

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 11: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Christian Doctrine. This series of lessons examines doctrines which are foundational to our faith, with an emphasis on how incorrect doctrine can negatively impact true faith. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that determine how we practise our faith. It is critical that Christians understand correct doctrine about the nature of God and salvation, especially if they are engaged in teaching and discipling. This module examines scriptures related to a number of core doctrines of the Christian Church, and also some of the areas of confusion and error associated with each doctrine.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God sincerely. The lessons will also benefit church leaders who wish to encourage people in their Christian service, and identify spiritual gifts in those they are discipling.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 11: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

PURPOSE

This lesson explores our citizenship being heaven, the Kingdom of God both now and in the future, and our allegiance to God over and above our earthly rulers.

LEADER'S NOTE

This is the last lesson in this series on doctrine, and we end with a topic which was central to Jesus' teaching and the consummation of all we have presented so far. Living as a citizen of the Kingdom of God impacts our daily perspective on life as well as our hope for the future. If your participants have been struggling with the heavy theological nature of these lessons, stress the practical application of these doctrines. If they are eager for deeper study, you could prepare a list of other books and resources they could study. If you would like to give them an assignment prior to the lesson, you could suggest they make a list of the different names given to Christians in the Bible, and the verses where they are found. Some are mentioned in the introduction section of this lesson.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What comes to mind when you think of the word "kingdom"? What makes being a citizen of a kingdom a good or bad way to live?
- ❖ How do you respond to authority in your life? Are you eager to please a good employer? Do you gratefully accept laws and regulations? Or do you prefer to be your own boss? Do you rebel when someone tells you what to do?
- ❖ Have you ever been an immigrant, refugee or resident of a country in which you were not yet a citizen? If your citizenship is different from your country of residency, how does it change how you live? Does it limit what you do? Are you treated differently? What changes when you gain new citizenship?
- ❖ What is our identity as Christians? To whom do we belong? What have we received because we are Christians? What is expected of us? Whom do we represent? What is our mission?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH

- ❖ **Considering the Kingdom:** John the Baptist and Jesus both preached that the time had arrived for the Kingdom of God to be announced. They said that this announcement was good news! In fact, proclaiming what the Kingdom was like and how one can enter it was the central message of Jesus' teaching on earth. Within the study of the Kingdom of God we discover our identity as a Christian, a greater knowledge of the God we serve, His plans for this world, and a clearer picture of the mission of the Church. For these reasons, understanding this doctrine is essential for strong and consistent faith.

- **Who We Are:** While we use the word "Christian" to describe who we are and what we stand for, the Bible actually uses that term only a few times. There are other ways that the Bible describes those who belong to God:
 - **Child of God** ([John 1:12](#), [Ephesians 1:5](#))
 - **Friend of Jesus** ([John 15:15](#))
 - **Belonging to God** ([1 Corinthians 6:20](#))
 - **Part of Jesus' body** ([1 Corinthians 12:27](#))
 - **In Christ** ([Ephesians 1:7](#), [1 Corinthians 1:30](#))
 - **The forgiven** ([Romans 4:7](#), [Colossians 1:14](#))
 - **The Called ones** ([Ephesians 4:1](#), [2 Timothy 1:9](#))
 - **Sheep of the Good Shepherd** ([John 10:25-27](#))
 - **Disciples of Jesus** ([Acts 14:21-23](#))
 - **Followers of the Way** ([Acts 9:2](#))
 - **Believers** ([Acts 5:14](#), [1 Peter 1:20-21](#))
 - **Those who passed from death to life** ([John 5:24](#))
 - **The born again** ([John 3:1-8](#))
 - **Saints** ([Ephesians 4:12](#), [Psalm 37:28](#), [Romans 1:7](#))
 - **Redeemed** ([Galatians 3:13](#), [Luke 1:68](#), [Revelation 14:4](#))
 - **Citizens of the Kingdom of God** ([Ephesians 2:19](#), [Philippians 3:20-21](#))

- **What is the Kingdom?** In this lesson we will consider what it is to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God. First, we must understand that this Kingdom is a good Kingdom. A Kingdom is the realm of influence that a King has – and our King is Jesus. Jesus rules over everyone and everything that submits to His authority. So wherever we are and whenever we live, Jesus' Kingdom is within us. We become citizens of this Kingdom when we become Christians. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are the same; they are used interchangeably in the Bible and refer to a new government that is under Jesus' rule.

- **The doctrine of the Kingdom of God can be stated this way: Jesus is our King and all believers are citizens of His Kingdom. This Kingdom is presently a spiritual Kingdom, as Jesus has authority over all believers. Someday it will culminate in a physical**



Kingdom where Jesus will rule over the heavens and the earth. The Gospel is the good news that the Kingdom has come, and the Church is the embassy of this Kingdom on earth.

- ❖ **Jesus is our King:** Long ago the people of God asked for a king to lead them. We still long for good leadership today. But our world is full of sin, rebellion, and hatred. The world is broken. We are all touched by poverty, sickness, disease, death, war, famine, injustice and evil. And we are not able to fix it regardless of our best efforts. But God is capable and has a plan, first to renew His people, and then the world.
 - **God's Plan for a King:** To understand the significance of Jesus as our King, we must look back through the Bible to see God's plan unfold for His people.
 - o When God first created man and woman, His intent was that He should reign as their King. He would be a good and loving King, protecting and prospering His people both individually and as a whole.
 - o But people sinned and would not submit to the authority of God as their King. God continued to pursue those who would willingly submit to Him. Through the Covenants, God began to establish a people set apart who would follow Him (Exodus 19:5-6).
 - o The people of God wanted a physical king like the other nations (1 Samuel 8:1-7). God gave them their desire, but warned them that it would not satisfy them, and they would find life difficult under a human king.
 - o The second King was David, a man after God's heart. David recognized God as the ultimate authority (Psalm 47:7-8). Under David and his son, Solomon, the nation of Israel was great. David charged his son to keep the ways of God (1 Kings 2:1-4). The people were not faithful to God, and the kingdom of Israel was split in two. The prophets urged the people to come back to God and obey Him, and reminded them of God's promise to one day restore them with an eternal King (Ezekiel 37:24-25, Daniel 2:44, Zechariah 9:9). These predictions foretold the coming of Jesus, born in the line of David.
 - o God's intent to rule over His people was fulfilled in the coming of His Son, Jesus (God Himself), to be an eternal King for the people who were in submission to Him.
 - **The Promised King:** The Gospel of Matthew establishes Jesus as the heir to David's throne, and the collective Gospels demonstrate how Jesus came to fulfill the role of King. He was not a king who demanded power and authority, but rather invited people to follow Him. The people of Jesus' day were waiting expectantly for a political leader to free them from political oppression. But Jesus came as a spiritual leader to free them from their spiritual oppression. Consider what Jesus says about His Kingdom:
 - o Mark 1:14-15
 - o John 18:36
 - o Luke 17:20-21
 - o Matthew 25:34



- **The Location of the Kingdom:** When we talk about the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, we do not mean that Jesus' sphere of authority is only in heaven, or that it is merely spiritual. His Kingdom is extended as individual people are saved from sin. The location of the Kingdom is therefore here and now! When we refer to Jesus as 'Lord' we are calling Him our King, and acknowledging the authority He has on our life. It will someday cover the whole earth and all of creation when everyone will acknowledge the authority of Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11, Romans 14:11).

- ❖ **Jesus' Description of the Kingdom:** Jesus taught His followers through miracles, teaching sessions, and parables. He described the Kingdom of God so they would be able to understand it.
 - **The Sermon on the Mount:** Jesus' ministry often focused on correcting wrong beliefs. Matthew chapter 5 is the account of Jesus teaching His disciples on a hill away from the crowds. During this time of teaching, He taught them the values of the Kingdom of God.
 - **Blessings of the Kingdom:** (Matthew 5:1-12) Jesus taught that it is not the rich, powerful and wealthy that are the greatest in His Kingdom, but rather those who seek and obey God. There are great promises within this passage: we will enter the kingdom, we will be comforted, we will be satisfied by God, and we will be called His sons and daughters.
 - **Citizens of the Kingdom:** (Matthew 5:13-48, 6:1-34, 7:1-12) Jesus corrected the idea that keeping the previous law was enough to qualify us for the Kingdom. Jesus emphasized the difference between outward obedience and inward change. Kingdom citizens experience a change of heart. He told His disciples that they may have heard they are to love their neighbour and hate their enemy, but the Kingdom requires them to love both their neighbour and their enemy!
 - **Entrance into the Kingdom:** (Matthew 7:13-29) Jesus taught that it was difficult to enter the Kingdom and few actually do. He used the parables of a tree and its fruit and a wolf in sheep's clothing, to show that not everyone who claims to be in the Kingdom is a true citizen. Those who bear good fruit (not merely good works) accept Jesus as their Lord and spread the message of the Kingdom to others.
 - **The Kingdom Parables:** Matthew 13 gives us a series of parables which specifically challenge false beliefs about the Kingdom of God. These truths were understood by those with faith, and concealed to those without it. Each parable addressed concerns that the audience had about the Kingdom of God.

TASK:

Divide participants into small groups. Give each group one of the following parables to read and discuss together. They should answer these questions:



What false belief was Jesus correcting?

What do we learn about the Kingdom of God from this parable?

Have each small group present their discussion points to the rest of the participants. You can use the information below to complete the questions if needed. (Optionally, to save time, you could teach this material yourself and have them answer as a group.)

- o **The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-9):** This parable explains why more people don't follow Jesus after they hear the Gospel message. Jesus taught that He is the sower, the seed is the message of salvation, and the soil represents the human heart. There isn't a problem with the sower or the seed as the people thought, but rather with the human heart. We are not to be alarmed if the message seems like foolishness to some and doesn't change them. We are not to be surprised if some fall away. But we are responsible that our own faith is not choked out by sin in our life. We are to be fruitful and faithful in spreading the seed.
- o **The Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30):** This parable addresses the question about God's judgement against false teachers, or those who follow Jesus with their words but not their hearts. Jesus was saying that the seed that falls on good soil produces true believers. The weeds are false believers. They may act like a believer for a time, but they do not produce fruit. Jesus teaches that judgement will come, but for now we should expect to live in a world of unbelievers, realizing that there will be false believers even within the Church. It is not our job to judge them; Jesus will purify His kingdom at the right time.
- o **The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13: 31-32):** This parable addresses the question of what difference the message of the Gospel makes. Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as a seed – not just any seed, but a very small seed! The Kingdom begins very small, which is not what His hearers expected. The Kingdom will grow from an ordinary beginning to an extraordinary end. When you accept the message of the Kingdom of God, it impacts your whole being (how you think, act, love, work and believe). The value of the Kingdom isn't in its beginning, but what it is becoming.
- o **The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl (Matthew 13:44-46):** These parables address the fact that the Kingdom of God may sound foolish to many. To leave what you knew before and then trust in Jesus, or to follow a new King who had not yet come into His Kingdom, would seem strange! These parables teach that it isn't foolish to leave all that you have in order to gain something more valuable.

**TEACH:**

- ❖ **Life in the Kingdom:** From the teachings and parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, we are admonished to be people who live under the rule of Jesus Christ now. This was the central message of the Gospel. Jesus Himself told His disciples that he came to “preach the good news of the Kingdom of God” ([Luke 4:43](#)).

 - How do we live as citizens of a Kingdom that has begun but has not been completely fulfilled? The answer is to acknowledge the reign of Jesus every day, and await His return with joyful expectation! The doctrine of the Kingdom of God is essential because it was the central message of Jesus.
 - **Jesus is the King of the Kingdom** ([John 18:36](#)).
 - **The Gospel is the message of the Kingdom** ([Mark 1:15](#)).
 - **Disciples are the citizens of the Kingdom** ([Philippians 3:20](#)).
 - **Discipleship is the work of the Kingdom** ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)).
 - **Church is the embassy of the Kingdom** ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)).
 - **Our mission is the spread of the Kingdom** ([Acts 28:31](#)).
 - **Love is the mark of citizens of the Kingdom** ([John 13:34](#)).
 - **Our hope is the coming of the Kingdom** ([Matthew 6:33](#)).

- ❖ **Errors in Doctrine of the Kingdom of God:** Despite how central the teachings of the Kingdom of God are in the Bible, they are not always prominently featured in the message of the Gospel.
 - **Error #1 — We can disregard earthly government:** Our true citizenship as Christians is the Kingdom of God, but that does not mean that we can disregard or rebel against authorities on earth. So far as their decrees and laws do not contradict the law of God, we are to obey our earthly rulers ([Romans 13:1](#), [1 Peter 2:13-14,17](#)). We can participate in political life, vote, work to improve our community as a matter of conscience, and we must pay our taxes ([Matthew 22:17-21](#), [Romans 13:5-7](#)). We are also commanded to pray for our authorities ([1 Timothy 2:1-2](#)). Where earthly authorities conflict with the teachings of Jesus, our lives and reputations may be at risk. At that point we must choose Jesus as our higher authority ([Acts 5:27-29](#)).
 - **Error #2 — We can bring about changed hearts through the law:** The opposite of the first error is the belief that we can use government and law to turn people to God. A nation ruled by Christian laws may have peace and outward obedience, but it will not change people's hearts or result in their salvation. There is no such thing as a Christian nation until Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom. True citizens of the Kingdom are those who have been changed from the inside by Jesus Christ. Jesus did not teach that His followers should take over political power and bring in the Kingdom through that means – it cannot be done!
 - **Error #3 — False gospels:** Any gospel that does not include the Kingdom of God is a false gospel. If the message you receive from someone puts you at the center of your life, puts you in control, or has you telling God what to do, it is a false gospel. The Kingdom of God is not all about us and what we want. It is about Jesus, and when we



enter it, we are called citizens of heaven. It may mean loss of property, prosperity, or even our lives. Beware of any gospel that does not include the cost of following Jesus.

- **Error # 4 — Becoming a Christian is only a simple prayer:** It is false to believe that praying a simple prayer once in our life is all it takes to become a citizen of heaven and be rewarded with eternal life. Potential converts to Christianity are sometimes encouraged to pray what is called 'the sinner's prayer'. There is nothing wrong with these first steps of faith, but true conversion is always accompanied by change in behaviour and a willingness to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ. Otherwise our words are meaningless and we use the name of Jesus in vain.

- ❖ **Conclusion:** As Christians, our citizenship is not of this world, but we are like displaced people awaiting our true home ([1 Peter 2:10-12](#)). God's Kingdom has been announced and is coming, but in the meantime we can practise living under the reign of our King. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is here! That's because the Kingdom of God dwells in each one of us! Remember your true citizenship, and act as a representative of Jesus. When He returns, all believers will be united and worship Him, our King forever!



DISCUSSION

- ❖ In Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5, He gives many promises. One of them is that we will experience persecution in the world if we act according to the values of God's Kingdom. Why would acting according to the Beatitudes cause us to be hated by the world?
- ❖ If someone asked you how a person becomes great in the Kingdom of God, what would you say? What values and behaviours are praised in God's Kingdom?
- ❖ What does it mean to pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? What are you hoping for when you pray this?
- ❖ Do you ever worry that you could be one of those who thought they were a true citizen of the Kingdom of God, but then realized you were fruitless or false? How can you be sure of your salvation and citizenship? Should this be a concern for every Christian?
- ❖ Jesus is our King, and is reigning now. What power does Jesus have as King, and how does He exert this power?
- ❖ What have you learned in this module on doctrine? How has it helped you identify the differences between false beliefs and Scriptural truth? What questions do you still have, and how can you seek answers to them?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Pray that they would be citizens of God's holy Kingdom and spread the news that it has come! Pray that they would renew their fervour for evangelism and plant the seed of the Gospel. Pray that they will wait expectantly and patiently for Jesus' return to fulfill His Kingdom and complete His reign.