

## **The Kingdom of God**

John 3:1-8

Series: The Kingdom Project

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I am so excited about this new series we are beginning today. I introduced this whole concept, *The Kingdom Project* to our staff team this week in our Staff Advance. Twice a year we as a staff team, take a day and intentionally set it apart to pray together. We typically will worship together and it just an opportunity for us to get on the same page as it relates to mission and vision so that as a team, we are all hopefully moving and leading the church to move in the same direction.

If you've been here in the last year, you know we introduced what we call a FOCUS statement that we wanted to serve as a filter so to speak to help us prioritize what we do AND what we fund as a church. It was on that intro video. Here it is on the screen for you:

**Champion Forest advances the Kingdom by making disciples (FOCUS priority #1), loving our community (FOCUS priority #2) and strengthening the Church (FOCUS priority #3).**

This new series is all about highlighting and looking in detail at the first part of that statement and that is *Champion Forest advance the Kingdom*.

What do we mean when we use the word "kingdom"? It's NOT the kingdom of Champion Forest. The world doesn't revolve around us, and our calling is NOT to simply expand our influence as a church.

Now, we know that to whom much is given, much is required and God has blessed us as a congregation:

- We certainly want to use our resources from both a people and money standpoint to bless others and encourage others...
- We want to leverage everything we have knowing that eternity is at stake and so where we CAN influence and expand and grow...

We want to do that – that's part of the strengthening the Church (Big C FOCUS priority) but ultimately, it's NOT about us! It's NOT about growing our little kingdom here in Northwest Houston. It's about advancing the kingdom of God.

And that's the title of the message today: **The Kingdom of God**

**Illus. Romania** - Now, I first had the idea to do a message series like this way back in 2013. In fact, to prove that to you, I brought a picture from my journal in 2013 (**SHOW PIC**).

I remember I was flying into Romania on a mission trip and as I looked out my window, I saw so many homes stretched out across the landscape, and I just sensed a burden growing in my

heart...it was a burden...a sense of urgency that I felt concerning how all those people in all of those homes would hear the gospel.

I knew we had radio and internet and television and even missionaries and pastors that were serving in local churches and different places attempting to take the gospel to people...but I also knew that even with all of these resources and all these different types of churches and ministries taking place...EVEN then there were just too many people to reach.

How could we ever ensure they ALL heard the good news that Jesus died on a cross for their sins and was that he was raised to life championing sin and death forever? How would they ever hear that the God who created them is the only one who could give their life purpose and meaning today.

It was in those moments that I believe the Lord impressed on my heart that the solution to getting the message of Christ, NOT just to every single person in Romania, but:

- every single person in Houston, Texas...
- every single person in your neighborhood...
- every single person in your office complex or school...

THE solution to getting the gospel to them, is you! It's me! And that's what this Kingdom Project series is all about.

We're going to discuss over the next seven weeks the topic Jesus spoke MORE about than anything other topic in scripture – The Kingdom of God. We're going to define it AND we're going to discover what our specific role in the Kingdom is NOT only as a church, but as individuals.

*The Kingdom Project*...this series is a dream, and I'm asking you to dream with me.

- What it would look like if every single member of Champion Forest woke up every single day with an intense desire to do as our church FOCUS statement suggests, and that is to “advance the Kingdom”?
- What would it look like if we prayed Kingdom prayers as Jesus taught? If we discovered and lived out our Kingdom purpose - using the skills, education, passion, and gifting God has entrusted to each of us to help further the mission he gave us?

I believe on a personal level, we would experience the abundant life Jesus promised, and in the process we would make a massive Kingdom impact that could change and transform our lives, the communities in which we live, and every place we ever go.

And so, let's get started today and let's begin by defining what we mean when we use the word “kingdom” or the phrase “kingdom of God”.

**Graeme Goldsworthy** is an Anglican theologian from Australia summarizes the Kingdom of God as, "**God's people in God's place under God's rule.**"

**Robby Gallaty** – “**The kingdom of heaven** (this and kingdom of God is used interchangeably in scripture) **is the work of God in the world today through kingdom citizens. It’s not just a realm to enter but also a ruling of God over our present life.**”

**Rene Padilla** – “**The gospel is the good news concerning the kingdom, and the kingdom is God’s rule over the totality of life.**”

**Jeremy Treat** – “**God’s reign through God’s people over God’s place.**”

So, to sum it all up, we could define it like this. **Kingdom: The realm of God’s rule and reign through his people**

Now, as mentioned, Jesus speaks more about the kingdom than any other topic or subject. In fact, most of his teachings that we are aware of are in the context of him teaching about the kingdom of God. His ministry is bookended in this way.

**Matt. 4:17** – “**Matt. 4:17** – “**From that time** (from the start of his earthly ministry) **Jesus began to preach saying, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven** (kingdom of God) **is at hand.**”

He concludes his earthly ministry as he is ascending to the Father and says to his disciples.

**Acts 1:6-9** – “**So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”** (As I will show you this is what Jesus had talked about...what he had told them he was preparing them for!) <sup>7</sup> **He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.** <sup>8</sup> **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** (extend my rule and reign through the whole earth)<sup>9</sup> **And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.**”

Now, when we talk about the kingdom of God or Kingdom of heaven, we need to realize that there is an “already/not yet element” to what we are talking about.

Theologians call this an “inaugurated eschatology”. The end has already began. (begun...started!) Let me write it out like this and put it on the screen for you:

**The kingdom of God:**

- **Existed in eternity**
- **Initiated at the first coming of Jesus**
- **Inaugurated at the resurrection of Jesus**
- **Consummated at the return of Jesus**

This is what I mean when I say there is an already/not yet component to the kingdom. It's existed for all of eternity!

**Psalm 103:19** – “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.”

**Daniel 4:3** – “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.”

We see his rule and reign! He initiated his future Kingdom in his first coming – “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”.

**Luke 17:20-21** – “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

He inaugurated his future kingdom at his resurrection. His resurrection vindicated him as the sovereign Lord of all and now his kingdom expands as we are his witnesses in the whole earth testifying to his Kingship (Matt. 28, Acts 1).

And he will consummate his Kingdom – fulfill it...complete it at his return. He will finish what he started by creating a new heaven and a new earth where we will live physically with him and rule with him forever and ever.

**Rev. 21:1-4** – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

**Illus. Confession** –I have interpreted so much of scripture through the lens of taking people to the kingdom of heaven, that I have failed to see that often times those very parables and teachings are NOT about the future and what is to come, but MORE about the here and now – I'll show you some of these in this series.

What I am learning as I have studied this kingdom terminology and theology is the importance of seeing the culmination of scripture in NOT going somewhere up there...it's not so much about earth getting to heaven, but the end game is to know and live like heaven has come to earth BECAUSE it has and it will!

This is the Kingdom...it's a different perspective! I call it the “pressbox perspective”.

**Illus. Cowboy Meme (show gif of floppy disk)**

So, if we go to the pressbox on this idea of Kingdom, we see it from the very beginning and it's a theme that is woven through the scripture, literally from start to finish.

Let me give you kind of an overarching theology of the kingdom.

**Gen 1:26-28** (Notice the “Kingship language – don’t miss it!)– **“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”** <sup>27</sup> **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** <sup>28</sup> **And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

We know what happens though...sin comes in the world and Adam and Eve make a decision that if you boil it down is about asserting themselves on the throne – they aren’t going to advance the kingdom of God, they are going to advance their own kingdom - and this is the essence of sin!

Sin is NOT just rebellion against God, it’s replacement of God. It’s dethroning God and putting self on the throne.

And as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin, instead of advancing the kingdom of God via the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden and they spread the curse of sin to all mankind – man doesn’t want God ruling his life!

You look at the Old Testament...from Adam we move to Abraham. It from Abraham and to Israel (rule and reign). He gave them his presence in the Temple, but what happened?

Time and again, sin hardened, they rejected his purpose to advance his kingdom rule and reign! They rejected his presence to the point that at the opening of the New Testament, they haven’t heard from God in over 400 years. His presence is gone!

And then Jesus comes. The king is finally here! BUT because he didn’t fit their picture of what a king and a kingdom looked like!

- They were looking for a political king...a military ruler!
- They were looking for someone who would deliver them from Roman occupation and establish a national rule and earthly kingdom!

And Jesus, listen to what he says to Pilate when asked if he is a king. Jesus doesn’t deny his kingship, he simply says in:

**John 18:36 – “Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world...”**

And so, the people reject their king once more. No king of theirs would wear a crown of thorns and suffer as Jesus did and die!

BUT this is the plan of God...this is how the curse of sin would be reversed (Gen. 3:15)...this is how the kingdom would be restored!

And even the death of Jesus can't stop the kingdom of God from advancing. Why?

Because Jesus, while he is rejected and put to death, he is then three days later raised to life. And when people follow him and trust him, he puts his Holy Spirit in them...and look at this...don't miss it!

We as humans who are created from the ground...we are but dust. God puts his Holy Spirit in us when we follow him, and now – WE – his prized creation – mankind, made in his image...when his Spirit lives IN us, we become a mixture of heaven and earth, and he entrusts to us the mission of advancing his kingdom around the world.

Listen to the Great Commission...same kingship language that was given in the Garden of Gethsemane:

**Matt. 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

What God started in the Garden of Eden, he remakes in the Garden where Jesus is raised. And we now have become his ambassadors, and we go into the world representing him and as we live, work and play – AND if we do it under his lordship...if we do it under his kingship, we are advancing his Kingdom.

In other words, what this series is about is NOT just living to take people to the kingdom of heaven up there! Ultimately Jesus will remake the heavens and earth and the kingdom of heaven is going to be down here.

Brazilian theologian, **Leonardo Boff** – **“The resurrection is a process that began with Jesus and that will go on until it embraces all creation.”**

In the resurrection, we have tasted the new creation. And as a “new creation in Christ”, we work to bring the kingdom of heaven that is already here/but not yet completed to people here on earth...AND as we spread his rule and reign, we give a watching world a foretaste an appetizer of the new creation to come.

**Illus. Appetizer**

Here's the question we have to answer though and we have to answer it as individuals. "Am I...are you a member...a citizen of the Kingdom of God?"

You don't get the abundant life Jesus offers now NOR do you get eternal life – life forever in the Kingdom without being a citizen of the kingdom.

And so, how does one become a citizen of the kingdom of God? It's a good question and it's one of the first questions Jesus answers in a conversation he had with a religious leader named Nicodemus.

Turn with me to John 3. Now, let me just set some context for you before we read this conversation.

First of all, Nicodemus was a learned man. From a religious and spiritual standpoint, we are talking:

- Uber spiritual...
- Brilliant scholar – he KNEW the scripture...
- Skilled in the law of God...
- Extremely prominent and very well-known...

And evidently, he is familiar with Jesus's ministry. Now, if you want to know what the final, fulfilled, completed, future Kingdom of God will look like there are two ways you can discover this.

First, one should be able to look at the kingdom, by looking at kingdom citizens – how we live our life, how we make decisions, how we treat one another. Our job is to reflect the king and as we work to bring heaven to earth we can make this world a better place and really show off what the future kingdom is going to look like once Jesus completely recreates it.

A second way...and the main way to know what the final consummated kingdom that we will live in IF we are kingdom citizens will look like is to just examine the life of Jesus.

Jesus was the embodiment of the Kingdom of God. So, think about what happened wherever Jesus went:

- Oppression ceased...
- Demons gone...
- The lame healed...
- The dead raised to life...
- Joy...
- The will of God done in perfection...

That's FUTURE life for us in the kingdom! Nicodemus saw Jesus and got a glimpse of the future kingdom...and his curiosity really got to him. Could this be the king that we have been waiting on?

So, he makes a decision to go to Jesus in the middle of the night. We don't know why.

- It could have been he was fearful of what others would think – how could someone of Nicodemus’s clout be seen conversing with a street preacher?
- It could have been that Nicodemus just wanted some private time with Jesus, afterall, wherever Jesus was, there were crowds.

We don’t know why Nicodemus came in the night, but he came and let’s listen in on the conversation because Jesus states in this conversation the exact way someone can become a citizen of the kingdom of God.

**John 3:1-3 – “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, (very respectful...means teacher) we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”** (signs! All the miracles Jesus performed had been prophesied about – when you see THIS happening, the Messiah...the king is here! And Jesus, he just cuts to the chase with Nicodemus – there is no beating around the bush here. Jesus answers a question that he knew was in the heart and mind of Nicodemus) <sup>3</sup> **Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

In other words, Nicodemus, you’re on to something, but it’s not your religion, pedigree or education that’s going to get you in the kingdom. How does one enter the kingdom?

“He MUST be BORN AGAIN”.

Commentator **Leon Morris** puts it like this: **“In one sentence Jesus sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for and demands that he be remade by the power of God.”**

If someone wants to be a citizen of heaven...of the kingdom of God – here’s the answer! You MUST BE BORN AGAIN.

What on earth does that mean? Nicodemus wanted to know the same thing!

**John 3:4-8 – “Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**

To be a citizen of the kingdom of God, one must be cleansed...forgiven...renewed.

Jesus is using language from the Old Testament here that Nicodemus would have immediately recognized. The prophet Ezekiel wrote of a time when the Messiah arrived that a spiritual



renewal and cleansing would take place. God would give his people a new spirit and a new heart...they would be “born again” – this birth is NOT physical, but spiritual!

But this “born again” or being “born from above” doesn’t happen on our own...it’s not something we can just conjure up! This is something God must do – the Spirit is like the wind – it blows where it wishes!

Being born again is something we can’t conjure up AND really, it’s not something we can explain...it must be experienced! Again, like the wind.

So, if we can’t conjure it up and we can’t explain it, how can we experience this new life?

Jesus walks Nicodemus through a story in the Old Testament. We see the grace of Christ in this as he uses language and terms and stories that would help Nicodemus better understand. If we were to keep reading John 3, we see Jesus using a story from the Old Testament – Numbers 21 to help Nicodemus understand how he can experience a new birth.

It culminates with Jesus telling him in **John 3:15** – “**that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**”

When we believe NOT just with our heads but with our hearts that Jesus is king and that as a king he died on a cross on a cross for our sins and was raised to life vindicating who he was as king and when we humbly requests to be a part of his kingdom – we get off the throne and enthrone him on our hearts – THIS is when we become citizens of the kingdom.

And so, I ask you, “Are you a citizen of the Kingdom?”

### **Lord’s Supper**

**Matt. 26:26-29** – “**Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”** <sup>27</sup> **And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,** <sup>28</sup> **for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.** <sup>29</sup> **I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”**

Appetizer...foretaste to come! When we take of this supper, we are yes, looking back, but we are also looking ahead to the day Jesus finishes what he started. This is life in the Kingdom of God.

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*