

# THE KINGDOM WITHIN YOU

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## Supernatural Diet

Holy Communion is a supernatural diet.

I believe the communion supper is *more* than an intellectual symbol, or a touchstone for recalling the sacrifice of Jesus.

For the last several weeks on Tuesday nights we have been examining and discussing the very challenging teaching that Jesus gave in the synagogue of Capernaum, near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In summary, He taught that the manna provided for the Israelites by God under Moses' leadership was *not* the true bread from heaven, as they had always believed, but merely a token of that bread.

*John 6:47 "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes (in me) has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> Yes, I am the bread of life! <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. <sup>50</sup> Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."*

*<sup>52</sup> Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.*

*<sup>53</sup> So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. <sup>54</sup> But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."*

To make sense of this, some have taken these plainly figurative words as literal, and created a superstitious theory called *transubstantiation*, that presumes that the bread and juice (or wine) are *actually* transformed into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, as a result of a priests prayer and blessing, so that communicants may fulfill the teaching of Jesus. I do not believe in this.

Yet I believe the communion supper is *more* than an intellectual symbol, or a touchstone for recalling the sacrifice of Jesus.

I believe we have actually partaken of grace today, as we shared the Table of the Lord. I believe that God blesses this meal, when we truly think of Christ and receive it in faith. I believe *that grace* achieves something supernaturally wonderful for us, even if we feel no change. And the more often we share it together, the better for us.

## Only One Key

Let me tell you why. One evening, Jesus had a meeting with Nicodemus, a teaching elder among the Jews in Jerusalem. As Nicodemus began to express his admiration for Jesus, the Lord interrupted him.

*John 3:3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

*<sup>4</sup> "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"*

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life."*

For John to have recorded this private conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, one of the two of them must have shared it. Perhaps it was an illustration Jesus used when teaching, or maybe it was part of a testimony Nicodemus had shared about His coming to faith. In either case, it laid the groundwork for understanding the supernatural Kingdom: a new birth was the only gateway to "seeing" or "entering" the Kingdom.

## Kingdom Pictures

What the Kingdom is, is difficult to describe. It requires the use of language based on known objects and observable transactions to describe what we have never before seen or experienced.

Matthew's account of the Gospel offers many metaphors that Jesus used to describe the Kingdom of Heaven (interchangeable with the Kingdom of God). Among them are these:

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like good seed that endures among weeds
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which grows great
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast which permeates the dough
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant who sells all

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that catches every kind
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who stores and shares both old and new
- The Kingdom of Heaven is a haven for the childlike
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who calls his subjects to account
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who employs workers
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding feast to be filled
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like 10 bridesmaids, both wise and foolish
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like giving account to the landowner

Though these few examples do not nearly comprehend the Kingdom of Heaven, from even these few we may learn much about the nature and impact of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, already, we have seen that the Kingdom of God may be discovered and entered through only one door: a new birth from above (from Heaven, by the Spirit of God). We have learned of the persistent growth and fruitfulness of the Kingdom, even under unlikely or difficult circumstances. We have discovered the childlike nature of Kingdom relationships, and also the stern, yet generous, accountability of the Kingdom. And we have been assured of the ever-increasing embrace of Christ's Kingdom.

It is this Kingdom to which we have been invited. It is this Kingdom to which we are to invite every soul who will hear us.

## When and Where?

But a major quandary remains in the minds of many: When will the Kingdom be established? And where? The Pharisees wondered the same thing.

*Luke 17:20 One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?"*

*Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs (or by your speculations).*

*<sup>21</sup> You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you."*

Something we may also learn, is that the Kingdom of Heaven has neither locational nor dimensional limits. While it may be found in many times and places and may spread in all directions, the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be bound by time or space. Ever.

In the words of Isaiah, the Hebrew prophet, *"Of the increase of His government and peace **there will be no end**, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."* (Isaiah 9:7)

Nor can the Kingdom of God be found in time and space by the usual means. Its establishment will not be trumpeted with great ceremony, nor will a red carpet announce its entrance. No great walls will be erected to outline its domain. Its just not a “time and space” thing.

The Kingdom of God comes whenever and wherever its King (Jesus) appears or acts. As Jesus said, *“If I am casting out demons by the power of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you.”* (Luke 11:20)

## **In Your Midst**

Therefore, He told His disciples, *“The Kingdom of God is already among you.”* With this statement Jesus introduces a most amazing lesson. From the time of the King James Version, this truth has been expressed as, *“The Kingdom of God is within you.”* This is a perfectly valid translation, although it has been misunderstood and frequently misapplied to propose an innate human potential for supernaturalness that overrides Jesus’ teaching to Nicodemus about the single entry point to the Kingdom. This error is often expressed in terms like, “Look to, discover, or realize the unlimited power of the God-within-you.”

The potential for discovering the Kingdom of God is indeed universal among human beings, and not limited by intellectual, physical, emotional, or social challenges. But it is not because God lives within every one of us, or a piece of God is in us all.

We all enjoy this potential because we have been created in the image of God, no matter how that image may have been deadened and buried by sin. But it takes a supernatural spark from *outside* of us to awaken our spirits to God—a new birth from above.

What Jesus actually taught here is not seen in the word “within,” but in the word “you.” What we cannot know for sure from the translation or the context, is revealed in the study of the original language, and it is this: this word, “you,” is the *plural* form of the word. Jesus was not speaking to a single individual about his individual potential. He was speaking to His disciples about their *group potential*. Thus, the newer translations, “among you” and “in your midst.”

The wonderful reality is this: You cannot see the Kingdom of God within yourself alone. It is only and always seen (developed and expressed) in our togetherness, our unity, our cooperation. Kingdom life is something that happens, not to me, but to *us*. The Kingdom is among *us*.

That is what we remember, celebrate, and renew when we share Holy Communion as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

## Doing Life Together

With this awareness of the relational nature and interdependence of the Kingdom of God, other teachings about the Kingdom become concrete. For example, let's look at part of Paul's letter to the church in Rome (14:10-19). He doesn't mention the Kingdom in the beginning of the passage, but by the end it becomes clear that the Kingdom is the primary subject and the reason for his admonition. Because the Kingdom is shown in our relationships in the Church.

*Romans 14:10* ***So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. <sup>11</sup> For the Scriptures say, 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will declare allegiance praise to God.'***

*<sup>12</sup> Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. <sup>13</sup> So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.*

*<sup>14</sup> I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. <sup>15</sup> And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup> Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good.*

The message is simple: In God's Kingdom, WE are more important than YOU. *You* have certain liberties, because you are no longer under the Law but under Grace. But your "rights" are to be sacrificed for the benefit of US—the body of Christ—for that is what *love* requires. Now the summary:

*Romans 14:17* ***For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. <sup>19</sup> So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.***

What will our church—any local church—look like if *this* becomes the aim of each of us (all of us)? I propose that it will look like the Kingdom of God!

The Kingdom of God is among you.

You cannot see the Kingdom of God alone. It is seen (developed and expressed) in our togetherness, our unity, our cooperation.

So, devote yourself to finding and developing *this* Kingdom, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through unity and fellowship and cooperation and mutual support. Through surrendering your

rights to the good of us all. Through building up each other (not putting or tearing each other down—anybody can do that).

Finally, to paraphrase a former president of the United States of America, I say to you: *Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church (your brothers and sisters in the faith).*