



Kingdom Ways

A narrative about the upside-down
nature of God's kingdom

THE BIBLE

Matthew 3, 5, 13, 18
Luke 10, 13-14, 17, John 3

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

- What is one of your favorite movies or books? What do you love most about it?

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Baptism & Temptation – Jesus in the Wilderness
- Jesus' Followers – The Disciples and the marginalized
- Hope & Healing – The mission of Jesus
- Miracles - Jesus' ability to perform wonders

Hear the Story

Scene One: Nicodemus

There was a religious leader and Pharisee, whose name was Nicodemus. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. He said, *"Rabbi, we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miracles make it clear to us that God is with You."* In response, Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

This statement puzzled Nicodemus. He wanted to understand what Jesus meant, so he asked, *“How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”*

Jesus replied, *“Let me be clear: no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Holy Spirit. Humans can only give birth to babies, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. Don’t be surprised when I tell you that you must be born again.”*

“Consider the wind. It blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it’s coming from or where it’s going, in the same way, you can’t explain how people are born of the Holy Spirit.”

“How does that work?” Nicodemus responded. “You are a respected religious leader; you should understand these things,” Jesus replied.

Then he said. *“This is how God will show the world how much He loves them. He gave His son for the world, and to everyone who places their trust in Him, God will give them eternal life. God isn’t looking to condemn the world; He wants to rescue it through His Son.”*

Nicodemus left that evening, considering all that Jesus had said, and he began to follow the teachings of Jesus, paying close attention to everything Jesus had to say about the Kingdom of God.

Scene Two: Beatitudes

On another occasion, Jesus and His followers climbed up a hillside. Jesus began teaching them more about God’s kingdom. He said:

“The humble, gentle, poor, and merciful are blessed by God.

The kingdom belongs to you, who realize your need for God.

Those who are grieving and in pain are blessed by God. God will bring you comfort.

Those who have a pure heart are blessed by God. You see God more clearly.

Those who desire what is right and work for peace are blessed by God. You are truly God’s family.

Those who are mocked, hated, and excluded for following me and doing what is right are blessed by God. Be glad and know that God is with you.

You are God's brilliant light - like a city on a hill that shines brightly for everyone to see.

No one lights a lamp and then hides it under a basket. A lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. Just like this, let your life shine for all to see, so everyone will see God reflected in you."

Jesus continued teaching the crowds about God's ways. He said:

It might sound like I've come to get rid of the laws given to Moses and the writings of the prophets. No, I've come to fulfill the purpose of these laws - to show you how to live in God's ways as true children of God. If you want to be great in God's kingdom, follow God's laws – live generously and purely, and love your enemies without exception.

People were amazed by Jesus' teaching. They saw that His words were backed by His actions, unlike many of the teachers of the day.

Scene Two: Parables

Jesus often taught through short stories, called parables, that used word-pictures from everyday life. Many of the parables explained what God's kingdom was like.

Jesus said, *"The kingdom of God is like a tiny seed that's planted in a field. This seed may be small at first, but it grows into a large tree where birds can rest and find a home.'*

Jesus told dozens of stories like this to the crowds. He said the kingdom is ...

'Like a hidden treasure buried in a field – worth diligently searching for.

Like yeast spread in a ball of dough – just a little will raise a lot.

Like a precious pearl – worth trading everything for.

Like a great feast – where all of the poor and the outcasts are welcomed.'

People were in awe of Jesus' teaching and wisdom. Some understood His parables. But for others, God's kingdom remained a mystery.

At one point, a religious leader asked Jesus, *"So, when is this 'kingdom' you're teaching about going to come?"*

Jesus replied, *"The kingdom of God isn't something out there to look for; the kingdom of God grows within us."*

Later, some of Jesus' disciples asked, *"Which one of us will be given the most important role in your new kingdom?"*

Instead of answering right away, Jesus asked one of the children in the crowd to come over to Him.

As the child came close, Jesus said to His disciples, *"If you want to be great in God's kingdom, humble yourself and become like this child."*

Scene Three: The Good Samaritan

One day, an expert in Jewish law tried to test Jesus by asking Him, *"What must I do to gain eternal life?"*

Jesus replied, *"What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?"*

The expert answered, *"Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And love your neighbor like you would love yourself."*

"Exactly. Do this, and you will find life!" Jesus said.

The expert pressed Jesus further, asking, *"And who is my neighbor?"*

So Jesus replied, as He did many times, with a story: He said ...

"A Jewish man was traveling down a narrow, dangerous road and was attacked by thieves. They took his clothes, beat him, and left him to die on the side of the road.

Before long, a Jewish priest came down the same road. When he saw the man there dying, he crossed over to the other side and continued on his way.

(Jewish laws required those who came in contact with a dead body to go through a long and very specific purification ritual.)

"Then, a Levite came by and looked at the man lying there." (The Levites were Jews who helped take care of the Temple.) "The Levite also crossed to the other side of the road and walked by.

"Finally, a Samaritan man came along ..."

(For centuries, there was deep ethnic hostility between Samaritans and Jews. Though they had common ancestors and religion, they hated one another.)

"When the Samaritan saw the man, he was filled with compassion for him. So he bandaged up his wounds and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

The next morning, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper extra money and said, 'Please take care of the man I brought here. If it costs more than what I've given you, I will gladly return and pay whatever is owed.'

After telling the story, Jesus turned and asked the expert in the law, *"Which of these three would you say was a 'neighbor' to the man who was attacked?"*

The expert replied, *"I supposed the one who showed the man mercy."*

"Yes," Jesus said. "Now go and do the same thing."

Retell the Story

- Who came to talk to Jesus at night? What did they discuss?
- What are some of the ways that Jesus taught His followers to live differently than the world?
- What method of teaching did Jesus often use?
- What did Jesus teach about most often?
- What happens in the parable of the Good Samaritan?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- What part of Jesus' teaching stood out to you?
- Why do you think Jesus taught in parables?
- What words or images would you use to describe God's kingdom?
- What do you think Jesus meant when He told people that the Kingdom of God is within them?
- How might this Kingdom be different from what the Jewish people were looking for?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

1) KINGDOM GROWTH

If God's kingdom grows within us, where do you see it growing in you? Where do you see God's kingdom growing in our community? Are there any unexpected places where you see Kingdom growth?

2) OTHER KINGDOMS

What "kingdoms" (ways of life) do people live for in our society? How do these kingdoms differ from what Jesus taught about God's Kingdom?

3) THE GOOD SAMARITAN

What message is at the heart of the Good Samaritan story? Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to share this story? Why is this story still important to us today?

Pray

God,

Your Kingdom is upside-down and backward from the way our world operates. Thank You for your wisdom; help us see Your Kingdom and expand Your Kingdom here more and more as we follow You each day. Amen.