

The Kingdom Is at Hand

- Jesus said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).
- He made this declaration after the Holy Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism and after He was tested by the devil for forty days in the wilderness.
- He made this declaration after He was filled with the Spirit’s power.
- What did Jesus mean by “the kingdom of heaven”?
- For many twenty-first-century Gentile Christians, the kingdom often means:
 - Going to heaven when you die
 - God ruling in your heart
 - Living morally
 - Doing social justice
 - Bringing Christian influence into culture
- But Jesus’s Jewish audience heard something radically different: God’s reign coming to earth.
- They thought about the promises of the prophets:
 - A righteous King reigning from Zion
 - Justice, peace, healing, joy, righteousness, holiness, and God’s glory filling the earth
 - The nations streaming to Jerusalem
 - Creation restored
 - The knowledge of the Lord covering the earth like the waters cover the sea
- They heard the announcement that God’s reign was breaking into the earth and history was about to change.

Most Christians Misunderstand the Kingdom

a) Common Reductions of the Kingdom

- Some reduce the kingdom to going to heaven when you die.
- Others make it about politics, social reform, morality, revival, cultural influence, or Christianizing a nation.
- Some see the kingdom as entirely future, while others insist it is fully here now.
- Some make the kingdom synonymous with the church, while others sharply separate the two.

b) The Need for a Prophetic Framework

- When Jesus preached the kingdom, almost nobody thought in these modern categories.

- To understand what His audience heard, we must learn to think like the prophets.

Learning to Think Like a First-Century Jew

a) The Difference in Mindset

- The mindset of first-century Jews was very different from the mindset most Christians have today.
- The Christian worldview has been shaped deeply by Greek thought.
- Why? Because the church:
 - Became increasingly Gentile from the second century onward.
 - Gradually distanced itself from its Jewish roots.
- A Greek mindset:
 - Often separates the spiritual from the physical.
 - Makes salvation primarily about the spirit going to heaven when the body dies.
 - Reduces the kingdom to something inward, invisible, and mostly personal.

b) The Hebraic Expectation

- First-century Jews expected heaven to come to earth.
- They expected God to act in history to fulfill His covenant promises.
- They longed for the Messiah to come, defeat evil, restore Israel, judge the nations, bring justice to the earth, renew creation, and establish God's reign from Zion.

c) What Jesus's Audience Heard

- When Jesus announced, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," His Jewish audience would not have heard, "You can go to heaven when you die."
- They would have heard: "The long-promised reign of God is breaking into history through the Messiah."
- If we want to understand Jesus, we must learn to think like the prophets who shaped Israel's kingdom expectations.

Why the Prophets Matter

a) The Prophets Shaped Israel's Kingdom Expectation

- The prophets—Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and others—shaped the Jewish expectation of the kingdom.
- The Jewish people longed for God's reign to break into history through the Messiah.
- They prayed for it, sang about it, taught it to their children, and saw God, history, Israel, the nations, justice, creation, and the coming age through this kingdom hope.

b) The Right Question Comes First

- Many modern Christians rarely study the prophets in context because they first ask, “How does this help me today?”
- That is a good question, but it should not be the first question.
- The first question must always be: What did this mean to the original audience?
- Scripture was written *for* us, but not *to* us.

c) The Prophets Pointed to the Ultimate Solution

- The prophets were not fortune tellers predicting isolated events in the distant future.
- They spoke by the Spirit into Israel’s present crisis in light of God’s covenant promises and the hope of His coming kingdom.
- Whether confronting injustice, idolatry, immorality, political compromise, covenant-breaking, corrupt leadership, foreign threats, or spiritual rebellion, they looked beyond the immediate crisis to God’s ultimate solution: the reign of the Messiah on the earth.

My Experience Reading Isaiah

a) The Struggle

- For many years, I had no understanding of God’s coming kingdom revealed by the prophets.
- Like many Christians, my focus was mostly on spiritual growth, breakthrough, discipleship, hearing God’s voice, and how Scripture applied to everyday life.
- Over twenty years ago, as part of my leadership training, the Lord led me to spend an entire year studying Isaiah.
- At first, it was difficult because Isaiah was not primarily about me.
- It was the word of the Lord spoken to ancient Israel, addressing covenant unfaithfulness, corrupt leadership, injustice, idolatry, and national rebellion.

b) Looking Forward to the Coming Kingdom

- Isaiah looked beyond Israel’s immediate crisis to something much bigger.
- He pointed forward to a coming King, a righteous kingdom, a renewed earth, justice, peace, healing, joy, righteousness, holiness, and the glory of God filling the earth.
- He saw the Messiah reigning from Zion, evil judged, the nations streaming to Jerusalem, creation restored, and the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea.

c) My Eyes Were Opened

- I realized that the prophets were not boring, irrelevant, or disconnected from real life.
- They were unveiling God’s grand storyline—the coming reign of God through the Messiah.

- The prophets reveal the great hope of the world.
- They show where history is headed.
- They reveal the kingdom Jesus inaugurated.
- They anchor us in a broken world.
- They remind us this present age is not the end of the story.

Why Is the Promised Kingdom Important?

a) An Important Question to Answer

- Why should you care about the promised kingdom?
- For many Christians, the promised kingdom feels distant, irrelevant, impractical, and unrelated to everyday life.
- Because of this, many rarely study the prophets or grow bored and confused when they do.
- Even many pastors and teachers rarely talk about the promised kingdom because they assume it feels abstract or disconnected from discipleship.

b) Jesus Used the Coming Kingdom to Shape How People Lived

- Jesus did not treat the coming kingdom as abstract theology or irrelevant speculation.
- He used it to motivate holiness, faithfulness, endurance, readiness, sacrifice, and overcoming.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, His parables, and His words to the seven churches in Revelation, Jesus taught that how we live now shapes our future inheritance in the kingdom and the role we will play in it.

c) The Promised Kingdom Gives Weight to This Life

- The promised kingdom gives meaning to suffering, weight to obedience, urgency to your assignment, and hope for the future.
- Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth.
- He taught that faithful servants who stewarded their kingdom assignments well would be entrusted with authority over cities.
- He promised overcomers a seat with Him on His throne and authority over the nations.
- The Christian life is not merely about being forgiven and going to heaven when you die. It is preparation for the age to come—training for reigning.

Tasting the Age to Come

a) Already Inaugurated, Not Yet in Fullness

- The promised kingdom has already been inaugurated through Jesus's first coming.

- Through the Holy Spirit we truly taste the powers of the age to come now.
- But we are not yet experiencing the kingdom in its fullness.

b) The Costco Samples Analogy

- Imagine Costco lets you sample anything in the store for free, then gives you a lifetime gift card for unlimited access to everything you sampled.
- Best of all? No weight gain. That is good news.
- That is how I think about the present kingdom and the promised kingdom.

c) The Samples Are Real, But Not the Meal

- The present kingdom is like Costco samples. They are real and give a genuine taste of what is coming.
- But they are not meant to fully satisfy your hunger. They awaken a deeper hunger for the full meal still to come.
- Healing is a sample of the coming kingdom of wholeness.
- Peace replacing anxiety is a sample of the coming kingdom of peace.
- Joy in worship is a sample of the coming kingdom of gladness.
- Justice breaking in, demons being cast out, people being set free, relationships being restored, and righteousness transforming lives are the powers of the age to come breaking into the present age.
- Hebrews says believers have “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb. 6:5). We are tasting the future in advance.

d) The Full Banquet Is Still Ahead

- When Jesus returns and reigns, the kingdom will no longer come in moments, breakthroughs, or foretastes.
- Peace will fill the earth. Healing will characterize the reign of the Messiah. Justice will be swift and universal. Joy will define life on earth. Righteousness and holiness will saturate nations.
- Isaiah described this coming kingdom as a great feast: “The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain” (Isa. 25:6).
- Right now, through the Holy Spirit, we receive samples of the coming feast. But the full banquet is still ahead.

A Snapshot of the Promised Kingdom

a) The Kingdom in Fullness

- The promised kingdom is the kingdom that will be established after Jesus returns to reign over the earth for a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).
- According to the prophets, it will be unlike anything the world has ever seen.

b) Ruled by the Messiah

- Isaiah declared that the government will rest on the shoulders of the promised Son, and His government and peace will increase without end on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6–7).
- Daniel saw “one like a Son of Man” receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom so all peoples, nations, and languages might serve Him (Dan. 7:13–14).
- Jeremiah saw the righteous Branch of David reigning wisely and doing justice and righteousness in the land (Jer. 23:5).
- The promised kingdom will not be ruled by corrupt politicians, self-serving leaders, or fragile governments. It will be ruled by Jesus.

c) Crushing Every Opposing Kingdom

- Daniel saw the stone representing God’s kingdom strike the kingdoms of men until it became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:35).
- God’s kingdom will “crush and put an end to all these kingdoms” (Dan. 2:44).
- Zechariah declared that God will destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem (Zech. 12:9).
- The reign of Jesus will not coexist with rebellion.

d) Centered in Jerusalem and Worldwide in Scope

- Isaiah declared, “From Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3).
- God says in Psalm 2, “I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain” (Ps. 2:6).
- Zechariah said Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth and the mountain of the Lord the Holy Mountain (Zech. 8:3).
- From Zion, the Messiah’s reign will ripple outward until the whole earth is filled with righteousness, peace, healing, and glory.
- Daniel saw all peoples, nations, and languages serving Him. Isaiah saw all nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord. Zechariah declared, “The LORD will be king over all the earth” (Dan. 7:14; Isa. 2:2; Zech. 14:9).

e) Transforming Everything

- The promised kingdom will transform governments, families, nations, economies, and creation itself.
- It will be marked by righteousness and holiness, justice, peace, joy, healing, restoration, prosperity, worldwide worship, and the glory of God filling the earth.
- Imagine a world with no corrupt governments, no war, no exploitation, no injustice, no fear, no confusion, no demonic oppression, no fractured families, and no creation groaning under the curse.
- Instead, righteousness fills society, justice flows like a river, peace permeates the nations, joy marks the human experience, healing becomes normal, creation flourishes, the nations worship the King, and the glory of God fills the earth as the waters cover the sea.

- This is the kingdom the prophets saw, and this is the kingdom Jesus came announcing.

A Kingdom of Peace

a) Anxiety Defines Much of This Age

- Parents worry about their children, husbands wonder if they can provide, students feel overwhelmed by the future, people anxiously wait for medical test results, and families feel the pressure of inflation, broken relationships, political instability, and economic uncertainty.
- Many quietly carry a sense of dread, wondering whether another war will break out, society will become more unstable, the economy will hold, or things will get worse.
- We live in a fallen world marked by fear, uncertainty, violence, instability, and unrest.

b) The Prophets Promised Perfect Peace

- The prophets looked ahead to a kingdom where fear would be replaced with perfect peace.
- Under the Messiah—the Prince of Peace—the fear, instability, conflict, violence, oppression, and uncertainty of this age will disappear.
- Isaiah called the Messiah the “Prince of Peace” and said there will be no end to the increase of His peace (Isa. 9:6–7).
- Isaiah saw swords beaten into plowshares and nations no longer learning war (Isa. 2:4).
- Isaiah promised freedom from oppression and terror, and Micah said there will be “no one to make them afraid” (Isa. 54:14; Mic. 4:4).

c) The Promised Kingdom: A Kingdom of Peace

- People will no longer wake up wondering whether evil will prevail, leaders will betray them, violence will erupt, or another crisis will shake the world.
- The prophets envisioned peace with God, peace among people, peace among nations, and even peace throughout creation itself.
- This peace will not be fragile, temporary, or dependent on diplomacy. It will flow from the throne of the Prince of Peace Himself.

A Kingdom of Justice

a) Injustice in This Age

- Much of life in this age feels deeply unfair.
- Victims wonder if abusers will face justice, corrupt politicians manipulate systems for selfish gain, helpless babies in the womb are destroyed by the millions, and hardworking families feel trapped in systems that keep them struggling.
- The wealthy exploit the poor, the powerful manipulate the weak, the guilty escape accountability, and the innocent suffer.
- Deep down, people long for someone to finally make things right.

b) The Prophets Promised Justice

- The prophets looked ahead to a coming kingdom where every wrong would finally be made right.
- Under the Messiah's reign, justice will no longer be delayed, distorted, or denied; it will flood the earth.
- Isaiah promised that the Messiah would bring justice to the nations and establish justice in the earth (Isa. 42:1, 4).
- Isaiah also said the kingdom would be established with justice, that justice would be the measuring line, and that Zion would be filled with justice and righteousness (Isa. 9:7; 28:17; 33:5).

c) The Promised Kingdom: A Kingdom of Justice

- Justice will no longer be purchased, delayed, or corrupted.
- Every courtroom, government, institution, economy, and nation will come under the righteous reign of the Messiah.
- Justice will flow from the throne of the King who sees everything, knows everything, judges perfectly, and finally makes every wrong right.

A Kingdom of Wholeness and Healing

a) Brokenness in This Age

- Brokenness touches every human life in this age.
- Mothers watch children suffer, spouses sit anxiously in hospital rooms, people battle chronic pain, families care for disabled loved ones, and the elderly feel their bodies weakening.
- Others carry invisible wounds: trauma, depression, grief, fear, rejection, and emotional scars from years of disappointment, abuse, or loss.
- Bodies break down, minds suffer, hearts ache, and death eventually touches every family.

b) The Prophets Promised Healing and Wholeness

- The prophets looked ahead to a kingdom where the Messiah would make all things whole.
- The sick would be healed without exception, disease would disappear, the disabled would be restored, trauma would be healed, and broken hearts would be mended.
- Isaiah saw blind eyes opened, deaf ears unstopped, the lame leaping like deer, and no resident saying, "I am sick" (Isa. 35:5–6; 33:24).
- Malachi promised the sun of righteousness would rise with healing in its wings, and Isaiah saw the Messiah binding up the brokenhearted and comforting those who mourn (Mal. 4:2; Isa. 61:1–3).

c) The Promised Kingdom: A Kingdom of Wholeness and Healing

- Healing will no longer be occasional, partial, temporary, or rare; wholeness will define life in that age.

- Healing will flow from the throne of the King, touching bodies, minds, hearts, families, communities, nations, and even creation itself.
- Under King Jesus, everything sin has damaged will be healed and restored.

A Kingdom of Joy and Gladness

a) Sorrow in This Age

- No one escapes sorrow in this age.
- Families stand beside caskets, mothers weep over prodigal children, marriages collapse under betrayal, and countless people carry loneliness, depression, regret, trauma, abuse, and shame.
- Joy in this age feels fragile. One phone call, diagnosis, selfish decision, or devastating loss can cast a shadow over everything.
- Even our happiest moments can change in an instant, and struggles always seem to return.

b) The Prophets Promised Everlasting Joy

- Through the Holy Spirit, we taste genuine joy now, but joy in this fallen age can feel partial, fragile, and temporary.
- The prophets looked ahead to a kingdom where sorrow and sighing would disappear.
- Isaiah said the redeemed would return to Zion with joyful shouting and everlasting joy on their heads (Isa. 35:10).
- He promised that gladness and joy would overtake them and sorrow and sighing would flee away (Isa. 35:10; 51:11).
- Isaiah also promised the Messiah would comfort mourners with a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting (Isa. 61:2–3).

c) The Promised Kingdom: A Kingdom of Joy and Gladness

- People will no longer wake up under the weight of dread, depression, grief, or despair.
- The prophets envisioned joy in God's presence, restored relationships, healed nations, renewed creation, and the righteous reign of the Messiah.
- This joy will not depend on circumstances. It will not fade. It will not break. It will flow like a river from the throne of the King.

A Kingdom of Righteousness and Holiness

a) Moral Confusion in This Age

- Righteousness and holiness feel increasingly rare in this age.
- We live in a world marked by lust, greed, immorality, pride, deception, rebellion, corruption, and moral confusion.

- Isaiah lamented that people call evil good and good evil, substituting darkness for light and light for darkness (Isa. 5:20).
- Truth is redefined, compromise is celebrated, dishonesty is rewarded, sexual immorality is normalized, corrupt leaders manipulate, and many no longer blush at sin.
- Paul described a world that exchanged the truth of God for a lie, worshiping created things rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

b) The Prophets Promised Righteousness

- The prophets looked ahead to a kingdom where righteousness and holiness would define life on earth.
- Under the perfectly righteous and holy Messiah, sin would no longer dominate culture, corrupt governments, destroy families, exploit the vulnerable, or spread like poison through society.
- Isaiah said the Messiah would judge with righteousness and fairness (Isa. 11:4).
- He declared that a king would reign righteously and that the Messiah's kingdom would be established with justice and righteousness forever (Isa. 32:1; 9:7).
- Jeremiah saw a righteous Branch who would reign wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land (Jer. 23:5).
- Nations will finally live according to God's standard. Truth will be honored, integrity prized, and justice upheld.

c) The Prophets Promised Holiness

- The nations will be consecrated and set apart to God.
- Isaiah saw a Highway of Holiness (Isa. 35:8).
- Zechariah saw even ordinary things marked "HOLY TO THE LORD" (Zech. 14:20).
- Obadiah declared that Mount Zion will be holy (Obad. 17).

d) The Promised Kingdom: A Kingdom of Righteousness and Holiness

- Evil will no longer shape culture. Good will be called good, evil will be called evil, and light will overpower darkness.
- Righteousness will flow from the throne of the Messiah into every nation, city, family, and human heart.
- Holiness will permeate every facet of society, and the world will be fully ordered according to God's character and fully devoted to God's presence.

A Kingdom of God's Glory and Worship in the Nations

a) Human Beings Were Created to Worship

- If we do not worship God, we will worship something else.

- Because God is veiled in this age and we cannot yet see Him as He truly is, people devote themselves to substitutes: careers, money, success, possessions, sports, politics, celebrities, recognition, and influence.
- Entire cultures revolve around self-expression, self-fulfillment, and self-glory.
- Social media has become a platform where people chase affirmation, attention, and approval, while nations trust in military power, technology, economic strength, and human achievement.

b) The Prophets Promised Unveiled Glory

- The prophets looked ahead to a kingdom where the veil would finally be removed and the beauty of the King would shine openly throughout the earth.
- Isaiah declared that God would swallow up the covering over all peoples and the veil stretched over all nations (Isa. 25:7).
- Isaiah saw the Lord reigning on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem with His glory before His elders (Isa. 24:23).
- He described the Messiah as beautiful and glorious and promised that all nations would behold the King in His beauty (Isa. 4:2; 33:17).

c) The Prophets Promised Worldwide Worship

- In that day, God's glory will openly fill the earth and the nations will destroy their idols.
- People will no longer bow to wealth, entertainment, influence, power, politics, or self.
- The nations will stream to Jerusalem to worship the King, and worship will become as natural as breathing.
- Isaiah saw the Lord becoming everlasting light and glory (Isa. 60:19).
- Habakkuk saw the earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (Hab. 2:14).
- Malachi saw God's name great among the nations (Mal. 1:11).
- Zechariah saw the nations going up to worship the King (Zech. 14:16).
- Isaiah saw the temple becoming a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa. 56:7).

d) The Promised Kingdom: A Kingdom of God's Glory and Worship in the Nations

- The beauty, majesty, and presence of the King will radiate from Zion.
- His glory will become the atmosphere of the earth, and the whole world will resound with praise to King Jesus.