

## Views from the Pews: The Kingdom of God 5: As Jesus taught it

Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom of God was built upon the contemporary understanding of God's kingly rule over Israel. But Jesus' revelation of The Kingdom was radically different from, and far greater than, anything that had been previously thought of.

1. **It is embodied in him, and by extension, those who follow Him.** In Jesus' teaching it was as though all previous ideas of God's sovereignty were just that, ideas. But now, he was introducing a radically new intervention by God into our reality "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come (or "has arrived") to you", he said.. (Lk 11:20). Wow! Jesus was proclaiming himself (and his followers) to be the visible, physical presence of the kingdom of God.
2. **It encompasses all people, everywhere.** Not only did Jesus offer his ministry to people who were not Jews, but he actively sought them out, even journeying some distance to connect with people who were outside of the traditional "circle of acceptance". Not only this, but he taught (and demonstrated) that the Kingdom of God broke through all the artificial boundaries of ethnicity, gender, age, location, class, status, and of course religious adherence, especially the rigour with which one practices that adherence. Needless to say, the Jews of Jesus' time found this teaching to be offensive. From their perspective they were utterly committed to the idea that ethnicity and behaviour were the key to acceptance to God, and any suggestion that it could be otherwise, was an insult to them and to God.
3. **It makes God's Grace real.** We humans are pre-wired with a cause-and-effect perception of reality. Sin must be punished, because there is an unalterable relationship between actions and consequences. So, when Jesus taught that forgiveness could be free, because sin is overridden by God's grace, people struggled – still do. This teaching was at the heart of the rejection of Jesus by the religious authorities of his time, and often also now. As has been said, "We like grace for ourselves, but we prefer justice for others." Our cultural traditions of tit-for-tat make free grace hard to understand. But in God's view, "The only way of excluding ourselves from God's grace is to *choose* to reject it." Even then, we still receive grace because God's acceptance of our rejection is itself an act of grace. Enough said.

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