

# The Good News of the Kingdom of God

## Introduction

The world we are part of knows two 'ages'. The present age, which gives 'cosmetic structure' to society around us in the world (*cosmos*), is threatened by inevitably being superseded by a coming, new age. This new age is referred to, in the Bible, as the Kingdom of God. The presence of the Kingdom of God, which is the rule of God, is not the dominant characteristic of the age we live in. The characteristic of the present age is rebellion against God (**Ephesians 2.1-3**) and darkness (**Colossians 1.13**), where the current order of things is under the control of the evil one (**1 John 5.19**). The disciples recognised this, when they asked Jesus, "what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (**Matthew 24.3**).

Jesus' first appearance in the world invaded the present order of things, overpowering the powers of the present age with the presence of the Kingdom of God: the power of the age that is coming in. The works of Jesus demonstrate this (**Matthew 11.2-6**). Jesus brings the message that the Kingdom of God has arrived and that a new order of things is taking shape.

Jesus, in bringing in the new age where the Kingdom of God comes to earth, is looking for accomplices: disciples.

The Kingdom of God is not about what God does while humans stand by passively; nor is it about our effort to build the Kingdom of God while God passively watches. The Kingdom of God is *performative*: it is God's performance in which we actively participate (Stassen & Gushee *Kingdom Ethics*).

What sort of people can be used of God is 'bringing in' His Kingdom? Jesus taught that, if we have faith, then we will receive whatever we ask for in prayer - what does this mean? Faith is certainly not a magical, blank cheque for whatever we fancy! We see from Scripture that Christian faith involves (**Acts 2.38**):

- turning from the devil's ways (**Galatians 5.19-21**) and embracing God's character, His glory and goodness: especially forgiveness (**Matthew 18.19-22**) and love (**John 15.16-17**).
- embracing what Jesus stands for (**Romans 6.1-11**).
- learning to be God's co-workers, looking to the empowering and leading of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 4.7-10**)

All Jesus' teaching on faith should be read in the context of His Kingdom's invasion of the present age's dominion of darkness. Seeking God in prayer is less like waiting for orders in a restaurant and more like calling for back-up in a battle. Far from being in 'an age' where God's will is presently done, we are in a time where the 'god of this world' seeks to blind people (**2 Corinthians 4.3-4**). Our participation in the Kingdom of God is a participation in an invasion of the present order of things, by the power of God at work in us and through us.

## Part 1

In our introductory examination of the Scriptures on the nature of the Kingdom of God, we saw that the Kingdom, or rule, of God is not what we live among here on earth. Last week we saw that the characteristic of the present age is rebellion against God (**Ephesians 2.1-3**) and darkness (**Colossians 1.13**), where the current order of things is under the control of the evil one (**1 John 5.19**). Because of this, it is true to say that the world is not presently within the control of God, albeit that God has the sovereign power to conquer and impose His will.

To understand the nature of the ministry of Jesus, we have to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom Jesus brings in is a invading Kingdom. It is here in the present, confronting evil powers and bringing the presence and power of God into the lives of people. We might describe GRACE as 'God's richness and Christ's embrace'. It is God bringing in what is His, in and through Jesus and the presence and power of His Holy Spirit. In the coming months we will look at what this means in terms of the 'Nazareth manifesto', found in Jesus' declaration and description of His ministry in **Luke 4**; and, consequently, the ministry of those who seek to live as His disciples:

*16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.*

*17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,*

*19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

*20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him,*

*21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

First, then we have to come to grasp the Biblical teaching as to the nature and character of the Kingdom of God. Secondly, we need to grasp the place of the Holy Spirit in this. And thirdly, we have to come to a better, Biblical understanding as to the nature of faith. Faith is our human response to the Kingdom of God. Faith is what takes place in us and affects what is brought about through our lives. The faith of Jesus Christ is what happens when our lives are being shaped by the presence of God now with us and in us, through the Holy Spirit and because of Jesus Christ, who He is, what He has done and what He is now doing.

## 1. *The Spirit of the Lord*

The presence of the Spirit, poured out, is the defining mark of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God. Isaiah anticipates this as a time of restoration and fulfilment of God's covenantal purposes; as in **Isaiah 32.15-20, 44.1-5**. We see the same prophetic expectation in **Ezekiel 39.25-29** and **Joel 2.28-32**. This expectation of the coming of the power and presence of God in refreshment is combined with an anticipation of judgment (e.g. **Isaiah 24.14-25.12**).

The mystery of the Kingdom of God, come in and through Jesus Christ, is that these two events. The good news of the Kingdom is that God has first broken into the present world order to first bring, in His mercy and compassion, salvation and restoration through His Son become a human being. The coming of the Spirit marks the breaking in of the Kingdom in the life of the New Testament church (**Acts 2.33, 10.45; Romans 5.5**). Here is mention of the key component of the Christian's life: the person of the Holy Spirit present and recognised.

John the Baptist spoke of the coming of the Messiah, the anointed One of Israel (**Luke 3.15-18**). He saw how the Scriptures spoke of and anticipated the Messiah bringing in the fullness of God's rule, or Kingdom, upon the earth. Where, though, was the triumph and restoration, the judgment and exaltation of Israel that he anticipated? John had not yet grasped that, while Jesus was the harbinger of the Kingdom, the mystery of the Kingdom of God revealed in Jesus was other than that which many expected. The mystery of the Kingdom, made known through Jesus, is that the compassion, mercy and saving activity of God comes prior to His vindication of His people and the judgment of the nations. This is what Jesus was ushering in, particularly tied up with the presence and work of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 7.18-23**). In this sense, John was the last of the prophets before the coming of the Kingdom (**Luke 7.24-28**). Jesus brings in the Kingdom.

We have to be careful that we do not get into a *John* way of thinking, rather than a *Jesus* way of thinking. Jesus brings in the 'upside down' Kingdom. The judgment will come; but now is the goodness and the mercy. There are, warnings and previews of what is coming; but what matters is more is the good news of the mercy and goodness of God that God brings to us through Jesus.

How do we recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit? He is the bearer of the glory and goodness of God. What are the implications of this? His ministry is an integrated one, but here are five facets that we can identify:

1. **Bringer of peace**      **John 20.19-23**      This is one of the most basic ways that people come to a knowledge and experience of the work of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus demonstrated the presence of the Kingdom of God, it was in a manner that usurped the demonic suffocation of oppression, injustice, guilt and death. He brought in the fresh breeze of the Kingdom: righteousness, peace and joy.

These are the marks of the Spirit's presence, as He bears the holistic healing of God's grace and compassion, merciful love, faithfulness and forgiveness into the human predicament.

But not all welcome this. Those whose lives are bruised and hurt to such a degree that they are oppressed by spirits of bitterness and destruction, that they are not ready to renounce, will find this presence oppressive and threatening. Such is the presence of God: welcoming to those who seek Him with repentance and contrition, threatening and foreboding for those who continue in rebellion against Him.

2. **Teacher**                    **John 14.21 ff**                    The Spirit guides us toward a recognition of the ways of Jesus. This is not simply an intellectual or personal activity. At the heart of this is a collective function. Truth finds expression and also development within community. The Spirit teaches not simply through ideas, but by prompting us in 'doing' virtues, such as compassion and mercy; He leads us to implement these in practice; and he draws us into community, wherein we not only meet with His presence and actions in and through others and their giftings, but are changed in that meeting. The teaching of the Spirit is not simply the imparting of ideas that we can then own, but the shaping of our character as disciples of Jesus.
3. **Seal of the Presence:**    **Ephesians 1.13.**                    The imprinting activity of the Spirit, embossing on our lives the character and the mission of Jesus. The seal of the Spirit is an imprinting of the presence and purpose of God on our lives that can be recognised. Here again, we have to remember that the Spirit is given to the church collectively (**1 Corinthians 12**), and to individuals derivatively, as constituent parts of the church.
4. **Empowerer**                    **Acts 1.8**                    Teaching and presence are bound up with empowering. As is love. The Holy Spirit, while associated with the presence of God's power and exercise of divine authority, cannot be reduced and described in terms of these alone: they are what His presence generates and supports. Again, the work of the Holy Spirit, in terms of generating power for ministry, may well prove to be intermittent, or even incremental, in our experience; as it may have been in the ministry of Jesus (**Luke 5.17; 6.19**). Jesus' use of that power was tied up with His listening to and obedience of Father in heaven (**John 5.19; 12.49-50**).
5. **Transformer**                    **2 Corinthians 3.18**                    The Holy Spirit works conformity to Jesus into our lives. In this sense, we need to learn to keep our expectations Jesus-centred and not world-centred. We have to be careful that we do not, like John the Baptist, have expectations of the Kingdom breaking in and its manifestation that are shaped by personal, cultural or cultic preconception, rather than Christ-centred awareness. Simon Magus was a case in point (**Acts 8**).

Next week, we go on to examine what it means to be able to say that *this* Holy Spirit 'is upon me'.

## 2. *Is upon me*

What does it mean to say that *this* Holy Spirit '*is upon me*'? Last week, we looked at the essential character of the Spirit of the Lord, as He brings the purposeful presence and power of the Kingdom of God into our lives. This week, in both the morning and evening Sunday meetings, we look towards what the Holy Spirit leads us into.

From the parables of Jesus, as well as from personal experience and observation, we come to see that our moving into a position where 'God reigns' in our life is not something that takes place completely and fully, all at once. Growth and development as a Christian, a person 'anointed' in the ways of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, tends to be gradual and incremental. Certainly, there can be sudden spurts and especially formative moments of change; but for us all, there is an ongoing process of maturing, towards '*attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*' (**Ephesians 4.13**). This is worked out in both our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

The Christian life, therefore, is not something that can be developed simply by reading a book or taking a training course. It involves a growing awareness of Scriptural teaching and the nature of Christian discipleship; but this has to be married to a life consecrated to God by being self-consciously and deliberately rooted into the life of Christ. Jesus became like us so that, through the power of His atoning death and resurrection from the dead, we might come to Him in order to become like Him. Now, being rooted in the Christian life makes us one of those who gather to and around Jesus, as one of His disciples; and it therefore leads us to deeper commitment to and involvement within the relationships of Christian community. This is not something that we necessarily will find easy. In the words of Jean Vanier, the founder of the first L'Arche community,

"...community is a terrible place. It is the place where our limitations and our egoism are revealed to us. When we begin to live life full-time with others, we discover our poverty and our weaknesses, our inability to get on with people, our mental and emotional blocks, our affective or sexual disturbances, our seemingly insatiable desires, our frustrations and jealousies, our hatred and our wish to destroy".

To grasp that being involved in community is an integral part of the Christian maturing process has been glimpsed by Christians throughout the centuries, despite the absorption of Christianity into the structures of society and the mixed blessings that came with Christianity's status as the 'official' religion of medieval Europe. In a letter of 1650, Andreas Ehrepreis, a bishop belonging to one of the growing number of Reformation 'unofficial' churches, eloquently expressed this importance of the communitarian aspect of church when he wrote of how the Lord's Supper can be understood as a sacrament of community:

The grains had to be brought together into one flour and one loaf. Not one of them could preserve itself as it was, or keep what it had. Every grain has to

give itself and its whole strength into the bread. In the same way the grapes. The grapes must be pressed for the wine. Every grape gives all its strength and all its juice into the uniform wine. In it no grape can keep anything for itself. Only in this way does wine come into being.

This can be a painful and difficult path of consecration, bringing a deep sifting as well as a maturing within us. It moves us, from having a faith that is minimally *in* Jesus, towards a participation in a life of that faith that is *of* Jesus. It moves those who are giving themselves *to* Jesus into the ministry *of* Jesus. Certainly, there is a place for us to live responsibly and act as individuals. Each person, made in the image of God, needs to make personal choices and commitments. At the same time, our individual humanity finds true meaning and fulfilment within the context of community.

For all this to be progressed there has to be a willing surrender to God on our part. Now, we need to be clear that what we are here talking about is an internal, not an external, work of the Holy Spirit. Anyone, Christian or non-Christian, can experience something of the external working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sometimes brings a sense, even an overwhelming sense, of God's presence or a conviction of personal sin and distance from God to both individuals and to groups of people. This is not what we are talking about here. What we are here concerned with is that work of the Holy Spirit which takes place within us, when He comes 'upon us', as He came upon Jesus. We might call this 'being filled' or 'baptised' in the Holy Spirit.

This baptising or infilling work of the Holy Spirit, when He brings us into a sense of immersion and inclusion into the life of Jesus, has to be both voluntarily and intentionally sought after by us. The Holy Spirit, when He comes 'upon us' to indwell and work through us, does not violate or force Himself upon us. Although coming with the purpose, power and presence of God, His coming to be an indwelling presence is not characterised by forceful, domineering possession. For Him to mend, motivate and move deep within us (**John 7.38**) there has to be in us a willingness and desire on our part that God should come and work out His justice and righteousness within us, birthing a deep love and faithfulness within our hearts.

There are different ways by which we might helpfully speak of this presence and work of the Holy Spirit 'upon us', in seeking to come to a better understanding of the compass of the Holy Spirit's work. We can distinguish:

### **His Owning presence**

God is a 'jealous', a passionate God: the Hebrew word indicates His intensity of longing. He wants us to know that He is committed to us in a total way, and delights when we embrace Him through recognising and becoming disciples of Jesus, welcoming the Holy Spirit as a 'guarantee', a 'deposit' or engagement-ring, of His intent of keep us as His own forever (**Ephesians 1.13**). Likewise, the Holy Spirit, in calling us to share in the faith *of* Jesus, introduces us into intimacy with our Father in heaven, whereby we learn to call out, 'Abba, Father' (**Romans 8.15; Galatians 4.6**).

### **His Creative presence**

As well as our being able to use our created, natural abilities in the service of God, the Holy Spirit would work to enhance or augment these (**Romans 12.4-8; 1 Corinthians 12.3-11**), in order that we might replicate the ministry of Jesus and continue the ongoing extension of the Kingdom of God here on earth (**John 14.12**).

### **His Prompting presence**

In order to fulfil the purposes of the Kingdom, we have to be aware of God's agenda. The content of this is found in the Scriptures. Part of what the Holy Spirit does is to focus us on specific 'fine tuning' to assist us in the process of working this out. We see this in the life of early Christians (**Acts 9.10ff; 10.9ff**). We also, today, can know and testify today to the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of ourselves and other Christians around us.

### **3. - *A necessary detour***

#### **The Righteousness of God**

##### ***How God sees us***

In the second of our opening studies on the Nazareth Manifesto of **Luke 4.18-19**, we looked more deeply into what it means to say, with Jesus, that 'the Spirit of the Lord *is upon me*'. We reflected on how the Spirit of God moves us from having a faith that is minimally *in* Jesus towards a participation in a life of that faith that is *of* Jesus. We saw how the presence and action of the Holy Spirit on our lives takes us from giving ourselves *to* Jesus and moves us into the ministry *of* Jesus. In this study we take some 'time out' from the manifesto, in order to help us think through how it is that we can even imagine that we can share in the same faith and ministry that belonged to Jesus, the Son of God.

Have you ever thought on how it is that many can begin with what seems to be a keen faith; but that turns out to take them a very short distance? This is because there is a difference coming to Jesus as a customer and a disciple. Every shopper likes a bargain! Some people will even take things they don't want, if they are told they're free.

God's gift of life through Jesus Christ is freely offered to all; but God doesn't call for customers. He deals with disciples: people drawn to Jesus, bringer of the Kingdom of God. He deals with people who are intent on knowing the presence and purpose of God's Kingdom in their lives. God calls us to be participators in His divine nature (**2 Peter 1.4**). He wants us to be those who show, in our lives, the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5.21**).

How can this be? This whole process is based on the nature of the salvation that God calls us into. Being saved by Jesus does not simply take us into a place of safety from outside forces, where we are thereafter free to do whatever we want to do with our lives. The Bible speaks of our being freed from the powers of darkness and brought into the Kingdom that belongs to Jesus Christ (**Colossians 1.13**). God saves us by bringing us into a new life where Jesus is both our example and our older brother. Jesus Christ, God's only natural Son, is in the business of showing us, adopted as

God's children, how to live life in a way that pleases and furthers the purposes of our heavenly Father.

In this study, we begin to see how the essence of the new identity that comes to us, through faith in Jesus Christ, is based on the righteousness of God.

What is righteousness? To begin to understand this, we have to remember that the blessing of God is something that God 'pours out' upon us. It carries the scent of the glory and goodness of God. It is like a stream that comes upon us; and that is to flow out from among us, full of the presence and purpose of God Himself (**Amos 5.24; Ezekiel 47.1-12**). In the same way, we have to understand that the righteousness of God is that which 'comes upon us'. God's understanding of salvation is to imprint His character upon us; to work out His purposes in and through His promises to us (**Gen 12.2-3**). God wants to work in our lives to make us like Jesus, so that we, quite literally, *might become the righteousness of God* (**2 Corinthians 5.21**).

Now, if you are beginning to feel yourself overwhelmed with your own sense of inadequacy, don't be dismayed! God knows you can't bring about this change by yourself. With His help, however, it can happen. Why, this is the very reason that Jesus Christ came to us from God! Yet God doesn't leave us with nothing to say in the matter. The pivotal verse in the Old Testament that describes what God invites us to do, in order to be saved, is found at **Genesis 15.6**. It describes the process that began for Abraham. Here we read that Abraham heard what God said He had done and would do. Abraham responded, in *that he had faith in the Lord, God reckoning that to Abraham as righteousness*.

It's important to see that this righteousness that God attributes to Abraham has two stages to it. First of all, God imputes righteousness to Abraham because Abraham takes God seriously, putting His trust in Him and resolving to depend on Him. Abraham recognises the presence of the God of glory, acknowledges the goodness of His character and trusts in His promise. Abraham models the type of faith that brings righteousness into our lives.

Secondly, God goes on from there to work His righteousness into both Abraham's life and our lives. God marinates Abraham in His righteousness, making him more like God. It's a bit like preparing a special sauce for the meat in a bar-b-q sauce! You let it soak, or marinate in the sauce, so that the sauce flavours right through the meat. In the same way, God wants to soak us in His righteousness. The more Abraham is exposed to God and His ways, the more he is changed. For us, like Abraham, there are also these two stages to this growth into righteousness. It begins when God imputes righteousness to us, because we really put our trust in Him; but it doesn't stop there. As we surrender into God, offering our lives to participate in the ways of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, God works into us more and more of His glory and goodness, causing His own righteousness to be expressed in and through us.

Now, how does this tie up with Jesus? Well, it's very simple. Jesus is full of the glory of God, all God's character revealed in Him (**Hebrews 1.3**). Jesus is also the fulfilment of all of God's promises (**2 Corinthians 1.20**). It follows that, when we welcome and acknowledge Jesus to be the dominant influence in our lives, putting our

trust and confidence in Him, God both declares us righteous in His sight and also begins to work that righteousness into our lives.

That all this is done through Jesus is captured in the famous verse, **Romans 3.22**. It reminds us that:

1. we accept and welcomes Jesus as the fulfilment of all the promises of God
2. we start to live out of the faith of Jesus Himself, expressing His acts of righteousness.

***Faith – the doorway into a life filled by the Holy Spirit***

Covenant is about more than promise. It is also a declaration and expression of purposefulness. For us to be taken up in the covenants of God, in and through our relationship to Jesus, means that we are taken up in the purposefulness of God’s saving action, as He advances His Kingdom. Again, we are reminded of this when we see how, in the following chart, the covenants of God recorded in Scripture are not only expression of promise, but also of purpose:

<b>Abraham</b>				<b>Isaac</b>	<b>Jacob</b>	<b>Moses</b>	<b>David</b>	<b>new</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>					
<b>Great Nation</b>		<b>Father of nations</b>	<b>Numerous</b>	*	*		<b>Successor</b>	
<b>Blessed by God</b>		<b>Be Your God</b>	<b>Bless you</b>	*	*	<b>Treasured possession</b>		<b>Personal knowledge of God &amp; His ways</b>
	<b>A land to live in</b>	<b>Everlasting possession</b>	<b>Take possession</b>	*	*	<b>Kingdom of priests</b>	<b>Eternal Kingdom</b>	<b>Forgiveness of sins</b>
	<b>All peoples blessed through you</b>		<b>Blessing to all nations</b>	*	*	<b>Holy nation</b>		
<small>Genesis 12. 1-3</small>	<small>Genesis 15. 1-20</small>	<small>Genesis 17. 1-11</small>	<small>Genesis 22. 15-18</small>	<small>Genesis 26. 2-5</small>	<small>Genesis 28. 13-15</small>	<small>Exodus 19. 3-8</small>	<small>2 Samue I 7. 8-16</small>	<small>Jeremiah 31. 31-34</small>

How is it, then, that we can get involved in God’s purposes? The answer lies in faith. Faith is something God deeply and sincerely wants us to ‘do’. It’s not something someone else can do for us. Not even God Himself can ‘do’ faith for us! Our ability and capacity to ‘do’ faith is part of what it means to say that we are made in the image of God. The ability to exercise faith is part of our creative capacity. It’s to do with our ability to identify with God and to ‘do’ the Jesus-thing.

Faith is more like running a race than simply making a decision. We have to decide to move off from the starting line; but then we can’t then just stop! We have to keep on

running the race until we finish. Unless we finish the race, we become disqualified. No matter how naturally athletic we are, there is a race to run. Being athletic doesn't mean we don't have to 'do' it. Likewise, someone who has always been a couch potato yet, on entering the race, resolves to make it all the way to the end, is better than a 'natural' athlete who can't be bothered to run on! Faith arises from a life that is being taken up in and committed to the cause of God's Kingdom. This is the way it is in the teaching of Jesus.

Faith is better compared to a developing muscle than a decorative medal! The Bible talks of us receiving the Holy Spirit to aid us in this development process. The Holy Spirit strengthens us in repentance and consecration, leading us into expressing more and more of God's nature, character and ministry into our lives.

This is what the Holy Spirit doing in the lives of the early Christians – He leads us into doing more of the Jesus-thing. We see this in the life of the disciple Ananias, in **Acts 9.10-19**. We also see it in the life of Peter, in **Acts 10.9ff**. Notice, neither of these disciples instinctively wanted to do the Jesus-thing! They had to be willing to obey and consecrated themselves to do the 'Jesus thing', in order to undertake a ministry that is enabled by the Holy Spirit. What's true for them is also true for us.

God wants both to bless us and to make us a blessing to others, as we are bathed in His presence and power. This was why He made His promise to Abraham. It is what we are about as we give ourselves into being the righteousness of God.

#### **4. *Because He has anointed me***

##### **a. Our new identity**

In the Bible, anointing may be applied either medicinally, to honour someone with a fragrance, or to dedicate or consecrate someone or something to God. Jesus acknowledges that not only has he dedicated and consecrated Himself to God; but God has also accepted Jesus and set Him apart Him for a specific purpose. Jesus and all that is His is fully consecrated to God His Father.

So it is with Christians. When we turn away from pursuing our own goals, whether they appear positive or destructive, and consecrate ourselves to Christ, we find ourselves with a new identity given by God that is defined by and through Jesus (**Galatians 2.20; Philippians 1.21**). This is also the point where God consecrates us to the ministry and purpose of His choosing: it is our moment of 'Christening', or anointing by God. This is why, in early church liturgies, anointing with oil would often follow on baptism for believers. Aaron and his sons were anointed to be priests of God (**Exodus 28.41**). Saul (**1 Samuel 10.1**) and David (**1 Samuel 16.13**) were anointed kings over Israel. Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) both mean "the anointed one." The word is used of the coming Redeemer in the Old Testament (**Psalms 2:2; Daniel 9:25-26; Isaiah 61.1**). Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, is the Anointed One.

Christians are God's 'anointed ones'. We receive the Spirit because we are 'Christened': dedicated and committed to Jesus Christ and His ministry. We are

called by God not simply to be receivers of His love. We are called to be participants with Him in His ministry.

“A Christian is (or should be) defined as one who humbles himself or herself and chooses to enter into discipleship, to follow Jesus’ path, to build his or her life upon his teachings and his practices even at great cost, to pass those teachings and practices on to others, and thus to enjoy the unspeakable privilege of participating in the advance of God’s reign”  
(Stassen & Hushee *Kingdom Ethics* 30).

It is vitally important that we grasp this: that we share the same anointing as Jesus (**John 14.26**). His privileges are our privileges (**Romans 8.15-17**). His purpose is our purpose (**Matthew 28.19-20**). His ministry is our ministry (**John 14.12**).

#### **b. The key to understanding our new identity**

Jesus’ self-understanding, and the relationship He possesses under and in His Father’s authority, is summarised in His instruction to His disciples: *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well* (**Matthew 6.33**). It is the rule of God in and through Him, together with the presence and motivation of a life grounded in righteousness, in the full OT sense of the word, that characterises and defines His ministry.

This is the mark of those who belong to God, at all times in history. It was the case for Abraham. He gave himself to trust and invest himself in God’s promise and purpose (**Genesis 15.6**). God thereby worked His own righteousness and justice into Abraham through the conduit of Abraham’s faith (**Genesis 18.9**). Abraham turned to God, embraced God and became dependent upon God. It is the same for us today. The children of Abraham are those who trust in this same God: the God of promise, purpose and power who is made known in and through Jesus Christ (**Romans 4.13ff**).

Now, with all that we have said about our joining in the ministry of the Kingdom, we need to be clear about one thing: it is God alone who is able to bring in the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the presence of the rule of God. Where faith is activated from within us like a mustard seed (**Matthew 17.20**), it is a response to the Kingdom of God that has first entered our lives as a mustard seed (**Matthew 13.31**). In this sense, the most basic thing that we can do in order to advance God’s Kingdom is to ensure that we remain open to Him, under His authority and united to Jesus. That we look to God with submission, desiring to pursue His purposes. There is a danger that we imagine that there are actions we can take to outwardly advance the rule of God on earth; but we cannot. Only God can advance the Kingdom. Certainly, we must participate in the Kingdom’s advance through our exercise of faith. In what way, we might ask? By allowing God His place of respect, authority and rule within our lives. The Kingdom of God must be rooted within us (**Luke 17.21**).

Faith is our response to the Kingdom of God touching our lives. It is our tuning in and focussing, through active repentance, consecration and openness to the Holy Spirit, to what God has both promised and purposed in and through Jesus Christ. This is the only way for those who have entered into the anointing, embracing the identity and purpose, of Jesus the Messiah.

## 5. *To preach good news to (lit 'to evangelise') the poor*

Gaining an understanding of the Biblical meaning of both justice and righteousness, the foundations of God's throne (**Psalm 89.14**), is foundational to our grasping what Jesus is here declaring. The Old Testament, Hebrew understandings of Justice and Righteousness are a vital background to what is spoken of here. Justice means more than judgment, but involves establishing God's rule. Likewise, righteousness is not another word for self-righteousness! Righteousness is more than the quality of a good person: it has a social dimension too<sup>1</sup>, for first and foremost it describes the character of God Himself.

Justice is the Kingdom purposefulness of God pursued, His own character expressed: it means that quality that wants to see that people get what is rightfully theirs, especially in vindicating the marginalised, impoverished or powerless. Likewise, Righteousness is the quality of both individuals and communities of people who are committed to pursuing the rights of the poor or powerless, seeking the delivery of community-restoring justice. Both qualities are rooted in the character of God, as well as reflected and expressed in His Law, delivered to Moses.

Christian scholars have persuasively demonstrated<sup>2</sup> the connection between the Nazareth manifesto (**Luke 4.18-19**), the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5.1-12**) and the messianic declaration of **Isaiah 61**. Both Matthew and Luke's addresses demonstrate that Jesus' understanding is rooted in the Isaiah vision of the coming of God's Kingdom in power; and the Gospel writers clearly show and emphasise the true revelation of the mystery of the Kingdom of God. The nature of this mystery, made known through Jesus Christ, is that the Messiah's first coming is not in judgment but in compassion and mercy, manifesting God's righteousness and saving purpose. God's judgment, in vindicating the righteous and punishing the wicked, is that second aspect of the Messiah's coming that the prophets properly anticipate. Judgment will take place at the end of the 'church age' when the Messiah will return again, in manifest triumph and victory over His enemies.

How then is the news, that the Kingdom is coming, good-news to the poor? How can simply news be good? Don't the poor require, most of all, material help? Yes, but the heart of the issue lies in understanding the nature of real poverty. Poverty robs people of hope. It makes them feel trapped, helpless and worthless. The declaration of the coming of the Kingdom, where God brings justice and righteousness, is one that brings hope and expectation of relief from poverty for the poor.

But what is real poverty? Poverty, within our global context, is hard to define, for the measure of it is relative across the globe. Is a person poor if they have £100 a year? £1,000 a year? For many in our society, poverty would be thought of as having less

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<sup>1</sup> This feature is expounded and explained from Scripture in *The Politics of Jesus*, a significant work written in 1972 by the Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder. Yoder demonstrates that, for both Jesus and in the follow-on work of Paul, righteousness has the Old Testament sense of an essentially social dimension: it is patterned for society at large in and through the way that the community of God's people deal with one another.

<sup>2</sup> Most recently in the work of ethicists Stassen & Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (IVP 2003).

than £10,000 a year! What are better measured are the effects of poverty. Poverty marginalizes. It robs people of self-worth, or value to society: poverty brings a sense of lack of meaningful **identity**; a feeling of marginalisation or disenfranchisement within the wider **community**, causing alienation from others. Poverty causes a lack of **purposefulness** or direction in life. This is how we can define poverty: it is that which robs people of identity, community and purposefulness.

It is these issues of **identity**, **community** and **purposefulness** that the good news of the gospel addresses. The Gospel tells us *who* God has intended us to be: His valued children, one with His Son, Jesus Christ. It tells us *how* God wants us to be: people who see God's desire that we live together in community, reflecting the life of Jesus and giving hope to lonely people by showing how life with others might be. It tells us *why* God wants us to be: actively partnered with Jesus in bringing the good news and the presence of God's Kingdom to other people.

What, then, of the rich? Is there not a place in the Kingdom for those who possess wealth? Indeed, isn't wealth seen, in the Old Testament, as a sign of blessing? Or is the only word to the rich from Jesus, the Lord of the invading Kingdom, one of woe: *But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort* (**Luke 6.24**)?

To understand the Kingdom's impact on the wealthy, we need to remember that God's Kingdom is shown through Jesus to be an *invading* Kingdom. The present world is under the control of the evil one because of human investment in selfish and hedonistic pride and rebellion against God, exploiting and disadvantaging other people and the natural world we live in, ignoring the cause of justice and righteousness. People whose lives are invested in gaining wealth in this world, on this world's terms, are unlikely to welcome a new order that deprives them of their opportunity to keep such wealth! For those whose lives are truly invested in the Kingdom of God, wealth in the present order is incidental and cannot of itself be seen as a singular vindication or proof of God's blessing. On the other hand, such wealth as we possess can be positively used and put to work in serving the Kingdom of God's advance on earth: but our attitude towards it, mindful of the deceptive power of wealth (**1 Timothy 6.10**; **Psalm 64.6**; **Hebrews 13.5**), has to be carefully monitored.

So what should the rich do? As with Zacchaeus, they must demonstrate faith through repentance and restitution (**Luke 19.8-9**). The rich, as with everyone else, need that righteousness that comes through faith to be saved: which involves repenting, embracing Jesus and all He stands for and looking to the Holy Spirit for help. More than that, however, the rich have the opportunity to take up and pursue the Lord's mission to help the poor: those who have been robbed of their identity, participation in community and their sense of purposefulness. The Kingdom of God is therefore not only for the poor (**Matthew 5.3**); it is also for those who, with Jesus, will contend for the rights of and seek to bring help to the poor (**Matthew 5.10**), for righteousness' sake.

## 6. *He has sent me*

Our Father in heaven is the God of covenant promise. He reaches out towards us with a heart full of love, pursuing the cause of justice and righteousness; yet doing so,

through the mystery of the Kingdom come in Jesus Christ, with mercy and not yet judgment, with restorative compassion and not yet punishment

As our heavenly Father looks to rescue us from the destructive chains of sin and self-destruction, so His promise also looks for a response. The covenant promises of God, in Scripture, are always connected with a human response. That response is called 'faith'. God never forces Himself upon us. Even when He comes in awesome glory, He looks for mankind to act in our created, creative capacity as His appointed stewards on the earth.

What this response of faith means, in each particular situation, will differ in measure. Abraham, at first, had to get up and move (**Genesis 12.1**)! Then he had to still his heart from fear (**Genesis 15.1**). Later, he had to undertake circumcision (**Genesis 17.10**) and, lastly, he had to be prepared to sacrifice his own son (**Genesis 22.15-18**). Through all of this, Abraham was been fashioned into a man whose character and heart reflected, more and more, the character and heart of God. We see this principle repeated again and again through Scripture. It is as we hold on through thick and thin to this God of glory and goodness, who reaches out to bless us through His covenant promises (**2 Peter 1.3-4**), that God takes pleasure in releasing His blessing more and more into our loves.

To endure this, we need to positively embrace the way God engages us, involving us in His agenda. This is what being enlisted in the life of Jesus Christ involves. Jesus stood over against a contemporary religiosity that was about 'high ideals' and legalistic self-righteousness. The Son of God comes in our humanity as Messiah, in order to initiate and enroll us in transforming initiatives.

Before we go any further, though, let us be clear about one vital truth. Jesus say that *He has sent me*. Jesus is talking about God, his heavenly Father. Jesus is no more or less loving to us than His Father. Everything He does and says is at one with His Father in heaven. Now, why do we need to emphasise this? Quite simply because of the devil's deceit. There are many people who think of God as hard and judging, but Jesus as meek and mild. This is nonsense! The Scriptures make clear that Jesus is the sort of Son who is exactly like His Father (**John 14.9**; **Colossians 1.15**; **Hebrews 1.3**). Father has a loving and caring heart. Never forget this. What Jesus does is no more nor less than to represent Father's love and express it, in and through His life, towards us.

How much of God's transforming initiative should we now expect to take place? The answer is probably 'more than we are used to expecting'! Since Christianity, as early as the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, sought the approval of the powers of the Roman Empire, there was a danger in the established church of 'spiritualising' the Kingdom of God into an 'other worldly' religiosity, fit only for those detached from real life or who are facing up to their mortality. We call this form of deceit 'dualism': the separation of spiritual things from practical, worldly matters. The great religious paintings and art works of medieval Europe betray something of this. Jesus depicted either as a baby or as crucified: his life like one of us: except that everything between the cradle and the grave is conveniently lost sight of! It suited everyone, it seemed, to keep God in the church and the world left alone – but with God's blessing. Seldom was the Bible's commitment to and Jesus' involvement in pursuing justice and righteousness here on

earth emphasised. Righteousness, it seems, was ‘spun’ by the political spin-doctors of the time in order to lose its social and political sense, reformulated into the notion of an ‘inner, hidden quality’ that comes from a passive believing. Even among the great protestant Reformers there were those, such as Luther and Calvin, who perpetuated this medieval worldview by tending to emphasise salvation as belonging to the ‘spiritual’, not the ‘practical’ world. Small wonder that nowadays, in an age of growing prosperity and lengthening life expectancy, people in the 1<sup>st</sup> world economies have increasingly abandoned the legacy of such a compromised, impotent and irrelevant notion of faith!

The faith of Jesus and that met with in the Bible is quite different. The whole world rightfully comes under God’s authority; but the devil has exploited human sin and taken the world over, like a spiritual ‘mafia’. God wants us to realise that we Christians are in the reclaiming business! Every aspect of daily living, in business and at home, with family and with friends, is the place where we are to enter with the transforming initiatives of the Kingdom of God. Anointed by God, committed in justice and righteousness to the cause of the poor.

As disciples of Jesus, we are to embrace the fact that our lives are rescued and redeemed in order to be significant, social and purposeful. God is sending us into society each day. He gathers us, as cell group and as congregation, in order to model righteous and just relationships each week. He has appointed us as emissaries of the Kingdom among those we live and work with. He has not called us to be content with the *status quo* of our lives and those of our families and friends. He has and is sending us to bear the disruptive love of His Kingdom rule into a world wracked with darkness, disease, despair and death. He sends us as His own.

### *to bind up those who are broken and crushed*

This phrase is found in the AV rendering of our passage, more exactly quoting from **Isaiah 61**. Practical care is our starting point. It is the balance to the proclamation, for the action of bringing good news involves, by necessity, the accompaniment of practical help. There are also those who sense that they are beyond or out of reach of that point where they might responding to hope proclaimed: for such, we need to begin by proffering practical help.

Jesus’ love is not an abstract notion or unrealisable ideal. Jesus’ love sees with compassion and enters into the situation of people in bondage, doing deeds of deliverance and inviting into community with freedom, justice and responsibility for the future<sup>3</sup>. It is the love of the Good Samaritan: rigorously practical, bringing a

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[Stassen & Gushee \(pp 334-338\)](#) see 4 features in this love, Christ’s love:

- a. love sees with compassion and enters into the situation of those in bondage (or enmity)
- b. love does delivering deeds
- c. love invites into community with justice, freedom and a future (community requires that we live by forgiveness and grace rather than self-righteousness and judgmentalism)

transforming initiative. Yet Christian love does not end there. There is also another responsibility that falls on the disciple of Jesus.

### ***to proclaim***

This is the action of the herald, of one who is both under the authority of and has the right to speak out a declaration from God. Jesus is the bringer of the Kingdom, proclaiming the fullness of God's Kingdom come and coming, which He now brings in.

What Jesus proclaims is the advent of the Kingdom of God. In Old Testament terms, this was seen as the coming of God to fully establish His reign on earth, in and through Israel. His coming would change both the political (**Isaiah 2.1-4**) and the physical order around us (**Isaiah 11.6-9**).

Jesus is proclaiming that which is arriving now. It is an invitation to men and women both to respond to what God is bringing in at present, and to look to Him to fulfil, in their live, that which is His healing purpose.

The action of proclaiming is vital, because it is this that prepares the hearts of men and women for faith in God. Proclamation tells and reminds people of who God is and what He is doing. It is proclamation of what God desires to do, opening the possibility of the response of faith. Proclamation declares and witnesses to the grace of God and the coming of the Kingdom. It opens the possibility of faith. There are two essential components to this proclamation:

#### ***i. to those in bondage: release***

This declaration of freedom resonates with the intentionality of the Jubilee year (**Leviticus 25 & Deuteronomy 15.2**). It also demonstrates who Jesus is (**Luke 7.22**). In Jesus' ministry, it is marked by a liberating of people, through deliverance, of demonic bonds that would diminish or destroy them. There is a difference between release and restoration from that which binds and the act of fulfilling all that God has for men and women. What comes first is the release: restoration follows. Effective ministry begins with release effected by repentance and also deliverance from the spiritual and demonic bonds that would strangle and destroy us.

There is also an aspect of deliverance which involves not only stopping involvement in bad things, but also renouncing influences upon us that have made us less than ready to surrender all we are into Jesus, in order to be healed. Such a deliverance from oppressive and destructive influences is essential for healing to take place.

#### ***ii. and to the blind: sight***

We have to be open to welcome, receive and embrace this declaration and offer from God. Faith has to be in birthed as our heart's response to God. We have to want a new perspective on life, a new way of seeing things.

The response to this proclamation has to be faith: an appropriation of God's blessing by each person ministered to. There also has to be a readiness to minister, in the power of the Holy Spirit, by the proclaimer. We might put it this way: in any advance of the Kingdom, there is an invitation by God to some which involves the empowerment and leading of others by the Holy Spirit.

Smith Wigglesworth, the great healing evangelist, once put it this way:

“There is no standing still for us. As Christ is, so are we in this world: the offspring of God, with impulse Divine. We must get into line! We have the life of the Son of God in us to make the whole Body aflame with fire. We have what it takes to do it, for the Word says;

After ye have received, ye shall have **power**.  
(Acts 1:8, paraphrased)

“God has given me a blessed ministry. He helps me to stir others up. Our gathering in meetings must be for increase; we must use the power of God in us to win more souls into the kingdom of God. I am zealous for us to come into this Divine plan. If we wait for such power, we have mistaken the position we have through the Spirit.

### **God Is Waiting -- So ACT!**

““If I could only **feel** the power," we say.

“We have been too much on that line. God is waiting for us to **act**; to be like Jesus. Jesus had 'perfect activity'; He lived in the realm of Divine appointment with the Father's acts ever coming forth.

“The pure in heart see God, and our God is a consuming fire. **We must dare to press on until God comes forth through us in mighty power**. May God give us faith, that the power may come down like a cloud!

When I was in Slovanger, Norway, God said,

"Ask, I will give you every soul!"

It seemed too much to ask. The voice came again;

"Ask!"

“I dared to ask. The power of God swept through the meeting like a mighty wind! You want this where you live, so speak all the Word of this life. **Press on until Jesus is glorified and multitudes are gathered in**”.

### ***7. to send away, in release, those broken in spirit by oppression***

Here, the ministry of the Christian must be as that of Jesus: arising out of a close relationship with God Himself. While the ministry of the Christian is to be characterised by care for the broken-hearted, it also involves a dimension where those who are broken come to experience release through the exercise of our spiritual

authority in Christ. This is the dimension of ministering, like Jesus, under the authority of God: doing what we see our heavenly Father doing, speaking out that which He gives us to say. It embraces the action of healing the sick and casting out demons. To be effective in this, we do need to be in right relationship with God.

We see this in Jesus' life, and in the expectation cast over the Christian's life. The righteous man spends time in prayer with God, looking to communion with the Holy Spirit, led of and enabled by God. At the same time, however, the act of faith lies at our behest: we must choose to lay hold of the promises of God to so enable us and, in obedience and after the example of Jesus, exercise our mind and muscle in the service of God, as 'participators in the divine nature' (**2 Peter 1.4**).

Andrew Murray, the great south African church leader, spoke of our human nature, our soul, standing between two realities: body and the spirit (**Genesis 2.7**)<sup>4</sup>. Are we to be fashioned more by the flesh or more by the spirit?

Our Father in heaven deals with us by His Word and His Spirit. To lift our eyes to Him, looking to Him through His Word and Holy Spirit, can change the condition of what happens in us.

This should not surprise anyone. There are various ways in which see our lives effected by non-biological factors, which cannot be reduced to natural, scientific terms: the widespread use homeopathic medicine and acupuncture are two examples. Both deal with principles that are not essentially chemical. How much more so the Word and the Spirit of God our Creator!

**Genesis 1.1,3:** The Spirit broods. God speaks. The word is responsible for forming.

**Genesis 2.7:** The Spirit fills what is formed by the Word.

**John 1.1-5; 14:** The Word enters flesh

**John 20.19:** The Spirit enters where the Word is honoured and longed for

We need to invest ourselves in the Word, and the way of the Word, in order to be filled with the Spirit of God.

God wants to bring us into deeper salvation and healing, dealing with us in the way that is met with in Jesus Christ. But to accept these things, we have to lift our eyes to look to God in heaven. Here are two consequences when we do:

### **The power of confessing God's Word**

- a. Telling it as it is in the Bible, interpreted in and through the pivotal revelation that is in Jesus Christ our Lord! Address people as they can be seen from God's perspective of bringing them into a place of repentance and restoration. Each person in the world is full of potential. Each person is possessed of creative potential which only finds true fulfilment and purpose when it is married and harnessed to God through His Word and His Spirit.

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<sup>4</sup> *Divine Healing* Chap 8

- b. We need to grasp the power of telling the good news about Jesus. The good news of the Kingdom of God presently being ushered in, with testimonies of what effect that has had in our lives!

## **The recreative power of God's Word**

God spoke and what was good came into being (**Genesis 1**)!

Jesus Christ gives us a focus to see, in our humanity, what is good and true. Jesus is God's Word fully formed in and filling human flesh (**John 1.14**). God's Word is like a tree, full of fruit. Abounding in promises. He wants us to lay hold of the fruit and feast on them!

We are changed and blessed by the fruit.  
We become like the tree.

These become realities for the spiritually formed, but not the naturally formed man. The naturally formed man is only interested in what he can consume, possess and manipulate for his own ends. The spiritually formed man has these same appetites, but controls and disciplines them. The spiritually formed man feasts on God's Word and thirsts for His Spirit.

We can see, then, that we are creatures formed by God so that our human nature stands between two realities: our soul stands between flesh and body.

How do we get it right? When we look to Jesus, we see the one in whom both Word and Spirit meet. He is the Word Incarnate. In Him we see the Holy Spirit fully indwelling human form.

It is helpful if we can grasp the difference between building our own life on the promises of God and ministering to others.

### **a. Building our own life on the promises of God**

Here, we have to take responsibility in embracing the promises of God and holding to them. Factors outside our immediate control can delay answers realised:

*What do you expect to happen?*

Reasons for delay, in looking for God to fulfil His purpose of blessing:

Process of Prayer & perseverance:

**1 Kings 18.1, 42-44**

Dealing with obstacles which hinder fulfilment:

**Deuteronomy 9.18**

Satan's opposition:

**Daniel 10.12-13**

Proving of faith:

**Matthew 15.22ff**

### **b. Ministering to others**

Investing faith in God's Word, His whole Word, involves more than claiming promises. It entails our embracing all of the:

- ***Covenants of God*** to Abram, Moses & Israel, David; and the New Covenant following the exile
- ***Character of God*** (**Exodus 34.6-7a**)
- ***Concerns of God*** as focally expressed in the Nazareth manifesto
- ***Commission from God*** be a blessing / make disciples of all nations

While we give ourselves to the Word, we need to listen to the Spirit. It is a growth into the likeness of Jesus. The Spirit will promote growth in us into conformity to 'the Word become flesh', Jesus Christ.

We need to invest in the Word. Look to the Spirit for guidance in ministry to others. And then choose to invest ourselves in what we see and sense God calling us to! We have to invest our own creativity and energy, harnessed to the purposes and power of God.

When we minister to others, it has to be out of the life and the faith that comes to us through our union with Jesus. It is ministering in the faith of Jesus. If our relationship to God in Jesus is shallow, then our ministry will be shallow.

## ***8. And to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour***

### **1. The origin of the jubilee year:            Leviticus 25.1-34**

The ***Sabbath year*** provision (v 1 – 7) allowed for a year to leave the land fallow (also **Exodus 23:10-11**) and for all the people to 'help themselves' to whatever was growing; but there was to be no systematic harvesting. Further, it was to mark the cancellation of loans and debts (**Deuteronomy 15:1-18**). Hebrews sold into slavery were to be released (**Exodus 21:2**).

The ***Jubilee year*** provision (8 - 34) went even further. In addition to the provisions of the Sabbath years, this year was to be a time of returning the land to its hereditary tribal owners, as given under God's command.

Basic principles of both the Sabbath and Jubilee years were:

- i. Sound principles of ecological government and land management emphasised. A 'rhythm of rest' established, for both people and the land.
- ii. Care to ensure that economic poverty is ameliorated, by regular cancellation of debts and loans. This ensured that the 'spiral of poverty' was regularly broken every seven years.
- iii. By the periodic redistribution of capital assets, people were not to be alienated from the means of production. Each generation would have fresh opportunities to prosper.

The jubilee year was the year that, in the historic life of Israel, never seemed to happen! Its provisions seemed idealistic, even utopian. They stood over against the principles of good, worldly, economic sense.

It was a year, though, that the poor and disadvantaged longed for: a year when the righteousness of God might be manifested on earth. When would it, how could it, ever come about?

The truth was that, faced with human sin and greed, God alone could bring it about. God's Word surely will not be proven false: He himself, as Isaiah had reminded the people, would bring this to pass (**Isaiah 40.1-11**). God saving purposes would surely be worked out, for the Messiah would come to do these things (**Isaiah 52-53**).

## **2. The 'coming-in' of the year of the Lord**

Once we see the final section of **Luke 4.19** in the light of proper expectations arising from God's Word revealed in the Old Testament scriptures, we can begin to understand what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is declaring that a new season has arrived, where the fullness of God's proper provision for His people is realised. No longer is there to be a sense of unrelenting, unrelieved economic entrapment and personal slavery for people. God is taking action. But how?

The effect on us is twofold. Firstly, God draws us into intimacy with Him, to know His liberating rule in our lives, through the power of the New Covenant that Jesus brings to us. It is through the power of what Jesus does that we experience true, Sabbath rest and restoration (**Hebrews 4.9**).

Secondly, we are Christ's instruments in carrying the real value of both Sabbath and jubilee into the world around us. God does not look with favour on economic policies that entrap or enslave people. As Christians, we carry news of the present, spiritual rest that people can enter into in their souls; but we are also responsible for promoting social justice, which involves the pursuing the periodic redistribution of the means of producing wealth, combating the 'spiral of poverty' and also seeking to encourage a rhythm of rest and spiritual refreshing in people's lives.

## **3. Why doesn't God make it all happen, everywhere and for everyone, now?**

Why is it that fulfilment and realisation of all that God intended, while real and powerful, was also only to be partial in this present life? The answer is, because of God's great mercy. He brings in the Kingdom through Jesus, but He does so as not to crush a sinful humanity: He brings it in delivering and not judging power. Jesus declared that this is the season of the Lord's pleasure; but He significantly avoids completing the Isaiah quote, by omitting to say that He had brought *the day of vengeance of our God* (**Isaiah 61.2b**).

How vital it is that we, as Christians, grasp this! This is the season of saving love and mercy, not judgment. Jesus will indeed judge all men – but not now (**John 5.26-27; 12.46-48**). For the present, we are in the season of declaring mercy and an amnesty to all sinners, the opportunity of forgiveness and restoration (**2 Peter 3.9**). To all who will turn to Him in faith, our Father will draw us to Himself in Jesus and come to renew us in the power of His Spirit.

This renewing aspect of the Kingdom is for now. The fullness of worldwide renewal for all creation is yet to come.

*<sup>21</sup> All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. <sup>22</sup> For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us*  
**Romans 8.**<sup>5</sup>