

QUIET TIME

Theme: The kingdom of God

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understand.

Day 1 Matthew 13:44-46
The cost of entering God's kingdom

Day 2 Matthew 22:1-14
The conditions for entering God's kingdom

Day 3 Mark 7:1-9
Religious traditions (human culture) that cripple God's Word

Day 4 Mark 2:18-22
The New Testament message must be poured into new forms

Day 5 Luke 10:29-37
Love in God's kingdom

Day 6 Luke 14:7-14
Humility in God's kingdom

Day 7 Luke 12:13-21
Materialism in God's kingdom

Day 8^{BS} Luke 16:1-13
Stewardship in God's kingdom

Day 9 Luke 12:42-48
Service in God's kingdom

Day 10 Matthew 25:1-13
Watchfulness in God's kingdom

- Think about Matthew 6:10.
Jesus teaches us to pray that his kingdom (kingship) may come to more and more places on earth and in a growing measure in our own life as a Christian.
- Pray that God's kingdom or kingship may come in more areas of your life and to more places in the world.
- Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

STUDY

Theme: The kingdom of God and its culture

Read study 20 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

BIBLE STUDY

Theme: Be a good steward in God's kingdom

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Luke 16:1-16**

MEMORISATION

1. Motivation

Jesus memorised Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

SEEK GOD'S KINGDOM

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom
and his righteousness,
and all these things
will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

3. Review and back-review

Review the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

4. Review of the Bible books

The 4 Gospels, 1 book of history
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts,

The first 7 letters of Paul:

Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

20. The kingdom of God and its culture

The different relationships between people and the way in which people behave are strongly influenced by one's culture. This study highlights the difference between the culture of the world and the culture of God's kingdom.

A. The culture of the world

1. What is culture?

The culture of a particular group of people consists of their view of the world, their truths, their beliefs, their superstitions, their norms and values and their experiences. These are expressed (become visible) in their convictions about for example science and faith, their behaviour, their relationships, their heritage (e.g. language, music, art, dance, sport, humour), their traditions and their institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, political parties, courts).

2. The origin of cultures in the world

The first 11 chapters in the Bible describe the beginning of human cultures on earth. In the very beginning all people spoke the same language and had the same culture. In Genesis 11:6-9 we read how God divided these people in different language groups and caused them to spread in different directions across the world. Every people group took their shared knowledge along with them. This knowledge consisted of knowledge of God, the creation and the great historical events like the flood. But after living apart from one another for centuries, these people groups began to forget or twist this knowledge and so in time various explanations and myths were added (cf. Romans 1:18,25). Thus different people groups developed different cultures, which in one way or another were twisted.

Only the prophets of Israel kept the true knowledge of God and of ancient history in a pure form, because they were inspired by the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:20-21) and because they recorded God's revelation in the Old Testament Scriptures (Genesis 2:4; Exodus 24:4).

3. The knowledge of good and evil

God had revealed certain knowledge to all people in all nations. By nature people can know that God exists and what 'good' and 'evil' is. God has made these truths available in his creation (Psalm 19:1-6). Whoever takes the time to study the creation will become aware that God exists and that he is great and powerful (Romans 1:19-20).

God has also written certain truths in the hearts of all people (Romans 2:14-15). People can know God's spiritual and moral truths when they listen to the voice of their heart and conscience. Whoever listens well knows

that God says: "You shall not steal", "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not kill" and "You shall not lie".

4. Every human culture has good and bad aspects

All human cultures have good aspects: e.g. good laws and honest judges (Deuteronomy 16:18-20), hardworking labourers and civilized citizens (*Read* 1 Kings 10:1-9), relief organisations and friendly and loving relationships.

But because all people have fallen into sin and are sinners (i.e. they miss God's goal) (Romans 3:23), all human cultures also have sinful and evil aspects. Examples: people have developed human religions with a wrong or twisted view about who God is. They harbour a wrong worldview. They have adopted wrong norms and values for behaviour. They extol false spiritual truths, immoral sexual behaviour or addictions (alcoholism, overeating, sexual immorality, drugs, corruption, extortion, robbery, etc). And they have institutions (political parties, justice system, businesses, schools, etc.) that instigate people to evil power, injustice, materialism and false teachings. The sinful part of every human culture harms its own people. Read how the sinful culture of the world entered Israel in the time of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 10:2-5; 7:22-28) and what the sinful culture of the world will be in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

B. The kingdom of God

1. What is the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is not like the kingdoms of this world (John 18:36)! The kingdom of God is the kingship or sovereign rule and power of God (Jesus Christ) over everyone and everything in the creation. In particular it is the kingship of God (Christ) that is acknowledged in the hearts of God's children (Luke 17:21) and is expressed in their lives (Matthew 7:21). The kingdom of God is established after Christ made atonement for sins at his first coming (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 12:28). The Holy Spirit applies Christ's completed work of salvation to the hearts and lives of believers. 'The kingdom of heaven' is exactly the same as 'the kingdom of God' (cf. Matthew 13:31 and Mark 4:30-31).

2. The kingdom of God in the lives of his people

The parable of the self-growing seed (Mark 4:26-29) teaches how God establishes his kingdom in your heart and takes care that it causes your spiritual growth and bears fruit in your life.

The parable of the yeast (Matthew 13:33) teaches that once God's kingship has been established in your life, it will continue to influence you until everything in you has been renewed and transformed (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:5). The Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) teaches that you must seek God's kingdom first above all other endeavours (Matthew 6:10,33).

C. The results of God's kingship (kingdom)

1. God's kingship results in your salvation from beginning to end

Whoever repents and believes in Jesus Christ enters God's kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). To enter God's kingdom means the same as to be born again (born anew) (John 3:3), to be saved (Mark 10:25-26) or to be declared righteous by faith (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Your salvation *begins* at your new birth (John 1:12-13) and is *only made complete and perfect* at Christ's second coming. Throughout your life you are being saved more and more from the guilt, pollution and power of sin in each area of your life. When you die as a believer, your 'spirit' (your whole personality and character) will be transformed to be completely holy and righteous like that of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:1-3). And at the second coming of Jesus Christ your physical body will be resurrected (i.e. saved from death and mortality) and will be transformed to be completely glorious like the body of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:26; Philippians 3:20-21).

2. God's kingship results in the establishment of the Church

Jesus Christ builds his Church by gathering the saved people into his Church. Jesus Christ is the Builder, the Owner and the Head of the Church and the Church is a part of the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:18-19). When people hear the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ they belong to the Body of Christ (the worldwide Christian Church), of which Jesus Christ is the Head (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:13,22-23).

Nevertheless the parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43) teaches that the kingdom of God (the Church) in its present form is a mixed company. In every congregation there may be people who are still unbelievers (seekers or deliberate unbelievers) who are not born-again. But Christians must not allow them to influence their Christian lives. Rather, Christians should exercise the good influence of the kingship of God on them: "Let the people turn to you, but you must not turn to them" (Jeremiah 15:19)!

The Church consists of God's chosen people (1 Peter 1:1-2). Christians have a prophetic, priestly and royal calling to fulfil in this world (*Read* 1 Peter 2:4-10).

3. God's kingship results in transforming society

Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Christians have great influence on their fellowmen and their society. People that are drawn into the influence sphere of Christians become spiritual, moral and emotional healthy people. Christians develop good functioning families. They establish schools and universities, hospitals and clinics. They care for widows, orphans and abused women. They help the blind,

the deaf and the handicapped. They support the poor, the oppressed (persecuted) and the destitute (Matthew 11:4-6). Christians fight against injustice, are hardworking labourers, pay their taxes and oppose corruption (Luke 3:10-14).

4. God's kingship results in a redeemed universe

At the second coming of Christ the whole universe will be renewed (Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:5). Then Jesus Christ will weed out of his kingdom in its present phase everything that causes sin and all people who do evil. He will throw them into the fiery furnace (Matthew 13:36b-43; cf. Matthew 3:12b). Only the righteous will inherit the kingdom of God in its final phase (Matthew 25:34). Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful and deceitful (Revelation 21:27). The kingdom of God in its final phase consists of the new heaven and new earth.

All God's children in history together constitute 'the heavenly Jerusalem' (cf. Isaiah 54; Galatians 4:24-27; Hebrews 11:9-10,13-16; 12:22-24; 13:14). At the second coming of Christ 'the heavenly Jerusalem' will be the Bride of Christ and descend with Christ onto the new earth. Then she will be called 'the New Jerusalem' (Revelation 21:9-10).

In our present time before the second coming of Christ the sovereign rule of Christ often seems to be absent, because evil continues to abound. But this does not mean that God is not almighty or does not rule. God is patient with the people on earth, because he wants to give them a chance to repent and come to faith (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4).

D. Characteristics of the kingdom of God

1. The kingdom of God has present and a future form

In the present phase of the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ 'sows the children of the kingdom' in this world. At the same time the devil 'sows the children of the evil one' *among the children of the kingdom* (Matthew 13:25). This means that the devil (although curtailed) and his evil followers are still present and active within God's kingdom in its present form.

People are set free, redeemed and saved from sin, the evil world and the devil and his allies. This is how people become children of the kingdom of God and thus come under the kingship of God or Christ (Matthew 12:28; 19:14; Colossians 1:13).

But in the future final phase of the kingdom of God the children of the evil one will be uprooted and thrown into hell (Matthew 13:36-43)! And the old earth will be renewed. Then the kingdom of God will be absolutely perfect (cf. 2 Peter 3:13).

2. The kingdom of God is a revelation and a riddle at the same time

The kingdom of God becomes a revelation (something understood and experienced as a reality) for everyone who opens his heart and mind to the Word of God (the Bible). Such people will bear much fruit (Matthew 13:23). But the kingdom of God remains a riddle (something not understood and not experienced as a reality) for people like the Pharisees who kept hardening their hearts (Matthew 13:11-17; Luke 8:10).

3. The kingdom of God is in the world, but not of the world

The kingdom (the sovereign kingship) of God is 'in the world', i.e. among us, acknowledged in the hearts of believers and practically visible in their lives (Luke 17:21). Christians proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to others (Matthew 24:14) and live the kingdom culture among other people (Matthew 5:19-20; 25:34-40).

And yet the kingdom of God is not like all other kingdoms 'of the world' (John 17:14-16; 18:36). It does not have an earthly government and it also does not fight holy wars. The kingdom or Church is ruled in a sovereign way by Jesus Christ from heaven (John 18:36).

4. The kingdom of God begins small, but finally fills everything

The kingdom of God began at the first coming of Christ (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 12:28; Matthew 28:18). In the beginning it was small (Luke 12:32). But it develops gradually until it fills everything, just as the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast teach (Matthew 13:31-33; cf. Ephesians 1:10). The kingdom of God will make an end of all other political, military and religious kingdoms on earth. It will fill the whole earth (Daniel 2:34-35,44-45) and it will last forever (Isaiah 9:6-7).

E. Change your worldly culture into the culture of the kingdom of God

1. Tension between two cultures

Every human being is born, grows up, is educated and lives in a particular human culture in the world. The way in which people relate to one another and behave is strongly influenced by their culture. Every human culture in the world has good aspects that may be maintained as well as evil aspects that need to change. Because all human cultures went through a long development in history they may differ very much from each other.

In the Bible God reveals what the culture of every group of people (nation) in the world should become! This culture revealed in the Bible is called 'the culture of the kingdom of God'. How people actually live (in their own human culture) and how they should live (in the culture of the kingdom of God) differ and therefore these cultures are at odds with one another. There is always a tension

and a struggle between living according to the flesh and living according to the Spirit, between living according to the sinful aspects of your human culture and living according to the culture of the kingdom of God (*Read Galatians 5:16-26*)!

When someone begins to believe in Jesus Christ, not only his heart changes, but also his culture (the way he lives) must change! People who belong to the King of kings must also possess the lifestyle of this King (the Sermon on the Mount) (Matthew 5-7)!

2. Jesus Christ teaches Christians to adopt the culture of the kingdom of God

When Jesus Christ was on earth he taught people very much about the kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount and in over 50 parables about the kingdom of God! The only perfect culture is the culture of the kingdom of God. The culture of the kingdom of God is taught in the Bible. The Bible teaches and commands how people ought to be and how they ought to live, how they ought to relate and which norms and values they ought to have.

In every so-called inter-cultural society (e.g. Asians, Africans and Europeans) there will be tensions, because what every human culture regards as 'good' and as 'evil' as appropriate and as inappropriate conflicts with one another. Only when all human cultures begin to focus on the culture of the kingdom of God, they will become more like the culture of the kingdom of God and they will also draw closer to one another (*Read Romans 14:1-23*)! No political party or particular religion will ever be able to solve this problem. Only 'seeking God's kingdom and God's righteousness' (Matthew 6:33), as taught in the Bible, will solve this problem of sinful human kingdoms and their sinful cultures.

3. Jesus Christ gives Christians the commission to bring the culture of the kingdom of God to people

Jesus gives Christians the commission to influence and transform the culture of the world around them in a positive way so that it may conform more and more to the culture of the kingdom of God. He has given Christians 'the cultural commission' of Genesis 1:28 and 'the great commission' of Matthew 28:18-20 and therefore the responsibility to transform the sinful (evil) aspects in the culture of the society in which they live according to their ability.

Christians are called 'to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14-16). That is why God has given Christians the following responsibilities:

Seek God's kingdom (kingship)

Christians must seek above everything else the kingdom (kingship) of God (Matthew 6:33). The Bible does not teach Christians to belong to a particular denomination, but calls Christians to acknowledge the kingship of God in

their hearts and to enhance the interests of the kingdom of God in their society.

Pray for the coming of God's kingdom

Christians must pray for the continual coming of God's kingdom (kingship), e.g. that other people will come to faith in Jesus Christ and will begin to live under his kingship (Matthew 6:10).

Proclaim God's kingdom

Christians must proclaim the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God to every nation (with their particular human culture) in the world (Matthew 24:14; cf. Acts 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:23,30-31).

Transform personal life style to kingdom culture

Christians ought to change the sinful aspects in their personal lives (life style), so that the culture in their society would become more and more like the culture of the kingdom of God. That is how Christians can have a positive influence in their own society.

Transform human culture to kingdom culture

Christians ought to exercise influence of God's kingdom culture on their own society and transform the sinful aspects within the human culture of their society, as much as God enables them. Jesus Christ came, not only to transform people, but also to transform the sinful aspects within their human culture!

Examples of aspects of the kingdom (kingship) of God that should transform the culture of the world are: Christian marriage, Christian upbringing of children, Christian education, Christian judicial system, Christians in politics, Christians in social institutions, Christian relationship to parents, Christian relationships between the sexes, the Christian relationship to the creation (ecology, environmental conservation) and the Christian convictions and commitments with respect to personal life style (e.g. corruption, extortion, lying, drug abuse, smoking, overeating, alcoholism, unlawful sex, cursing, dirty jokes, gossiping, overwork, laziness, riotous living, gambling (casino's), lotto, change games, extreme dangerous sports, etc).

4. Jesus Christ will establish the kingdom of God in its final phase at his second coming

Jesus Christ will renew everything (Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:4-5)!

He will weed out of his present kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil (Matthew 13:41-43)!

But all aspects of human cultures that conform to the Word of God, bring glory to God and stand the final test of holy fire in the final judgement (1 Corinthians 3:11-15) will be brought into the kingdom in its final phase (Revelation 21:24-27).