in Israel?” It is a natural question because again, they were not confused. What is the Kingdom of God? They knew exactly what to anticipate and to expect, and therefore they were reaching for it and asking Him.

If we as disciples are to seek first the Kingdom of God and to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God and make disciples of all the nations so they likewise can go and preach that the Kingdom of God is at hand, then there needs to be teaching that clearly, scripturally educates and defines to Christians what that good news is of the Kingdom of God and ends the confusion about what is meant by Church and what is meant by the Kingdom of God on this earth. So we are reaching for this. The Scripture clearly tells us that we should be seeking first the Kingdom and His righteousness, and then all other things will be added to us. But if we don't quite have this clear understanding of the Kingdom, then how

are we to walk in this reality? How are we to fulfill the scriptural mandate that we've been given to seek first the Kingdom of God? Well, what I want to do is to give some clarity for us. I'm going to give four points of emphasis. And at first I'll read these four points; they are points of emphasis. They're obviously not everything that could be said about the Kingdom of God or our focus on it, but I want to read the points. I want to give you the points and then I will give details for each of these points and reiterate them back to you, all right?

How do we as Christians today seek first the Kingdom? Number one, I think by giving ourselves to study and discover what Yeshua meant in the Gospels when He said the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven. Number two, by submitting our lives to the Lordship of Christ. We must make Him our Lord and our King and strive to live in obedience to His will. Thirdly, by living in prayer and proclamation that "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on this earth as it is in heaven." And number four, by proclaiming Messiah and His Kingdom to the world and announcing the need of repentance from our bonds and disobedience to His kingdom. Now let me flesh out a little bit these points, but I want you to remember them very carefully.

Going back to point number one, what do I mean by giving ourselves to study and discover what Yeshua meant in the Gospels when He said the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven? I think we can begin that process by reading the Gospels. Once again start at Matthew. Go through all four Gospels; read them carefully. As you are reading, focus on Him speaking and teaching and giving parables, and how those parables in those teachings are related to the Kingdom of God and talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. Something else we can do is to find a good Jewish resource that talks to us about the Jewish beliefs, the beliefs in Judaism even today about the Messiah and about the Kingdom. Do we realize that one of the thirteen pillars of Judaism is faith in the Messiah? Now I know that as we have been influenced by supersessionism and replacement theology, most Christians believe, "Well, there is no faith for Messiah. And when the Messiah came, they missed the Messiah." That is really, really not true. Number one, remember that for the first fifteen years or more of the Church there were only Jews within the Church. So to say that the Jews miss the Church and rejected the Messiah means that there would not be a Church. So it is impossible that the Jewish people as a whole, there were thousands upon thousands after the ascension of Yeshua that believed in Him and were a part of the formation of that Church. But what we've got to realize is that as they came into and began that early Church, their focus and their understanding was still around the fact that He was Messiah. And one of the main purposes of Messiah is to establish the Kingdom of God and to restore the Kingdom of God on earth into Israel. So I encourage you, get in and study about it.

Don't be taken over by a lot of the belief system that has tried to bring the division between Christianity and Judaism. There needs to be a healing of that deception. And there needs to be a great understanding that Christians today, Gentile Christians have about the Messiah and about the Kingdom from another perspective than just what is meant in Church and what is meant in salvation. It is a much broader picture than that. And the Jewish people had that, the disciples themselves, the apostles, they understood that the followers of Yeshua during His time on earth and even as we see following the resurrection. In fact, they probably had less understanding at the moment about what the resurrection really meant than they did of a surety of what the Messiah meant and what the Kingdom of God was going to be about. So I think as the first point, we need to really get in and study. We need to do our homework. We need to reread the Gospels. We need to find this emphasis that Yeshua said, "I've come to preach and proclaim that the time is now over, and the Kingdom of God is at hand." We need to make this real. I beg you, do your homework on this point.

Number two is we need to submit our lives to the Lordship of Christ. We must make Him our Lord and our King and strive to live in obedience to His will. There were things that the Lord gave us to do. One is what we are talking about in this podcast. We are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things will be added to us. He told us if we loved Him, we would keep His commandments, His commandments to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. There were very direct things that the Lord did. Even if we don't have the most clear, concise understanding at this point of what He meant by the Kingdom of God and what is meant by the Kingdom of Heaven, we still can be obedient to Him. We can submit our hearts to Him as the Messiah, as the Christ, the Anointed One. And we can install Him as King over our lives; to be anointed, to be Christ meant to be the King. And so when we say *Christ*, we're saying, "the Anointed." When we say *Messiah*, we're saying, "the Anointed." We're not saying *salvation*; we're saying, "the Anointed One." And the *Anointed One* means "the one who God establishes as King." He is our King. He is our Lord and Christ. So this idea, even if there is not a tremendous clarity, maybe there is even a confusion in your life about what is the Kingdom of God all about. We can still present our hearts and our lives and our spirits to Him and say, "You are my Lord. You are my King. I make You my King." And what is it that we do in relationship to a king? We are obedient. We serve the King. We are obedient to His instructions, to His Word. We can give ourselves in obedience to the Lord, to the King, to the Messiah. As we do that, as we give ourselves in dedication, the revelation of His Kingdom will come to us and clarify.

Point number three was by living in prayer and proclamation. One of the greatest things we have as believers is the prayer that the Lord taught His disciples, and it begins, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. [Sanctified be Thy name.] Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9–10, KJV). We are to pray every day that His Kingdom come to this earth. And I think we've lost that impetus with a focus in Church about heaven. We see people die. Where do they go? They go to heaven. And it is almost like we have transitioned as a Church to believe that the Kingdom of God is only in heaven. It's a heavenly place. We don't emphasize the reality that Christ came in the first appearing to do and accomplish certain works in the anointing of who He is as King, but He returns to earth. Again we tend to confuse that when we're taught so much about a rapture; while the Rapture gives this idea where we are pulled up into heaven there to be always with the Lord. We are not to be in heaven always with the Lord. He is coming to establish an earthly Kingdom as it was said through all the Scriptures, through all the prophets, through Christ Himself in the parable about the ruler who went away to get a kingdom and then bring it back. He will bring a Kingdom back and establish it on the earth. And that is why we need to understand what the Kingdom of God is. But again if we don't have the clearest understanding, we can be obedient to the way He taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We are not to pray for the establishment of His Kingdom in heaven. We're to pray for the Kingdom that has been established in heaven to be brought into this earth. That should be our prayer. That should be our proclamation.

Number four, we talk about proclaiming Messiah and His Kingdom to the world. We should constantly be telling the world about Messiah, about the King who is coming to the earth to rule and reign in this earth. We are to speak these things into the world and teach people who are not yet believers that there is a Kingdom to come. It is going to affect every nation. It is going to affect every government. It is going to affect every person. Every knee will bow. And every tongue will confess that He is the Lord, that He is the King. We need to announce that coming Kingdom because as it was announced by John the Baptist and Yeshua Himself. There is a need for repentance. So we not only announce that the Kingdom is coming. We announce to the world once again, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"

(Matthew 3:2). And we must repent of all bonds, of all other allegiances and alliances that we have, of all disobedience that is in us to His Kingdom. We must bring that in and pull that out of our lives. Again when we see really what the Kingdom of God is, it brings into our hearts, minds, and spirits a drive to get rid of every other allegiance, to get rid of every other bondage, to get rid of every disobedience within us, and submit ourselves wholly and completely to His Kingdom.

I want to read these points again so that you have this emphasis. Number one, we give ourselves to study and discover what Yeshua meant in the Gospels when He said, "The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven." Number two, we submit our lives to the Lordship of Christ. We must make Him now today our Lord, our King, and strive to live in obedience to His will every day of our lives. Number three, we live in prayer and proclamation: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on this earth, Lord, today as it is now and already in heaven." Lastly, by proclaiming to all the earth Messiah and His Kingdom, that it is coming and that as it comes, there is a need for all of us to repent of other allegiances, of all disobedience, and those things that take us away and distract us from being given to and focusing on that Kingdom. We are to seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness; all other things will be added to us. Shalom.