

In Mark (ch.14) Jesus says he will not drink again 'until he drinks **in** the Kingdom of God'.

Luke (ch.22) uses Kingdom of God in the context of Jesus not drinking again 'until the Kingdom of God **comes**'.

These are all different views about what the Kingdom means, presented according to the thoughts of each author.



# Jesus in the Gospels

## 11. The Kingdom in the Gospels

### The Kingdom and the Church

Matthew's Gospel is unique in identifying the Kingdom's present reality with the Christian community. This shows the influence of the early Christian communities on the formation of the Gospels. This is most clearly seen in chapter 18 (but also in ch.16 where authority and leadership is given to Peter) where guidelines for decision making within the church, for the resolution of conflict, and for handling sinners are all laid down, alongside the importance within the community of humility and good example. Matthew's is the only Gospel that uses the words ecclesia or 'church' to describe that community.

### The Kingdom is Present and Future

The dualistic presentation of the kingdom in the Gospels as both a present reality and future event is not a contradiction. Because he Jews were expecting an earthly Messianic king to inaugurate a new Davidic kingdom, Jesus was keen not to encourage or support this hope. So, while he preached the kingdom as being present or 'close at hand' this was as a spiritual kingdom centred on himself. And just as the parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast indicated, the kingdom was not yet totally fulfilled. That would not be achieved until he returned in glory at the final judgment.



### Questions tion

### For Reflec-

1. What is meant by the Kingdom?
2. Did Jesus say the Kingdom had arrived?
3. Why is there little emphasis on the Kingdom in John's Gospel?

## What is Meant by the Kingdom?

The Kingdom is the Kingdom of God. For the Jews of Jesus' time the Kingdom was intimately linked to the coming of the Messiah. As such, it was temporal and earthly and meant the establishment of a kingly state under the protection of Yahweh. The concept was part of Jewish apocalyptic literature that appeared after the exile, and laid stress on the coming of the Davidic Messiah, catastrophe, judgement and a new world order. Its beginnings can be seen in the books of Zechariah, Joel and especially Daniel with its image of the 'Son of Man' (ch.7). Jesus used the term several times in his preaching, but for him it meant something more complex.



## Jesus and the Kingdom

In the Gospels, Matthew has Jesus usually using the term Kingdom of Heaven, whilst Mark and Luke have him using Kingdom of God. This is a simple example of how difficult it is to ascertain Jesus' actual words, as the Gospel writers would amend sayings and situations to suit their own theological purpose. It might be that Matthew is reluctant to use God's name, but he is inconsistent in this because he also adopts the term Kingdom of God on three occasions (ch.12 & 21).

In Matthew's Gospel, addressed as it is to Jews, the Kingdom is presented in different ways. For John the Baptist it is **imminent** (ch.3) while Jesus often preaches it as a **present reality** (ch.4 and 9 'proclaiming the good news of the kingdom'), emphasised in the parable discourse (ch.13), in the dispute with the Pharisees about whether Jesus drives out demons by the power of Beelzebul (but here Jesus uses the term Kingdom of God), and in the parable of the Wedding Feast (ch.22) 'where many are invited but few are chosen'.

On other occasions, though, the phrase used by Jesus is that it is **close at hand** (ch.4 and 10). However, this may be Jesus' way of identifying the Kingdom with himself.

Elsewhere, the Kingdom seems to be in the future (ch.8 tells of a feast where the guests will be from east and west, and the 'children of the kingdom will be expelled') and of an apocalyptic nature (ch.16) equated with the coming of the Son of Man (ch.24) and the Last Judgement (ch.25).



For Mark the kingdom is more of an eschatological event of the future, that is one that comes in the last days with a terrible judgement (ch.13).

Luke does not emphasise the Kingdom of God so much, as his Gospel has less of a Jewish / Palestinian bias than Matthew's or Mark's. But, he, too, has dual elements, sometimes showing the kingdom as present (ch.10, the Mission of the 72 disciples, ch.11 the Beelzebul disputation, and especially ch.17 when Jesus answers the Pharisees' question by saying that the kingdom is amongst them) but in general he follows Mark in seeing the Kingdom as a future cosmic event (ch.21).

John's Gospel is not one of a future kingdom, but of the risen Lord. For John, the kingdom is Jesus; his is a realised eschatology, that is a reality that is here and now in our acceptance or not of Jesus. But, where the kingdom is a subject of discussion, when Jesus is questioned by Pilate, Jesus denied that his kingdom is of this world (ch.18).

## 'I Shall not Drink Again ..'

It is interesting to compare how the synoptic writers handle a particular kingdom passage. At the Last supper, Jesus says he will not taste wine again until he feasts in the Kingdom. But this is recorded slightly differently in each of the synoptic Gospels.

In Matthew (ch.26) the term used is 'Kingdom of my Father' and it is said in the context of drinking with the disciples in the future 'until I drink the new wine **with you** in the Kingdom of my Father'.