



*7 Short  
Studies on  
the Gospel*

**Written by**

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# Invasion of Kindness

## Jesus and His Kingdom

### Day One: Kingdom

The very first public message from Jesus was about three seconds long. No doubt the perfect length for any sermon! It was one short sentence: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (Matthew 4:17)

This three second sermon is long enough to get Jesus off to a bad start for many people. There are often unpleasant feelings associated with the word “repent”. The word seems to imply, “you’re a sinful person and you should feel sorrowful enough to change.”

“Repent” in the original biblical language didn’t carry the idea of sorrow. It literally meant “turn around”, or do a 180. The word is like a highway traffic sign announcing the need to change direction. Jesus was not telling folks to feel sorrowful; he was pointing to something, to a major change about to break on the landscape.

This major change is described in the intriguing second part of his little sermon: “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This sounds like a strange reason indeed for anyone to turn around. What is the kingdom of heaven and how can that possibly affect anything?

Any kingdom is simply a realm of authority. Like the old saying, your home is your castle. Your home is a place over which you have authority, over which you rule.

Jesus began his ministry by announcing there is a new authority to be reckoned with on earth. Was this the authority of God’s judgement? Was Jesus getting ready to condemn people for their failures? Ironically it’s the exact opposite.

Here’s how Jesus put it.

**“God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.”** (John 3:17 Msg)

It’s a bit like the old Clint Eastwood stereotype western, in which a little village of decent people is suffering, having been taken over by a gang of bullies. That is, until one day a quiet stranger rides into town. Nobody knows it, but at that very moment the game has just changed. A new authority has silently arrived.

Jesus first message was, in effect, “turn around, because I am about to establish a groundbreaking kingdom unlike anything you’ve ever seen. This is good news for you, because this kingdom is empowered by heaven, in fact, by the God of heaven.”

It’s true. Jesus was calling people to change (repent or change direction.) But he was inviting them into something powerful and good. That is vastly different from a message of condemnation. This announcement by Jesus was very bold. It could

easily be dismissed as nonsense from a dreamer, someone detached from reality, unless somehow this claim of a real new kingdom could be backed up and demonstrated in everyday life.

But what might that actually look like? It didn't take long to find out. Jesus began to take action.

Discussion:

Key References: Matt. 4:17, John 3:17

1. What do you think of when you hear the word kingdom? How does that relate to the "kingdom of God"?
2. If God has always reigned, (read Psalm 99:1) how is Jesus announcement of the nearness of God's reign different?
3. What would you expect the kingdom of heaven (the kingdom Jesus announced) to look like?
4. With all that is wrong in the world, does news of a different kingdom bring joy or fear to your heart?

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## Jesus and His Kingdom

### Day Two: Miracles

Jesus' words soon took shape in action. His announcement of a new kingdom, a new authority, started to manifest itself in deeds. He began to help large numbers of people in incredible ways that had never been seen before. His fame spread rapidly. Matthew writes

**“And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. <sup>31</sup> So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.”** (Matthew 15:30-31 NASB)

The miracles attributed to Jesus are, no doubt, a problem for some people in our age. But often the reverse side of this problem is overlooked. What if Jesus had done nothing? What if His life showed no speck of evidence of anything unusual except extraordinary public speaking? His dramatic announcement of the kingdom of heaven would seem at best the words of an idealistic dreamer, or at worst ludicrous nonsense. For a person to make such momentous claims and be taken seriously, there must be a demand for some sort of proper evidence.

Therefore, belief in Jesus is ultimately rooted in actual historical events. The historical reports may be doubted or debated, but the discussion does take place on objective ground. Either the events happened or they didn't.

John the disciple wrote his own eyewitness report of Jesus miracles with that exact thought in mind:

**“In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.”** (John 20:30-31 The Good News Translation)

It is essential to note there is also a class of miracles that Jesus would not do. His critics goaded him to do something spectacular to prove himself to the world, and He flatly refused.

**“The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He \*said, ‘Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.’”** (Mark 8:11-12 NASB)

He never used miracles purely as a means to bolster His fame. His focus was simply not on Himself. As one keen observer noted,

“We cannot say that He thought little of himself, but we may say that He thought not of himself at all.” (AB Bruce, Training of the Twelve, p. 202)

The miracles Jesus did were outwardly focused acts of love and kindness to hurting people. Simple, ordinary folk came to him in their desperation. He did not act superior to them or turn them away. His kingdom authority was proving itself to be authority over sickness, disease, and spiritual torment. He proved by His actions that the news was indeed very good. The true nature of the kingdom of heaven would prove to be one of sacrificial love. He devoted His time and energy helping people to the point of exhaustion.

**“Then Jesus said, “Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.” He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat.” (Mark 6:31 NLT)**

Contrary to today’s popularized notion, Jesus was not in the business of selling future shares to a faraway place called heaven. He was infusing heaven into the harsh realities of this place called earth.

And increasingly He began to speak out about breathing the life of God back into the human race.

Discussion:

Key Verses: Matthew 15: 30, 31; John 20: 30, 31; Mark 8: 11, 12;

Mark 6:31

1. How would you respond to Jesus if you had seen Him do the miracles described in these passages?
2. Why were some people receptive to Jesus while some rejected Jesus in the face of such miracles?

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## Jesus and His Kingdom

### Day Three: Life

On a daily basis, Jesus went to war on sickness, disease, and spiritual oppression and won. The authority of the kingdom of heaven was proving to be good news indeed for many people. But Jesus began to reveal a much bigger vision of the power of His kingdom. He used vivid word pictures to invite people into a revolutionary new quality of life.

**“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”** (John 7:37-38 NIV)

**Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”** (John 6:35 NASB)

As it turns out, the miracles of physical healing that gained so much attention were not the end goal. They were a signpost to a something even greater.

**“I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”** (John 10:10 MSG)

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”** (John 5:24 NASB)

So the ultimate good news of Jesus and his kingdom are revealed here: the offer of eternal life. No issue for humanity compares with the reality of death. As Solomon once observed:

**“Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!”** (Ecclesiastes 9:4 NIV)

Death lurks in the background of human life, a merciless enemy, exempting no one, rich or poor, highly educated or illiterate. Jesus had healed many people afflicted with sickness and disease but even for them, at some later point death would still come.

Jesus does not refer to eternal life as a vague future state of bliss in the hereafter. He invites people into a present reality of deep fulfillment in this life that endures straight through and beyond death.

This promise of an indestructible life is inspiring but seems in real life like a noble sentiment too good to be true. How can endless life possibly be attained, or even more improbable, granted by one human being to another?

The answer hinges on Jesus’ gradual revelation of His own identity. He began to speak of Himself in ways suggesting He was distinct from other human beings.

**Just as the Father is himself the source of life, in the same way he has made his Son to be the source of life.” (John 5:26 GNT)**

**“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9 RSV)**

The question of Jesus true identity is the central question. What He taught is tied to who He is. The credibility of His invitation into life is bound up in the answer to a question He once posed to his disciples:

**“But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15 NASB)**

Discussion:

1. Review the verses on these pages?
2. What is your reaction to the words “abundant life”? “eternal life”? an “indestructible life”?
3. How do you see those phrases intersecting with your actual life right now? Are they related in any way or unrelated?
4. What is your impression of Jesus as He says these things? Are you drawn to Him or confused by Him?



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## Jesus and His Kingdom

### Day Four: Identity

When Jesus first announced groundbreaking news about the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, He left the most significant part unsaid. It happened to be the part about Himself.

As a rule, Jesus did not talk openly about His own identity. That is because the focus of His life was consistently outward. He sought to let His actions be the primary source of revelation about Himself. By helping the common people and associating with the outcasts of His culture, He proved that great power can be wielded out of great humility. He could be approached by even the lowliest of persons.

But His miracles were simply astounding, unlike anything that had ever been seen before. So rumors and guesses abounded about who He really was. Jesus disciples told him a few of the guesses:

**“Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”**(Matthew 16:14 NASB)

These deeply revered names show the extraordinary impact Jesus was having on the common people of Israel. His rank was considered to be of the highest order.

But there was an even higher order. It took a long time for even his closest followers to come to a realization that Jesus affirmed. Jesus asked them:

**“But who do you say I am?”**

**Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,\* the Son of the living God.”**

**Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John,\* because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.”**  
(Matthew 16:15-18 NLT)

Jesus strong affirmation of a divine identity radically altered the good news. It wasn't just that the kingdom of heaven that had arrived on earth. The good news was the king had arrived as well.

Toward the very end of his life, Jesus began to speak more openly about His identity. This stirred up fierce anger and resentment among the religious leaders. His claims were considered to be disrespectful insults toward God, or blasphemy. At one point they picked up stones to kill him:

**Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”**

**The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”** (John 10:30-33 NASB)

In response to such accusations, Jesus calmly pointed to His deeds, not His words, to answer the question of his identity:

**“The proof is the work I do in my Father’s name.”** (John 10:25 NLT)

In the end, when he stood on trial for His life before the council of the high priest, He gave a straightforward answer to their question, knowing the grim outcome for uttering His reply.

**And they all said, “Are You the Son of God, then?” And He said to them, “Yes, I am.”** (Luke 22:70 NASB)

At the core of any meaningful discussion of Jesus stands this question of His identity. He regarded His mighty deeds as primary evidence, once again rooting belief in actual events. In the absence of any proof, such far-fetched claims as these by a person would signal an unbalanced mind or outright lunacy.

On trial before the Roman governor, he completes the circle begun with his very first message.

**Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world.”** (John 18:37 NASB)

Discussion:

1. Review the verses on these pages.
2. Do you think of Jesus as a king? Why or why not?
3. If Jesus is king as He claims, what are the implications for all human authority?

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## Jesus and His Kingdom

### Day Five: Death

Jesus was not surprised when He was captured for execution. Roughly a year before His death He began warning His disciples of this.

**“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.”** (Luke 9:20-22 NASB)

His disciples could not process this information at all. They were afraid to ask details. Ultimately, they ignored it. Their conception of Jesus was already set in stone. He was the long expected Jewish Messiah, who would set up a kingdom in David’s great tradition. Israel would no longer be subject to the Romans. This view led the disciples to argue on several occasions who would be greatest among them.

Jesus had a radically different plan they did not fathom. But He did give clues of this plan along the way. For instance, His statement:

**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** (Matthew 20:28 NASB)

A ransom is payment for the release of a prisoner. Jesus consistently taught that humanity was actually imprisoned, enslaved to wrongdoing as evidenced by the mistreatment of one another. **“Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”** (John 8:34 NASB)

He explained that humanity’s problem is not intellectual but a matter of the heart. **“For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”** (Mark 7:21-23 NIV)

The religious life of Israel had from ancient times been built around the concept of sacrifice. Under this system, a perfect flawless animal - often a lamb - was sacrificed before God. This animal was essentially a substitute for the people. The wrongdoings of the people against each other and before God were symbolically placed upon this animal, and it was killed. With the shed blood came forgiveness from God.

This might sound like just another angry God story. Except for one thing. In this case, the good news was that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, had come to set things right and establish His kingdom. This kingdom would not be established through violence. It would be born out of God Himself bearing the agonizing sacrifice. The great power that Jesus meant to show people was the power of God’s love, and His deep desire to bring forgiveness and healing to people.

Peter summed it up this way: **“Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed.”** (1 Peter 2:24 GNT)

Perhaps it’s easy in our scientific age to dismiss these ideas as religious superstition. The sticking point is this: our modern culture is unable to solve the same problems. Why do people seriously damage each other all the time? Why are murder and war so commonplace? How can we explain our tendency to hurt and damage even our closest loved ones? Has any person ever made it through life undamaged, uninjured by other people? Doesn’t it seem that with the vast knowledge at our fingertips, anger and war would be ancient history?

How strange and terrible that Jesus himself, by any measure one of the finest people to ever walk this earth, was, after countless acts of kindness, “flung out of existence by the world as a person not to be tolerated.” (AB Bruce, Training of the Twelve, p. 314)

But it wasn’t a dreadful accident. Jesus death as a ransom for people was part of a master plan. It was in many ways the beginning. The greatest secrets of His kingdom were about to be revealed.

#### Discussion:

1. Review the verses on these pages.
2. What do you think the disciples were expecting?
3. Although Jesus said He was going to die, why do you think His disciples didn’t understand it?
4. How does Jesus’ willingness to pay a price for you make you feel about Him?

# Invasion of Kindness

## Jesus and His Kingdom

Day Six: Raised

When the very first report of Jesus' resurrection from the dead reached the ears of the disciples, this was their reaction:

**"... these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them."** (Luke 24:11 NASB)

Nonsense? How strikingly odd. Weren't these the men who saw all the miracles? Didn't Peter proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God? Didn't Jesus clearly tell them that he would be put to death and rise again?

Actually this reaction is very true to life and gives great credibility to the authenticity of the account. The harsh truth is there was not even a whisper of faith left in these men. They had been completely crushed. Crushed hope quickly ferments into cynicism. They would not be lured into getting their hopes up again. No way! This new kingdom that Jesus had promised in their minds had come crashing down. The great Messiah who had excited their imaginations was dead. That was it.

Consequently, when Jesus first showed himself to them, they were terrified! He had to calm them down: **And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"** (Luke 24:38 NASB)

He took great pains to show them that he had physically risen, that it was really him: **"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."** (Luke 24:39 NASB)

Over the next 40 days Jesus helped them regain their shattered faith.

**After his suffering, he presented himself to [the disciples] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."** (Acts 1:3 NIV)

So, in this plain, matter-of-fact style, the New Testament reports that Jesus is alive; He has risen from the dead. Just as it is with his reported miracles, so it is with His resurrection. The most decisive facts about Jesus are tightly bound up in actual events. If the events took place, then Jesus claims must be seriously considered. If the events took place, there exists extraordinary evidence of His divine identity.

However, the physical resurrection of Jesus was more than just a vindication of His divine identity, more than just proof that what he said was true. It was the pivotal breakthrough moment ushering in all that He had promised about the kingdom of heaven. This was the turning point of His quiet revolution to reclaim the earth.

But how can any revolution help humanity? Let's be honest. Noble talk of heaven and glowing words about life and joy are fine, but does anything really change with human nature? It isn't that human beings lack the knowledge or capacity to

conceive of a happy, peaceful planet. We understand it. We even desire it. We just can't do it. In spite of all the positive talk, human nature remains stubbornly locked into conflict patterns and damaging self-centered behaviors.

Human nature needs a whole new moral DNA, not just good advice. That is exactly the door that Jesus opened by His resurrection. His resurrection paved the way for God's Spirit to be unleashed in this world. Becoming a follower of Jesus is primarily about being joined to His resurrection life. Peter, writing at a later time, called it becoming "**partakers of the divine nature.**" (2 Peter 1:4 NIV)

To continue the metaphor, it's as if through His death and resurrection Jesus has given access to a divine DNA, which is none other than the Holy Spirit of God. When a person places faith in Jesus and in His sacrificial payment to cancel out sin, and also embraces His resurrection life, it's as if God's Spirit, the divine DNA, wraps himself around and merges with our perishable human DNA. Everything changes because the life of God becomes forever joined to the souls of ordinary people. This initiates a fundamental change in our moral nature otherwise impossible.

That is why following Jesus is not simply agreeing with certain religious concepts or ideas. It is about joining oneself forever to a real living person.

#### Discussion:

1. Review the verses on these pages.
2. If you had been one of the disciples, how do you think you would have responded to the news of His resurrection?
3. What does it mean to be a partaker of the "divine nature"?
4. Does having a new "moral nature" as described on these pages sound attractive or unattractive? Why?

# Invasion of Kindness

## Jesus and His Kingdom

### Day Seven: Faith

It should be no surprise that the disciples at first failed to believe in the resurrection. Even though they saw Jesus and His miracles in person, they consistently struggled with their faith. The phrase “you of little faith” was almost like Jesus’ nickname for the disciples.

So, if it was difficult even for the disciples to believe, given what they saw, how can we find faith in our day?

One day a desperate father came to Jesus with his sick son, pleading for healing. Deep inside, he was skeptical that Jesus could really help. He said: “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” Jesus replied, “If you can? All things are possible to him who believes.” The father, fearing he had ruined his chances with Jesus, cried out, “I do believe, help my unbelief!” That prayer was immediately answered because Jesus healed the young man. (See Mark 9:17-29)

This father’s simple, honest prayer is an excellent starting point for faith. It is far better to admit our doubts, admit where we really are, and to ask God for help, than it is to pretend. As Dallas Willard has pointed out, any attempt to talk yourself into faith only proves one thing: you don’t really have faith.

If God is willing to help us with faith, what then exactly are we supposed to believe in?

The most common answer in the religious world goes something like this:

“Believe in what Jesus Christ did for you, His death on the cross. Acknowledge and confess your sins to God. Receive forgiveness by asking Him for salvation through prayer. If you do this, you will go to heaven when you die.”

This popular explanation, though not entirely amiss, tends to get people off on the wrong foot. Why? Faith in Jesus isn’t actually founded upon a “*what*”. It’s founded upon a “*who*”. True, what Jesus has done is part of the reason we should trust Him. It is evidence of how powerful, good and trustworthy He is. It points to practical matters regarding guilt and sin being dealt with. But ultimately we are not trusting an arrangement or an agreement. We aren’t putting our confidence in a contract. We putting our faith in a living person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus is comprehensive trust in a person, the kind of person that He is, not certain things he has done. It is personal, not abstract. You may believe that a certain surgery will save your life but it will boil down to trusting a person, a particular surgeon to perform it. Faith is like that. Reliance upon Jesus is not theoretical or future oriented. It is a present-time reliance upon a real living person: reliance in His true identity as the king from heaven and Son of God, reliance in His

kind heart and divine power displayed through countless acts of mercy, reliance in His dramatic offer as the only doorway to a superior abundant life, reliance in his sacrificial death to absorb the full cost for humanity's sin, and ultimately, reliance in his bodily resurrection as the source for an indestructible life and proof of his final authority over life and death, heaven and earth.

Jesus' solution to humanity's darkest problems was not a bit of new philosophy. As NT Wright points out, sin and death are not overcome by offering some good advice, however wise.

Simply put, Jesus crashed into history and started to reclaim his world from under an evil usurper. His chief weapon was Sacrificial love. His secret for certain victory was a hard-won capacity to offer people a brand new heart stamped with the same image as His own. He offers the opportunity to become partakers of the divine nature, to receive new moral DNA through God's Spirit.

The author of Hebrews says this about Jesus: **"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame."** (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)

Jesus was looking past the cross and forward to the triumph of giving people vibrant new life as citizens of a great kingdom that will last forever. This citizenship starts here and now and is freely available to anyone willing to come.

To doubt is human, but doubt is not invincible. Doubt can be undermined by tiny seeds of faith, like the little prayer of the anguished father mentioned above. This kind of honest prayer taps into God's resources. He has abundant capacity to help people gradually develop full reliance on Jesus, until the little prayer will shorten even further to simply, "I do believe!"

The only requirement is willingness. God himself does the heavy lifting.

As John the disciple wrote: **"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."** (John 1:12 NRSV)

Discussion:

1. Review the verses on these pages.
2. How would you define faith?
3. What is the difference between trusting an arrangement and trusting a person?
4. Consider the people in your own life. Who are the people you trust? Who are the people you don't trust? What is the difference?
5. With the previous question in mind, do you really trust Jesus, or are you trusting some kind of arrangement?