



EXPECTED ARRIVAL TIMES

Theme Resource Pack
August 2024
(4 August - 31 August)

Introduction

The Kingdom — God's reign, God's project of restoration for humanity, for life in all its fullness — has come... is here... is soon... is being realised... will come... and is already in the process of becoming! All at the same time!

The *Kingdom* is God's vision for a renewed world of reconciled relationships — how things are meant to be, how they can be, and how they *actually are* here and now as the Kingdom is being built for us and with us! One of the ways the Kingdom is revealed to us is through divine compassion, glory and wonder. Indeed we get a taste of it at Communion!

While we still live in a world of fractured relationships — between one another and with our planet — we also live in one that has witnessed the redemptive and restorative love of Christ who loved us to the cross and beyond!

So, last month we got packing with God, we're on our way, and we want to know what the expected arrival time is! Jesus said the Kingdom is already at hand, in fact it's already in our midst, and yet it's simultaneously something we deeply long for — the way we long for home, for belonging, for meaning. The Kingdom is not so much a matter of an Arrival Time, but of *Arrival Times*, as God's grace finds us exactly when and where we are.

Yes, the Kingdom can be a hard thing to define and date and tie down, BUT it's not hard to be a part of, or contribute to! In fact it's quite a welcoming place... by design. It's hard to get our head around in the same way concepts like *love* and *happiness* can become complicated once you put them under the microscope. But just like love and happiness that doesn't stop them making sense in everyday life, or being instantly recognisable. You don't need to be able to pin down the exact dimensions of love to love someone. You just love them! The Kingdom can be like that — it is the rightness of God in action. And it's at hand!

Weekly Overview

- Now and Not Yet! — *How the Kingdom has arrived and is still arriving!*
- Eyes Open! — *What the Kingdom is like...*
- On time! — *How the Kingdom arrives in our lives.*
- The time is now! — *What it means to be citizens of heaven, in the here and now.*

Format

Every month we have a God-given theme delving into different aspects and areas of faith. Over the course of 2024 these themes connect and take us on a faith journey out into the wonders of life with Jesus. Our themes shape our Daily Worship, Sunday Live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! Each week run Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

Now and not yet! (Week 1, 4 August)

Introduction: The Kingdom is both here *and* on its way. The same way that loving someone isn't a static thing frozen time — it's a living thing that continues to grow. When we love one another it is something that we enact every day, something we realise and witness day by day as it comes into fruition, new every day. The Kingdom is both here and continuing to arrive!

Setting the scene: Large arrivals board at a train station full of journeys coming and going.

Seeds to sow: When you look at your neighbourhood, what do you want to 'arrive' that hasn't arrived yet?

- 1. Mark 1:14-15 The Kingdom is at hand!** The time has come! Both the Gospel of Mark and Jesus's mission have an insistent sense of urgency and momentum. Something is happening, arriving, becoming... Jesus is restless to point people to the Kingdom, are we?
- 2. Luke 4: 42-44 The Kingdom must be shared!** The Kingdom is 'share size'! When do we need a jolt to get on our feet and share the Kingdom?
- 3. Luke 17: 20-21 The Kingdom is already here!** One of the theological tensions of the New Testament (and our lives today) is that the Kingdom is both something we yearn to see realised — and something which is already among us, weaving us together. It has arrived and is continuing to arrive. What does it mean for us in our day to day life that the Kingdom is already in our midst?
- 4. Colossians 1: 13-14 The Kingdom is our home.** We have been brought into the Kingdom of light! The Kingdom is not an escapist fantasy to make the present bearable — it is a heavenly reality that sustains us and is available to us right now even in the middle of life's struggles. How do we get our heads around the 'now and not yet' of the Kingdom?
- 5. 1 Peter 1: 3-9 Living Hope** The Kingdom is a living hope in the here and now. How does the knowledge of our inheritance equip us for the challenges of today?
- 6. Acts 28: 30-31 Without hindrance!** What helps us to speak without hindrance and share with boldness — as we proclaim the arriving Kingdom!?
- 7. Matthew 6: 10 Your kingdom come.** The Kingdom is something we can invite daily. It is something which is continually arriving, becoming, being realised through God's people as the Holy Spirit enthuses and guides us.

Eyes open! (Week 2, 11 August)

Introduction: So what is the Kingdom of heaven *like*? To see the Kingdom in action we need to keep our eyes open, to spot the small things that become the wild things, that become the beautiful things. That become the massive things. The things of the Kingdom.

Setting the scene: Jesus perched on a rock telling stories to a crowd of eager faces.

Seeds to sow: If you could only tell someone one story to tell them about the Kingdom, what would you tell them?

- 1. Matthew 13: 31-32 Mustard.** The Kingdom can start as something tiny, easy to miss, easy to ignore that yet that grows and become impossible to root out as it rapidly gains momentum. What can we learn from this image of the tightly packed potential of a tiny seed, slowly and then wildly exploding!
- 2. Matthew 13: 33 Yeast.** Just a pinch — a pinch! — of the Kingdom can make all the difference, can work all the way through the dough. What's our response to this compelling picture?
- 3. Matthew 13: 34-35 Story.** A story itself can work like a seed — we think we get it on one level, but as it takes root in us it grows and bears fruit in new ways!
- 4. Matthew 13: 44 Treasure.** When he buys the field, he get the treasure, but he also gets a whole lot of mud! This is such a short story, just one sentence, but it is full of depth. What do you uncover when you 'dig in to it?
- 5. Matthew 13: 45-46 Pearl.** This story is similar to the preceding one, but on this occasion we are told that the merchant is earnestly searching for a fine pearl, whereas in the first one the protagonist simply finds the treasure, perhaps literally stumbling over it in a field. What do we learn in the contrast between these stories, of the Kingdom as something that can both be found after an arduous search and something that can simply be stumbled across?
- 6. Mark 4: 26-29 Sprout.** The Kingdom is organic! It is a miracle of light and soil, faith and light, that grows in ways we cannot fathom and yet, like the everyday wonder of crops growing, it quietly goes on growing. Without a time lapse camera it can be hard to catch the moment a plant grows from one state to the other, but grow it does!
- 7. Matthew 20: 1-16 Payday.** The Kingdom sometimes cuts across the grain of our given cultural understandings. It did in the first century and it does so now in the twenty first. How does this story encourage us? And how does it challenge us and make us uncomfortable?

On time! (Week 3, 18 August)

Introduction: We live through time, present moment to present moment linking past to future. But God is not limited by space and time the way we are. God is not constrained by all sorts of dimensions and preconceptions that we are! Jesus once sat on a hill and got into it with a bunch of folk. And we're still unpacking the profound wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount to this day!

Setting the scene: A group of people sitting listening on a hillside.

Seeds to sow: How do you picture Jesus when you picture him preaching?

- 1. Matthew 5: 1-5 For theirs is the Kingdom.** Kingdom values are not always the same as what our societies value. Jesus tells us that those we might overlook, that we might take for granted — that the world takes for granted — are blessed, are special, that they matter, and are significant. The Kingdom is not a talent agency for go-getters — it is a family that cares for each member.
- 2. Matthew 5: 6-10 For ours is the Kingdom.** God sees us, notices us, and values our efforts, our attempts, our contributions like a Father who cherishes his children. The world's metrics are not God's. God's idea of success does not always align with how we're conditioned to think about success.
- 3. Matthew 5: 11-12 Hold on, rejoice anyway!** The invitation to rejoice is *right now*, in the midst of it all — the good, the bad, the hard, the easy, the struggle, the triumph, the failure — we are part of something bigger than any one of us.
- 4. Matthew 5: 13 Getting salty** Jesus calls us to stop 'getting salty' and instead to 'get salty'! The irony of the phrase 'get salty' is that it really means to 'get bitter'. But Jesus invites us to get rid of the bitter aftertaste and rediscover the salty zing that enhances the flavour of life — not just for us but for the world around us!
- 5. Matthew 5: 14-16 Getting light.** How are you letting your light shine this week?
- 6. Luke 12: 27-31 Seek first the Kingdom.** Sometimes we try and squeeze the Kingdom into the gaps around the rest of life. Life is full of pressures and demands that understandably occupy our minds. But Jesus invites us to start with the Kingdom, not compartmentalised as an additional treasure, but something that is woven into the very stuff of living from the first stitch.
- 7. Romans 14: 13-21 In The Holy Spirit.** It is the Holy Spirit, not our customs and habits, that holds together the Kingdom of God!

The time is now! (Week 4, 25 August)

Introduction: What time is it? Well the time is now! The present is all we can act in. The Kingdom is closer than we know. With The Holy Spirit's help we can be citizens of this Kingdom right here and right now. And all it takes is God's grace and our acceptance of who we truly are in him.

Setting the scene: A quiet moment at sunrise, sunset, dusk, or dawn.

Seeds to sow: Looking at your local community and your neighbourhood — what is it time for?!

- 1. John 18: 33-38 A Kingdom not of this world...** In this fascinating encounter between Pilate and Jesus we hear the enigmatic phrase 'My kingdom is not of this world'. There is a dynamic tension between the divine and the earthly in the Kingdom — it is something unfolding here but not 'of' here.
- 2. Philippians 3: 17-21 Our citizenship is in heaven!** What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven in the here and now?
- 3. Ephesians 2: 11-14 A Kingdom that transcends borders and divisions!** God's Kingdom, God's reign, is not 'might is right' and defending my patch of soil against yours. It transcends the borders we draw.
- 4. Ephesians 2: 14-22 Being built together!** We are *being* built. You could say that we are 'under construction'! The work of restoring humanity, our relationship with God, our world, and one another is an ongoing one of reconciliation and renewal.
- 5. Hebrews 11: 13-16 A heavenly country.** In some ways when we seek the Kingdom, we are searching for home.
- 6. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Ambassadors of that heavenly country!** Speaking words of reconciliation.
- 7. Matthew 19: 16-30 With God all things are possible.** We cannot buy our way into the Kingdom, or make it arrive on our terms or to our schedule. What we can do is simply love one another with hearts of compassion and have a childlike openness to the ongoing arrival times of the Kingdom...