

## "The Gospel of the Kingdom"

What is the "Gospel of the kingdom"? It is the good news that God in his great love has come to redeem a people for himself through the work of Jesus Christ, who will be set free from their bondage to sin and enabled through the gift of his Spirit to become a people of justice, mercy and a humble walk with God. We announce the Gospel of the kingdom just like Jesus did - by doing justice and preaching grace. **"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people..."** Matthew 4:23

"But when they believed Philip as he preached **the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were baptized..." Acts 8:12

"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the **kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.**" Acts 28:30-31

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into **the kingdom of the Son he loves**, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" Colossians 1:13, 14

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us **to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father** - to him be the glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." Revelation 1:5,6

## I. God's Zeal for His Kingdom Reign on Earth

### A. What is the kingdom of God?

A "kingdom" is a "king's domain", the place ruled by a king. God's kingdom is the place of his rule, but it is not tied to a particular geographic location; his place of rule is in our hearts – "...the kingdom of God is within you" Luke 17:21, because the presence of the King is now among us.

The great promise of God in Isaiah is that he is going to send his Son who will both be the King and the one who establishes God's kingdom reign. Isaiah assures us "of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord almighty will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:7).

One of the ways God sums up his purpose for our lives is by this phrase: "seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33),

As Jesus announced the Gospel it was presented not only as the good news of God's love for us, but also the good news of the establishment of his kingdom reign in the hearts and lives of his people. Are there core values of the kingdom of God? What kind of "rule and reign" does God intend to exercise over us? What does it look like to make seeking "his kingdom" the priority of our lives?

### B. What are the values of the kingdom of God?

In order to help us understand the kind of reign God wants to exercise over us he has given us his law, which is a reflection of his character: this is the holiness and the righteousness he requires of us as members of his kingdom reign. The Lord summarizes our responsibilities to the Law in several ways in Scripture. One such summary is the Ten Commandments (Ex 20). Another is the "two great commandments"- to love the Lord our God with all our heart...and our neighbor as ourselves (Mt 22:38, 39). One other summary of the values of God's kingdom is simply "his will". So Jesus teaches us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Micah 6:8 is another summary: "He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." In some important ways these different phrases are interchangeable and are all different means of looking at the same core issues of the nature of God's kingdom righteousness.

Whenever the Scriptures call us to learn or pursue "righteousness," that is just another summary word that includes these issues of justice, mercy and humility,

loving our neighbor and loving God. As children of his kingdom, all his discipline, love, care and promises will be bent towards shaping our lives as people who are marked by these traits.

“For those God foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers.” Romans 8:29

- C. Micah 6:8 helps us to see the issues of kingdom righteousness through a different lens than we are sometimes used to looking through. From this passage, the *core activities* that God himself describes as the fulfillment of this kingdom lifestyle *include*:

**To act justly:**

Justice, in this passage and many others in Scripture, is not referring fundamentally to the punishment of crime, but to the positive establishment of righteousness on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized (Psalm 9:8, 33:5, 45:6-7, 72:1-2, 140:12, 13; Isa 1:16-18). On one level, we are to make sure we personally treat others with all goodness, rightness and justice in every situation of life- as a merchant (Lev 19:36), an employer (Jam 5:4,5), a spouse and parent (Eph 5), a citizen (Romans 13), a homeowner (Deut 22:8). *But becoming a person of justice has another dimension to it that is often overlooked: taking an active role in helping others when you see them being treated with injustice.* In other words, to do whatever good we can for those who are oppressed. (Amos 5:23-24)

The people who are the most vulnerable to injustice, and the ones to whom we are called by God to pay special attention are the widow, the orphan, the immigrant and the poor. (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:10; Jeremiah 22:15,16; James 1:27)

**To love mercy:**

This heart of this term refers to kindness, and is translated “mercy” as a reference to compassion. God is calling us to be the kind of person who delights in showing compassion for people in need – when we see people in pain, distress or misery, to step in and take action to relieve their need. It is important to remember that this is a “covenantal obligation.” This is not simply random charity. It is a moral obligation to be like God- someone who is committed to showing mercy. (Mt 5:43-48; Gal 6:10)

This call for compassion applies to all kinds of need, but God calls us to pay attention to obvious physical need: hunger, shelter, clothing, sickness. (Isa 58:6-12 ; Mt 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 3:16-18)

What is so unusual about God's mercy is that it comes from a God of grace: we extend such help even to people who are unworthy or, who deserve just the opposite; we even show mercy to our enemies. (Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:17)

### **To walk humbly with our God:**

We are not to pursue this lifestyle from a position of arrogance, superiority or condescension, but from a humble walk with God: a humility that comes directly from being the recipients of God's great mercy in our lives (2 Cor 8:1-9); a humility that trusts God to do His will His way - even boasting in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9ff); and a humility that means we will not rely on human sources of strength, but on the Spirit's power, (Zechariah 4:6; Acts 2 & 4). Humility in Scripture includes not only a humble heart attitude, but also a willingness to minister in humble circumstances (2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:6-8) because the very nature of the kingdom is that it is "for" (directed towards) the poor. (Luke 4:18-21, 6:20)

This humility, which comes first from seeing our own need for and reception of God's mercy and favor, means the deeds of justice and compassion will not be marked by a motivation of making ourselves feel important, but they will be done as a true expression of the love of God, with careful concern for the person's true need, and "quietly" - without drawing a lot of attention to ourselves (Isa 42:1-4).

## II. The Unfolding History of God's Kingdom Righteousness in His People

Since these three traits of justice, mercy and humility are at the heart of God's character and because they are core values of God's kingdom, they are reflected in all his dealings with his people throughout the history of Scripture.

The Covenant Community of God established at Sinai and the justice/mercy/humility focus of Genesis-Deuteronomy.

### A. Genesis- Adam, Noah, Abraham and the Patriarchs- the Demonstration of Justice through God's Covenant Representatives

1. The Genesis 1& 2 narrative sets the all-important pattern for God's original intent for humanity. Man and Woman created in God's image to do good in exercising dominion over the earth (Gen 1:25-31). The heart of the Covenant with Adam is to live in social relationship as human beings with each other and God, and to live in harmony with creation by exercising a "stewardship" role of ruling over creation, versus conquest and subjugation.

2. The violence and oppression after the Fall (Gen 3-6) are evidence of the extent to which men will go in their practices of sin and injustice and are answered both by God's justice and his mercy through Noah. Noah is the next Covenant Representative, the "next Adam" who is blameless (just) and becomes the instrument of God's blessing to the earth (Gen 6:9-13, 8:20-9:11).
  
3. The newly developed nations return to a pattern of rebellion (Gen 11) and God calls Abraham, the next Covenant Representative, who is to be the agent of God's blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1-3). At the heart of this "blessing" is the restoration and demonstration of God's original intent of justice and righteousness among men. The hope for, and practical demonstration of real justice and righteousness in a fallen world, can only be achieved as a gift of God's supernatural grace (Isaac) and is to be received by faith (Gen 15:6). Adam is to teach these lessons of "righteousness- as a gift" to his descendants (Gen 18:19).
  - a. Over against the violent establishment of greatness by mankind through idolatry and the tools of "empire" (Gen 11), God will freely bless Abraham, a man in humble circumstances, through faith, and make him a blessing to all the nations of the earth Gen 12:1-3.
  - b. Part of Abraham's training includes learning how difficult injustice and oppression can be—and yet, experiencing both the protection and the mercy/compassion of God in his need Gen 12:10ff
  - c. Abraham teaches us crucial lessons about wealth and power: for the covenant people of God, we acknowledge that power and wealth exist in a context of "gift" for the purpose of doing good Gen 13 & 14, . Abraham's relationship with Lot is opposite to the cultural norms of power in his day. He offers Lot the choice of land, because Abraham wants to settle the dispute between their herdsmen in a just way. His humility is evident in his freedom to let God fulfill the promise regarding the land in His own way. (cf Phil 2, John 13).
  - d. God goes to great lengths in the birth of Isaac to teach Abraham the central issue of the Gospel which, in turn, frees us to be people of justice and generous mercy: God's blessings only come by the power of God's promise, received through faith as a gift- not by works, Gen 15-18 cf Romans 4:1ff. The righteousness he longs for will come as a gift that could never be achieved by human resource, but only through faith.

e. Abraham becoming a blessing to the nations of the earth involves learning to be a compassionate intercessor for those who are oppressed by sin; a trait God has every intention of teaching his descendants. Genesis 18:16-19; 19

4. These fundamental lessons are reinforced and expanded upon in the lives of the Patriarchs- Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

a. Isaac repeats and re-learns all of the same fundamental lessons as Abraham: His wife, who needs to be a “covenantal partner” (Gen 24:3) is a gift (Gen 24); Rebekah is also “barren” and has children in direct response to prayer (Gen 25:21); Isaac is also tested by the same oppressive practices his father had to endure (Gen 26), but with the same Covenantal promises of God; he also becomes a source of blessing to all around him through the water and the abundance of his crops and herds (Gen 26:26ff)- and his blessing is a clear gift from God, Gen 26:12.

b. Jacob’s entire life is a testimony to the blessings of God “by grace.” God does not bless because of noble character- it is his grace that transforms personality to give us noble character. He ends his life with a confidence in the free blessing of God over his children (Gen 49).

c. Joseph, as the history of the Patriarchs unfolds, moves closer to the expression of the ministry of Christ and the Church. Despite oppression and injustice, even from the family of God, he becomes a source of blessing to everyone he comes in contact with- Potiphar (Gen 39:1-7); the prison warden (Gen 39:20-23); Pharaoh and Egypt (Gen 41:16, 37-40). The main point of Joseph’s story is God’s commitment to bless the nations through him as the Covenant representative of God. God used him to mercifully provide basic food supplies for a large number of nations who would have otherwise starved from famine, and to bless the very brothers who betrayed him (Gen 50:19, 20).

The lives of the Patriarchs are written down as testimony to the people of God for all time that our calling, in covenant relationship with God, is to be a people like them, who, despite our sins and weaknesses, freely receive the righteous blessing of God through faith, and freely bless the nations around us by being salt and light. Abraham’s calling (and ours) is not for his self-glory or the personal good fortune of his descendants or the defeat of his enemies. He is to be used “for” the blessing of God to flow to the nations. The manifestation of God’s covenant will was to be the expression of justice in God’s world through his people.

B. Exodus-Deuteronomy: Israel Constituted as the People of God- for the Poor

(Ex 19:5,6 cf. Isa 42:1-4, 61:1-4, Lk 4:18-21)

Israel's formation in Egypt as an enslaved people and her subsequent deliverance from oppression in the Exodus form the core, defining paradigm for her existence as a people of justice, mercy and humility towards the poor and oppressed.

1. Her Sovereignly appointed history included specific experience as an oppressed/delivered people (Gen 15:12-16) which fits into the fulfillment of her role as compassionate descendants of Abraham who will "keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right" (Gen 18:18-19).

2. The entire Exodus experience is founded upon God's commitment to fulfill his Covenant promise to deliver his people- who have been oppressed through injustice and need deliverance not only from personal sin, but also from the bondage of the political tyranny of Egypt. Exodus 3:6-10; cf Lk 2:67-75

a) The Covenantal promise reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:6) is tied both to God's awareness of the misery of his people and the original promise to Abraham to bring righteousness in the midst of the violence of the nations (Gen 6,11,12:1-3).

b) God's deliverance is unfolded in a context of his deep identity with the suffering of his people. "I have seen their misery" "I *know* their suffering" (3:7ff.).

c) His deliverance of the oppressed Israelites becomes the means of salvation for the oppressor- Ex 7:2-5, cf Ex 12:38.

3. This "deliverance from oppression," and their experience as aliens who were treated with injustice, becomes a central part of the Law at Sinai. In fact, the Law focuses repeatedly on issues of justice for those who were easily abused and neglected.

a) The preamble to the 10 commandments, "I am the Lord...who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Ex 20:2) becomes the practical point of application for Israel as they deal with the alien in their midst. Ex 22:21, 23:9, Lev 19:34, Deut 10:14-22.

b) The poor Israelite who must sell his services in slavery is to be freed every seventh year (Ex 21:2).

c) All slaves were to be protected from unnecessary violence, and the cost is freedom for the slave (Ex 21:26-27).

d) Vulnerable young women are to be protected from sexual misconduct (Ex 22:16-17). In fact, justice and righteousness in the areas of sexual conduct are crucial in all relationships – Lev 18.

e) The poor are to be cared for in money-lending and pledge practices (Ex 22:25-27)

f) Even enemies are to be cared for (Ex 23:4-5)

g) The handicapped are to be protected (Lev 19:14)

4. God established annual, 7 year and 50 year festivals to remind the people of their position as those who had been redeemed from oppression, and their continued role as servant-stewards, to be a blessing to the nations and express God's justice and compassion for the poor and oppressed.

a) Every year Israel celebrated 3 festivals that acknowledged her position of dependence on God and the roots of her humility (Ex 23:14-16).

1) The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt.

2) The Feast of Firstfruits or Harvest to remind the people that their resources came as gift from God

3) The Feast of Ingathering or Weeks (Pentecost) as a reminder of God's faithfulness in bringing their labors to fruition- and an application to share freely with those in need (Lev 23:22)

b) In addition, after the final harvest, the people were to live in tents for 7 days, the Feast of Tabernacles, as a reminder that their roots were as an oppressed/delivered people (Lev 23:42-43)

c) Every Seven Years were to be "Sabbath Years" in which the land, and the workers had rest (Lev 25). The Sabbath, in general, is a relief from the oppressive tyranny of a relentless cycle of work the unbelieving nations forced upon the servant class.

d) Every 50 Years, there was to be a complete "re-setting" of all the structural issues of wealth and poverty that would prevent generational oppression. Sins were forgiven; land was restored; debts were cancelled. And at the heart of it, was a lesson going back to Adam- that his people were to see themselves as stewards of God's resources- not autonomous owners of anything. Lev. 25:8ff, see v.23.

5. Deuteronomy (as a second giving of the Law) reinforces and deepens God's Covenantal commitment to establish his people as an expression of justice, compassion and humility; all without the normal, oppressive means of Empire building. There are applications and explanations of God's intentions for practicing justice in Deut that are not found in Exodus or Leviticus.
  - a. Deut 10:14-22 After reviewing the history of God's deliverance, Moses calls the people to their fundamental, covenantal obligation- to love the Lord their God with all their heart, etc and to keep his commandments. And at the very outset of this reinforcing of the Law, God places primary emphasis on compassion for the marginalized and oppressed. Justice is the very heart of the character of God, and is to be the very heart of the obligation of his people to obey his Laws. This justice, of the One True God, stands in stark contrast to the false gods and the oppressiveness of the nations they were displacing -Deut 11:16 cf Lev 18:21-30, cf. 1 Cor 6 on issues of money and sexual perversion.
  - b. Deut 14:27-29 The tithes are to be an expression both of worship to God and care for the needy. Cf . Malachi 3:10-13- when the people of God provide food for the needy, God blesses them and even the nations call them blessed, cf Acts 3:44-47, 4:32ff.
  - c. Deut 15 In implementing the seven year cancelling of debts, God demands that his people do not begrudge loaning freely to the poor. In fact, if they treat one another with justice as God intends, there would be no poor among them- 15:4. Cf Luke 6:27-36 and the Lord's Prayer in Lk 11:4, where Jesus uses an economic term for indebtedness that refers back to the Jubilee principle.
  - d. Deut 17 When Israel demands a king, he must not resort to the normal devices of empire building. He cannot build up an arsenal of military weapons (horses and chariots in their day); he cannot make peace through marriage alliances; he cannot store up wealth for the exercise of his kingship – 17:16-17. His main job is to mediate and learn the Law of God and implement justice. Cf Lk 9:58, John 18:36, 37
  - e. Deut 20 There is no standing army. It is to be not only all volunteer/as needed, but it must only be men of faith. All others are free to go home. 20:2-9, cf John 18:1-11

C. Joshua-Esther: The History of Israel is a story of God's great commitment to bring his people to a place of mature expression of his justice, mercy, and humility, in order to bless the nations of the earth; their expressions of achieving the height of these purposes in King David, and their overall, continual pattern of failure and unbelief, before and after. It is also a story of God's faithful commitment to fulfill his purposes through the forgiveness of sins and the establishment of righteousness as a gift through the coming Messiah King.

1. Joshua: the battles are won, in humble military circumstances, as evidence that this is the hand of God leading Israel for his salvation purposes in the world- not for Israel's personal glory and personal gain. At the climactic end to the battles comes the call for Israel to hold fast to God's Covenant purposes for her- to keep the Law by doing justice and righteousness- and to not turn to the gods and the oppressive practices of the nations around her. Joshua 24:1,2, 11-15

2. Judges: the cyclical story of Israel's continuous, wandering heart that leads her to idolatry and oppressiveness; her refusal to submit to the Kingship of God, and God's graciousness in providing judge/deliverers over and over again to bring her back to her true calling. The depth of her sin/injustice is seen throughout the book and is told in two compelling stories that show the depth of her injustice in Judges 17-21, and ends with the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin. The "catch phrase" is that "every man did what was right in his own eyes." 21:26

3. Ruth: evidence of the light/blessing among the nations that God intended. Ruth is a Moabitess who is taken in by an Israeli mother-in-law and is cared for with great justice and compassion by Boaz. Part of the twist in the story is that Ruth is the one with great faith ( 1:16 "your God will be my God) and Boaz, the faithful kinsman-redeemer, was the son of Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute who protected Joshua's spies (Josh 2, cf Mt 1:5). As a "blessing to the nations", Ruth becomes the great, great grandmother of King David and in the line of Christ.

4. 1 & 2 Samuel tells the story of the eventual rise of King David, beginning with the continued injustice/lack of mercy/ pride that marked the people of Israel (even the sons of the high priest Eli – 1 Sam 2:12-22) and their first King, Saul, who is their attempt at sustaining peace/prosperity through the traditional means of "empire," versus reliance directly on the Kingship of God (1 Sam 8:1-9).

David, who becomes the Just King described in Deuteronomy, learns the lessons of Abraham and the Patriarchs through his own suffering/trial and deliverance and implements justice and mercy throughout his kingship cf Psalms 1-72.

All other kings in Israel, from that point forward, were measured for their faithfulness to their calling against the standard of David (cf 1 Kings 15:3,4; 15:9-

11, etc.). Jeroboam becomes the anti-David and all the evil kings are referenced to him, I Kings 15:25, 26, 33, 34, etc.)

5.1&2 Kings tells the stories of Israel's ups and down through the history of her kings. Solomon has the greatest potential to demonstrate the justice/compassion of God (I Kings 3:7ff, 4:29-34) and turned out to be the king who fell the furthest from God's calling (I Kings 10:23-11:13). There is an almost relentless pattern of failure that keeps emerging from the kings and the people in general, but even moreso, a relentless commitment from God to bring this expression of lovingkindness and justice into the lives of his people. Individuals repeatedly emerge, who live out the life of faith and justice God calls his people to. Most notably, Elijah and Elisha offer both a prophetic word and a prophetic life that point the people of God in the direction of true justice and compassion.

In Elisha's life there is a constant interplay between his interactions with the kings and his interactions with the poor and oppressed. 2 Kings 2ff. With the "double portion" of the Spirit of Elijah, Elisha demonstrates the mercy and justice of God in profound and extraordinary ways.

- D. The Psalms: one of the central, recurring themes is an expression of worship that exalts God for His Character – as the God of Justice, Mercy, Compassion; the God of the oppressed of the earth, the refuge, the deliverer- both from the destructiveness of personal sin and the injustices of evil men. In the Psalms, he is the God who is Faithful to these things. There is not a single Psalm that does not, in one form or other, include a reference to these issues.

Examples: Psalm 9:7-9, 10:12-14, 36:1-7, 37:1-7, 68:4-6, 72:1-4, esp vv. 11-14

- E. The Prophets- God's call to Israel to return to being "a people for the poor" and the promise of the Messiah, who will, through atonement and the power of the Spirit, unleash the full, faithful expression of God's justice and compassion in the coming kingdom of God.

1. The Prophets act as God's compassionate, "Covenantal Prosecuting Attorney's" who call the people back to a lifestyle of justice, mercy and humility.

The two-sided sins of the people of Israel that bring God's discipline are idolatry and oppression of the poor. They change the worship of God with his promise of blessings and justice into the worship of false gods, or the re-shaping of Jehovah into a god of personal prosperity and indifference to the poor, and they took up the cultural practices of oppression of the surrounding nations.

Isaiah 1:15-26; Jeremiah 2:26-28, 7:4-8, 22:15-17; Ezekiel 16:44-52; Hosea 4:1-8; Amos 2:6-8; Micah 3:6-12, 6:8; Zeph 1:17-2:3; Zechariah 7:4-8:3. See also Daniel 4:27 in reference to Nebuchadnezzar.

2. But God is zealous, and jealous for his people to be the light of the world he created them to be, and in great graciousness he holds out free forgiveness and the promise of the coming Messiah who will bring all this justice/righteousness to pass as gift of grace and the power of the Spirit.

Isaiah 1:18, \*2:1-5, \*9:1-7, \*11:1-9, \*19:19-25; 42:1-4, 54ff, see 54:13, 14; 55:1-2, 10-13, 56:1, 61:1ff

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24ff, 37:1-14; Hosea 14:1-4; Amos 9:11,12; Micah 5:2-5; \*Zeph 6:8-17; \*Zech 8:7,8,14-19; \*Mal 4:5,6

The greatest theme that emerges out of the Old Testament is that God had covenantally bound Himself to his people (Gen 3:16) and to this created world and universe (Gen 9:9ff) , to bring his love, restoration and righteousness into the dark brokenness of the world (Gen 12:1-3, Exodus 19:5,6), despite even the sins of his people (Jer 31:31ff), and that he would accomplish this through the coming Messiah/King (2 Sam 7:11ff, Isa 9:1-7).

## F. The fulfillment of God's Covenant through the Church

### 1. Jesus and the Nature of the Kingdom for the Poor

The Prophetic description of the work of Christ is that he would establish the kingdom of God as a rule and reign focused on the justice, mercy and humility -righteousness of the Law for all the nations of the earth.

a. Isa 2:1-5 The "in-working of the Law" will produce shalom among the nations, cf Jer 31:31ff and Matt 5:17-20. The focus of the Law, oriented towards justice with a particular application to the poor, oppressed and neglected, makes this promise of Christ's "fullness" of the Law, something to rejoice in. As an example of the fulfillment of the Law compare Deut 15:7ff and Lk 6:27-36.

b. The very nature of the kingdom will be justice and righteousness on behalf of the poor - Lk 6:20-26 cf Mt 5:3-14, and the extent and growth of the kingdom will have

no end, Isa 9:1-7, 49:5,6. In Luke 1- Mary and Zechariah's songs of salvation are good news of both the forgiveness of sins and the addressing of injustice in this dark world. The Presence of the Christ gives Simeon the confidence to die in peace, because God's salvation for the entire world has now appeared, Luke 2:28-32

c. The power source in Christ's kingdom to establish justice on behalf of the poor will be the power of the Holy Spirit Isa 11:1-5, cf Luke 4:18 cf Luke 11:5-13.

d. The humility of the kingdom will come in tangible forms that destroy the destructive pride of men Isa 42:1-4, cf Mt 12:15-21, and Mt 8:20- Luke 18:22 in the ministry of Jesus.

e. Wealth in the kingdom becomes the fullest expression of wealth-for-the-benefit-of blessing the needy, Isa 58. Luke 3:4-14; Lk 12:13-21; Lk 16:1-13; cf Mt 25:14ff with 25:31ff. It has been noted by many scholars that Jesus speaks more about wealth in the Gospels than any other issue. What is often not acknowledged is that he speaks about wealth as a stewardship responsibility for the poor. This comes to light profoundly in Zaccheus, Luke 19:8-9, a true son of Abraham - remember Gen 18:19.

f. The Shalom of the kingdom will address the deepest brokenness of men and re-establish them as righteous covenant keepers who will stand as unmovable displays of righteousness, Isa 61:1-3, cf Lk 4:16-21. This kind of righteousness is both the promise and the demand of the King in his kingdom, compare Isa 58 with Mt 25.

g. The forgiveness and righteousness of the kingdom comes as a gift to sinners, Isa 54, cf Mt 9:1-13, 21:28-32, see especially John 6:29 where Jesus ties the works of the kingdom to faith in Himself.

h. The evangelical mandate of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 is centered in discipling and instructing the nations to live out the "fullness of the Law" Christ has proclaimed, all by the blessing of the Covenant relationship with God sealed through baptism.

2. The Church- the full expression of the New People of God who manifest the kingdom "for the poor"

a. The Book of Acts draws an inseparable correlation between the kingdom, the Spirit and the expression of justice/mercy and humility in the people of God, Acts 1:1-5, Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:31-35. There is a deep, practical connection between Luke 4:18-19 and Acts 1:1. The Spirit isn't given simply as a general, personal comfort and source of power for whatever we would like to do with our lives, but he is the Spirit of

holiness (Rom 1:4) who empowers the people of God to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

b. James is the very first book written to the New Testament Church and is a prophetic call to maintain the faith-obedience of Abraham, despite the difficult trials they are facing. His call to “religion that God our Father accepts- to look after the widow and orphan in their distress” 1:27, is more than a passing reference to a helpful moral principle. It is an expression of the heart of the OT Covenant being fulfilled in the church and a reminder that the people of God are called to keep this focus central. The lessons and applications of Abraham becoming a man of faith-justice, and the call for the church to follow suit, 2:14-26, are not simply one possible set of moral applications from the Old Testament as a general encouragement to struggling saints, but a call to the central focus of the Covenant in Gen 12:1-3 and Gen 18:18-19 being fulfilled through them.

b. Romans is centered on the promise of this kingdom righteousness as a gift through faith in Christ, Rom 3:21ff. The understanding of the term “righteousness” in the contemporary Reformed and Evangelical church, and the meaning and focus of “imputed righteousness” in Romans 3, 4 and 5, is probably the focal point of the deepest confusion over these issues. On a practical level, there does not seem to be a connection between the “righteousness of Christ” and “the righteousness of the kingdom” in a lot of the contemporary theological discussion. Even the term “righteousness” is disconnected from the term “justice”, even though the Greek word, “dikaiois” can be translated either way.

Imputed righteousness seems to be exclusively and only about a standing of acceptance, apart from a power to implement kingdom righteousness. However, Romans 1:16 and Romans 5 paint a very different picture on the practical implications of gift-imputed righteousness. In Paul’s application of the meaning of this gift-righteousness, he returns to the very words of Jesus as a description of the kind of righteousness we are to give ourselves over to, Romans 12:9-21, cf Lk 6:27ff, Lk 14:12-14.

c. John ties the knowledge of God, and the experience of the love of God to a practical expression of justice/compassion for those in physical need, 1 John 3:36ff, and says it is impossible to separate practical love for our brothers from love for God, I John 4:7-12.

d. Paul’s description of the gifts of the Spirit and the gifting of the church leadership, is for the purpose of equipping God’s people for “works of service”, Eph 4:7-16. This is the apostolic application of Jesus’ command to “seek first the kingdom”.