

# CORE VALUES -- "The Gospel of the Kingdom"

## INTRODUCTION

**A Basic Definition: What is meant by the "Gospel of the kingdom"? And, why we need to ask this question.**

What did Matthew mean when he tells us, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel (good news) of the kingdom?**" [Matt 4:23, 9:35] And why did Jesus tell his disciples to "preach this message; the kingdom of heaven is near?" [Matt 10:2] What did that announcement of "the kingdom" mean to a Jewish family in a Galilean village? What does it mean that after his resurrection Jesus spent 40 days "speaking about the kingdom of God?" [Acts 1:3] What was it Philip said that made Luke describe the advance of the gospel in Samaria in these terms, "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] Why would Luke describe part of Paul's ministry while a prisoner in Rome in these terms, "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] Or Paul describe belonging to Christ and being a member of the church in these words, "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] Or John address the seven churches in Asia minor this way, "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]

And while the term "kingdom" is not explicitly used in other passages, it is implicit in the language nonetheless, as in Peter's description of the church, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." [1 Peter 2:9-10]

Why did Jesus spend so much time teaching "kingdom" parables? [Matt 13:1-25; 13:24-30; 13:31-43; 13:44; 13:45-46; 13:47-50; 18:21-35; 20:1-16; 21:33-46; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; 25:14-30] Why is the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount constantly set in a "kingdom" framework? [Matt 5:3, 10, 17-20, 6:9-13, 6:33, 7:21] Why does someone have to be "born again" to "enter the kingdom" versus Jesus simply saying "born again" to become a "Christian" or "member of the church?" [John 3:1-5] Is there any distinction here between the terms "church, kingdom, Christian, and believer-in-Christ," or do they melt into one basic general meaning of "a personal relationship with Jesus?"

## The Expectation of the Jewish People and Explanation to the Gentile World

Part of what we need to underscore here is that God's people – the Jewish Covenant community, the people in the towns and villages in the time of Caesar's Roman rule -- were in fact looking for the coming of their King, who would re-establish the long awaited, complete, full kingdom rule of God promised in Daniel 7:13-14,

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed,"

and described repeatedly in the Prophets as the great fulfillment of God's purposes for Israel and for all the nations of the world. [*Isaiah 2:1-5, 9:1-6, 11:1-9, Zechariah 9:9-17, Micah 2:5,6, Psalm 110*]

They were looking for God to exercise his kingly authority and bring an end to the rule of the pagan, gentile nations that oppressed both the Jewish people and all the rest of mankind as well and would enable them to serve God as a righteous, just and faithful people (Luke 1:51-55, 1:67-75). AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT JESUS WAS PROMISING THEM HE HAD COME TO FULFILL. Jesus did not come to set aside their kingdom expectations; nor did he come announcing an invitation to "join a church" (in our traditional sense of the word) or issue an invitation to enter a "personal (individualistic) relationship with Him." Every time he taught them about the "kingdom of God" (the Person who rules this kingdom) or the "kingdom of heaven" (the place of authority from which he rules- above the expanse of the earth, Psalm 18:6-16; 97:1-6; 104:1-3, Dan 7:13-14, Acts 1:9-11), he was explaining to them precisely HOW he had come to fulfill that promise.

A major part of the wrestle for the Jewish people was that Jesus was taking those very promises, and those very categories, and re-telling them and defining them in a way that constantly challenged them and made them wrestle: he was the King who was to come but he had no army, no money, no formal education, no "Jerusalem/Temple" pedigree. In fact he came in such humility and such a lowly position that Isaiah describes him as, "having no form or majesty that would attract people." [*Isa 53:1-3*] What he did have was the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the affirmation of God the Father as his Son, who would in fact by his mission [*Luke 4:18ff*] and lifestyle bring the kingdom of true righteousness and compassion, forgiveness and restoration that the Prophets declared. It was such a powerful demonstration, that the people tried to make him king by force. [*John 6:15, Luke 19:36-40*]

In the end, the Jewish religious-political leadership so feared his growing acclaim among the people, [*Matt 21:1-11, John 12:12-19*] that they brought him to trial, asked him directly if he was claiming to be the one described in Daniel 7 [*Mt 26:57ff*] and then presented him to Pilate

to be put to death precisely with the charge that he was claiming to be king. [Lk 23:1ff] And in fact, he was the very King he claimed to be and Peter tells us that his resurrection vindicated him as the Eternal King who is now seated as the Messiah and Lord of all mankind. [Acts 2:22-36]

### **Who (or what) is “the church” and how does the church relate to the kingdom?**

The answer is not at all difficult; it is simply clouded in our thinking by generations and multiple layers of cultural thinking and expectations that have attached themselves to our idea of “church.” We tend to associate the word church with “church buildings” and “church activities” like Sunday morning worship and prayer meetings and fellowship dinners. Not all of that is wrong, much of it has a lot of truth to it (though only partial truth). However, this is not what the early believers would have understood by the use of the term. As all first year Greek students can tell you, the word we translate as “church” is the Greek word “ekklesia” and means a “gathering, meeting, or group that has been called out.”

The actual English word for “church” is rooted in an English-Scottish term “kirk” that refers to a building and may have its origin in a totally different Greek word “kuriakos” which refers more to a “place belonging to a lord,” and is a very poor choice for translation. The term “ekklesia” does not refer to a building or location, but to a people “who are called out, or called together.”

So what is the “church” or the “called-out ones” referring to? It is a reference to those who have been summonsed or called by Jesus the Messiah to put their faith in him and take up the cause of his kingdom. They are called out – from the ways of the world and from among the ethnic groups of the world -- to become disciples of Jesus who now seek first his kingdom.

The implications and the organic connectedness between the teachings of Jesus and the teaching of the Apostle’s in their letters is far easier to see if the translators had simply taken the actual Greek term used by Jesus in the context of Matthew 16 and 18 and translated it “my called out people.” It would have made the connection to the understanding of the early Gentile and Jewish believers, that they were now, together, the “called out, gathered” followers of Jesus who were to pursue his kingdom, much easier for our contemporary minds to comprehend. So, for instance, some have erred in calling Jesus’ references to the “church” in Matt 16 and 18 as out of place with his kingdom teaching; but that is only if you try to place our notions of church (buildings, structures, organization) into the word. If it is more straightforwardly understood as those who were being called to become his followers, who would pursue his kingdom, the term exactly fits his kingship and kingdom message.

One final question/issue that is helpful to our discussion about the good news of the kingdom that needs to be addressed: Why does Paul talk about going to the Gentiles and preaching “Jesus?” One of his more famous statements is, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” [1 Corinthians 2:2] Again, in the book of Acts Paul’s sermon to the Gentiles at Athens says this, “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but

now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." [Acts 17:30]

This has led some to say that Jesus preached the kingdom, and Paul preached Jesus. And indeed, in the practice of many churches, there is a basic split in the thinking about the work of Christ on the Cross and the message of "the good news of the kingdom." Chances are if you are part of an evangelical church, regardless of the stripe, you will hear the gospel talked about almost exclusively from the point of view of personal forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with Christ. That truth, which is so crucial and so good and so necessary, is in fact part of the message of the gospel of the kingdom, but the problem is we have made it the whole message. Consequently, when Jesus speaks of the "gospel" in kingdom terms, many evangelicals are sometimes confused about what he is referring to.

So why would Paul say, "I preach Christ?" The answer is very simple. The gentiles by and large had no context for knowing the promises from Isaiah and Daniel and Micah. They could not, on first contact, know what Paul would have been referring to had he preached "the good news of the kingdom." But what they would have understood is the announcement of a King. The terms "Christos" (Christ) and "Kurios" (Lord) were familiar Greek terms and they would have completely understood they were being told about "one who was anointed" to be "king." To the Jew, Paul and Jesus could say "the promised kingdom of God is here, and Jesus is the promised King." To the Gentile Paul would say, let me tell the good news of this amazing king, and his death and resurrection; and then explain the nature of the kingdom.

Our conclusion is that the message Jesus of Nazareth preached to the expectant, longing Jewish community of his day was the good news that the long-awaited kingdom reign of God over the earth, for and through his people had arrived; and that he, Jesus, was the promised Messiah and King-son-of-David who would establish that kingdom. That holistic kingdom promise included: forgiveness for all the past failures of God's people, as well as anyone who put their faith in him; the end of the Temple in Jerusalem and the building of the living Temple of God's people anointed by the Spirit; the inclusion of the redemption of all nations; the empowering and establishment of a restored and reconciled people would live out the righteousness, justice and compassion of the Law; the eventual defeat of all the enemies of god's people; the inheritance now expanding beyond Canaan (the promised land) to include the whole, renewed earth and universe. And, we believe, this was the message to the gentiles as well; that along with the Jews, they were now called out to become the gathered people of God who pursued this kingdom rule of God together (the "ekklesia" church).

Some of our misreading of Scripture passages over the years results from confusing the personal invitation to salvation, with the purpose of that salvation- the calling to pursue the kingdom of God, which has a special focus in bringing justice to this world by caring for the poor and oppressed. So for instance, we read the story of the sower sowing seed (Matt 13) and

reduce that to a lesson about how personal evangelism takes place; when this parable is not (narrowly) about personal salvation, but (more broadly) about how the kingdom itself- the purposes of God's justice, compassion and love being brought to the world through his people- had not advanced in the past through the people of Israel, but would now through Christ in his people, bear much fruit.

There are additional aspects to the nature of the expansion of this kingdom that will be incorporated in other core value lessons, but just to list a few: the kingdom is only present when the KING is present, through forgiveness and anointing of his people; the kingdom comes in and through the weak things of this world; the kingdom looks like and grows from a mustard seed; the kingdom advances through much suffering and trial; the kingdom has a focus on the poor and disenfranchised; the kingdom has both an "already" and a "not yet" look to it -- meaning, it brings deep, real, tremendous change now, and yet, still awaits the final day of Christ's second coming for its full, complete expression.

### **Why We Need to Ask This Question: It focuses everything**

The church is "the called out ones"; called to follow Christ as King in the establishment of his kingdom. The "called out ones" exist for this purpose. All God's people called together from among the nations are now called to "seek first the kingdom and his righteousness." (Matt 6:33)

So, what is the focus of the kingdom? And how does that affect everyone's life and life pursuits and the life of the church body together? Is, "I want to know Christ" (Phil 3) the same as "I want to know and see his kingdom come and his will be done"? Our answer is, yes; but can we be more specific about what that means?

For some (many?) the idea of the kingdom it is a rather large, almost unidentifiable issue. The reason is that in some circles the kingdom of God has come to mean "cultural transformation."

This is part of what our theological circles call "a reformed world and life view." A part of that view is that the "kingdom of God" is meant to affect every aspect of culture and transform them from philosophies, ideals, practices and systems that are tainted by other "world views" (whether secularism or other religious world views) and gradually see them transformed to a more "redeemed," "God-centered" and "God-glorifying" thought and practice. And so the people of God are called to influence all aspects of culture by applying their Christianity in the arts, sciences, politics, business and family structures of the culture to make them more faithfully reflect the image of God. There is also a practical view that Christians are meant to do these things predominately as individuals "living out the kingdom" each in their own sphere of influence, and the corporate expression of the church fundamentally exists to strengthen, equip and train them to go as individuals into the world and exercise kingdom influence.

Obviously, there is much, much truth here. And yet, without the simple, direct, core values of the kingdom defining those efforts, and without an equal manifestation of the corporate body of Christ working together to express the kingdom, all of this very good sounding “world view theology” can drift into cultural assimilation and an unhealthy individualism that actually thwarts the fullest expression of the kingdom.

Our contention is when Jesus used the term “the good news of the kingdom,” he was explicitly referring to the establishment of God’s rule and reign as described in Isaiah 2, 9, 11, 58 and 61 (as examples) through the people of God both personally and collectively:

**Isaiah 2:2** It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,<sup>3</sup> and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law,<sup>1</sup> and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.<sup>5</sup> O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

**Isaiah 9:7** Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

**Isaiah 11:3** And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

**Isaiah 58:6** "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed<sup>1</sup> go free, and to break every yoke?<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?<sup>8</sup> Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.<sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

**Isaiah 61:1** “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;<sup>1</sup> he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;<sup>3</sup> to grant to those who mourn in Zion - to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of

gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.”

How much any culture is or is not transformed is not our primary calling, though it is our real and concrete hope. Our primary calling is to seek justice and righteousness in all things and that means especially seeking it on behalf of the poor and oppressed. The kingdom is “for the poor.” The resulting cultural transformation is something we hope for, but it is a side effect or benefit of seeking first the kingdom by the church being people of justice, compassion and humility.

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

### A. 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 in his kingdom reign.

As Jesus comes to establish the kingdom rule and reign of God, here are his words regarding the Law:

**Matthew 5:17** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

The Lord summarizes our responsibilities to the Law in several ways in Scripture. One such summary is the Ten Commandments. Another is the “two great commandments”- to love the Lord our God with all our heart...and our neighbor as ourselves. 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 such summary and is actually the lens through which we want to view and approach the rest of this kingdom study: “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.”

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]

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

### **To act justly:**

To make sure you personally treat others with all goodness, rightness and justice in every situation of life -- as a merchant [Lev 19:36], an employer [James 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. What is especially critical to note is that this is a covenantal obligation; it is not a matter of simply a discretionary choice. He has shown us what he “requires” of us as his people: to do justice.

[Isaiah 1:17,21-23, 58:10; Psalm 9:7-9, 68:4-6, 146:5-9]

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:**

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. This 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. [Matthew 5:43 ff, 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], and a humility that translates into actually entering the humble circumstances of the poor and vulnerable [Phil 2:5-8]. This means we trust 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].

The humility that comes first from seeing our own need for and reception of God's mercy and favor and is willing to become vulnerable, 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]. It also means the poor and vulnerable, together with us, will see that the salvation and deliverance is directly from the hand and power of God.

## **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.

- A. The Covenant Community of God established at Sinai -- and the justice/mercy/humility focus of Genesis – Deuteronomy
  - 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
  - 2. The violence and oppression after the Fall [Gen 3-6] are answered both by God's justice and his mercy [Gen 9]
  - 3. Abraham becomes the father (the Covenant head and representative) of the community of faith that God will call from all the nations of the earth. Over against the violent establishment of greatness by mankind through idolatry, God will freely bless Abraham, a man in humble circumstances, through faith (Gen 12) in order to be a blessing to the nations

- a. Part of Abraham’s training includes learning how difficult injustice and oppression can be—and yet, experiencing the mercy and compassion of God in his need [*Gen 12:10ff*]
  - b. Abraham also expresses crucial lessons about wealth and power: for the covenant people, they exist in a context of doing good [*Gen 13 & 14*]
  - c. Abraham learns the central issues of the Gospel, which frees us to be people of generous mercy: God’s blessings only come by the power of God’s promise, received through faith as a gift -- not by human strength [*Gen 15-17*]
  - d. 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. There are so many lessons with Joseph that sometimes we miss one of the most fundamental points of his life story, namely, that God used him to mercifully provide basic food supplies for a large number of nations who would have otherwise starved from famine [*Gen 50:19,20*]
5. Abraham’s vast biological descendants through Isaac, Jacob and the Twelve Sons of Israel learn fundamental issues of justice and mercy during a four hundred year, Sovereignly appointed stay in Egypt as slaves. While part of that stay was to allow the Amorites’ sins to reach the full measure of the judgment that would come against them [*Gen 15:14, 15*], another part was the intentional experience of suffering God would permit his people to endure [*Gen 15:13*]. When they emerged, they would be forever identified in the preamble to the Ten Commandments as the people whom “the Lord your God brought out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” [*Exodus 20:2*] The net effect of that was to make them into a people of compassion as they dealt with slaves, immigrants and the poor [*Exodus 22:21-28*]
6. The Law -- and the summary of the Ten Commandments -- reveal the full measure of God’s justice/mercy and humility
- a. The warnings against idolatry and images are rooted in opposition to the “divine right” of kings and mighty men to oppress the poor and helpless [*cf Pharaoh; Psalm 82; 2 Kings 17:7-17*]
  - b. The people of Israel are not to take the Lord’s name upon them in a vain/empty way - and “in the name of God” pursue evil [*Jeremiah 7:1-11*]

- c. The Sabbath and all its related “rest” ordinances of financial and physical relief stand in stark contrast to the harsh labor of the nations around Israel [*cf Pharaoh, but also Solomon/Rehoboam I Kings 12*]
- d. Each of the remaining commands reflect a relationship of turning away from injustice and turning towards compassion
- e. The unfolding of the law in detail [*Exodus 21*] calls for compassion and justice in everything from the treatment of slaves (indentured servants) to an equitable protection of property, to male/female relationships and the protection of women, to social responsibility for the alien, the orphan, the widow and the poor, *versus the patterns of the nations around them* [*cf Lev 18:1ff, cf Joshua 24:14ff*]
- f. The great social justice framework that helped keep Israel from falling into patterns of oppression and becoming “like the nations” who surrounded them included the Annual Festivals, the Tithe and especially the Sabbath Year and Jubilee Year legislation [*Leviticus 23 and 25*]

Key as a background to all of this is God’s insistence that whatever wealth Israel possessed, including all the blessings of the land, were a gift, not to be hoarded, but to be used for a blessing to others. In addition it was meant to be central to Israel’s understanding that the land was really God’s, and they were his “tenants” who were there to do his will (doing good) with the property. He would bless them, and they would be free from worry about their needs [*Deut 8:10-18, Lev 25:18-24*].

- 7. As the people of Israel wrestle with idolatry and turning away from the true worship of God throughout their history, the heart of God’s indictment against them through the Prophets includes their failure to care about these issues of justice and compassion. The Prophets become the crucial voice of God to call his people back to repentance

*[Isaiah 1:15-17; Jeremiah 5:28, 29; Amos 5:11,12; Ezekiel 18:5-13; Daniel 4:27; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 7:8-10; Malachi 3:5]*

- 8. Despite his people’s failure, God’s great promise is that he will raise up “the Servant,” the true representative of Israel who will fulfill God’s righteousness. The book of Isaiah is the most thorough Old Testament promise and proclamation of the ministry of Christ. It is loaded with these issues of “the Servant” who has at the heart of his ministry, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a commitment to issues of justice and mercy [*Isaiah 9:7; Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 61:1,2*]

9. In the exile, God again teaches his people to be a humble, servant people who know what it is to experience injustice and be the recipients of free, undeserved grace. This is meant to re-train their hearts so that when they return to the land, they will reject the idolatry and the oppression/injustice that had marked their lives, and they would once again become people of righteousness and compassion [*Isaiah 1:21-26; Jeremiah 29:7ff; cf I Peter*]
- B. The New Covenant Community of God's people, established with the coming of the Messiah, now fulfill God's call for his people to be a light to the world of God's goodness, justice, mercy and compassion, through grace
1. When Jesus comes he announces his ministry in the synagogue with a direct quote of Isaiah 58 and 61. [*Luke 4:16-19*] The Gospel writers then tell us story after story of how Jesus showed compassion and sought to establish justice by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, touching the outcast, liberating the oppressed from Satan's oppression and their own sin. And then he teaches his people the nature of his "kingdom" reign, rooted in God's grace, the forgiveness of sins and the free gift of salvation and sonship through faith in his name. He also calls his disciples to follow him in taking the compassionate love of God into the world
  2. Matthew shows us the nature of God's reign through Christ, and tells us how everyone was stunned and amazed by the expressions of God's mercy: Jesus heals the lepers [*Matthew 8:1ff*] and the servant of a hated Roman Centurion [*Mt 8:5ff*]; he shows compassion to Peter's mother-in-law with a fever [*Mt 8:14*] and the demon possessed. When he heals a paralyzed man and tells him his sins are forgiven, we are told the crowds "were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men" [*Mt 9:8*]

All these miraculous acts are simply expressions of mercy, compassion and justice. They are supernatural and do show us the power of God, but what is most crucial for us to see is that they show us the character of the God who loves us, and the character of his kingdom reign

3. Nonetheless, God's people have always wrestled with the nature of God's kingdom rule, even when Christ himself was present and demonstrating "how" God is committed to advancing his name in the earth. So when John the Baptist finds himself in prison and about to lose his life, he sends representatives to ask Jesus if he really is the Christ. Our Lord's answer of vindication that he is the Messiah is wrapped in terms of the expression of God's compassion and justice:

“Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”  
*[Matthew 11:4-6]*

4. The Pharisees

5. God’s call for his kingdom righteousness expressed through the Church -- the “ekklesia”

The great promises of God for his salvation purpose among the nations of the earth is rooted in the issues of making the church into a people who will live out these same issues of justice and compassion

a. Isaiah tells us:

“In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many people will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, o house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” *[Isaiah 2:1-5]*

God promises that he is going to redeem a people for himself from among all the nations of the earth and they will be marked, not by anger and war, but by works of caring for basic human need. This is the Old Testament precursor to Matthew 28:18ff

b. When John the Baptist announces the great arrival of the Messiah, he leads the way by calling people to repentance around these very issues. In response to his call to repentance the people ask what they should do. John’s answer:

The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same. Tax collectors [asked], ‘Teacher, what should we do? Don’t collect anymore than you are required to’, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we do?’

He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.'" [Luke 3:10-14]

- c. As Jesus leads his disciples and teaches the larger nation of Israel, he constantly refers to the reality of eternal life and the presence of God's salvation and kingdom in mercy and justice terms. The parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10] is in answer to "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" We know from all the rest of Scripture that salvation is not by works, it is only received as a gift by grace. The real question is – where will the presence of God's grace lead us? The answer -- to being people like the Samaritan.

When Zaccheus the tax collector is touched by the love of God through Christ, his response is, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus responds, "Today salvation has come to this house...." [Luke 19:7-10]

As Jesus describes the long time period that we all must endure until his final return, he tells his disciples parables of the kingdom. At the heart of those parables is the message of God's grace, love, and endurance available through the Holy Spirit. But when the Lord returns, the kingdom "investment" he will have been looking for from his people revolve around these issues of compassion [Matthew 25:31-36 cf. Isa 58]

- d. At the inauguration of the New Testament church in the book of Acts, we are told by Luke of the things that Jesus began to do and to teach [Acts 1:1], and the result of the forgiveness of sins through the work of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a profound demonstration of compassion and justice [Acts 2:38ff., Acts 4:32ff]
- e. As the church grew, the need arose for deacons who would be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to further address these very issues - in the first major case, the daily distribution of food to widows who were being neglected in the daily distribution of food [Acts 7]
- f. When the issue of salvation by grace alone was brought to the Jerusalem council, the Jewish Apostles addressed Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, acknowledging his ministry and gospel message and, Paul tells us, "All they asked was that we should remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." [Galatians 2:10]

- g. When Paul prays for the church, he constantly uses phrases referring to the kingdom of God and to righteousness [*Phil 1:8-10 , Col 1:9-14*]
- h. James, who is a New Testament version of the Old Testament Prophets, tells us that God's heart has not changed [*James 1:27, 2:5-7, 14ff*]
- i. The Apostle John unequivocally unites the experience of the love of God in the Gospel with the expression of acts of compassion and mercy [*1 John 3:16ff*]
- j. Finally, Paul tells us that the work of the Elders and other church leaders is to "equip God's people for works of service, so that the body may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" [*Eph 4:12,13*]