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Introduction

A while ago I saw this movie called "The Terminal", has anyone seen it? It stars Tom Hanks as an Eastern European visiting America. Anyway, he arrives at the Airport in the States only to discover that there's been a revolution in his country and all passports have been revoked.

So what happens is he is stranded in no-mans-land. He can't go back and he can't leave the airport. Physically he is *in* America, but until he can pass through customs properly he cannot actually *live in or experience* America.

There's this shot of him standing there in the airport, looking through the doors of the airport outside to America but knowing he's trapped inside the airport.

This scenario illustrates the place many, if not most Christians live in.

They've been saved, accepted Jesus' offer of a relationship with God, they're going to heaven – all that stuff, but their lives are not lived in the full experience of the Kingdom of God.

Penny's done a whole lot of travelling around the world and tells me that airports are not much fun to spend long periods of time in.

This morning, I want to look at some of the keys we need to move from the viewing platform, through the front doors and into the Kingdom of God!

Scripture

John 3:1-8 (CEV)

¹*There was a man named Nicodemus who was a Pharisee and a Jewish leader.*

²*One night he went to Jesus and said, "Sir, we know that God has sent you to teach us. You could not work these miracles, unless God were with you."*

³*Jesus replied, "I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom!"*

⁴*Nicodemus asked, "How can a grown man ever be born a second time?"*

⁵*Jesus answered:*

I tell you for certain that before you can get into God's kingdom, you must be born not only by water, but by the Spirit. ⁶Humans give life to their children. Yet only God's Spirit can change you into a child of God. ⁷Don't be surprised when I say that you must be born from above. ⁸Only God's Spirit gives new life. The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wants to. You can hear the wind, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going.

Overview

Jesus says two key things in this verse; first – we need to be “born from above”, this means that only those who have begun a relationship with God can see His Kingdom. Only Christians (those who have acknowledged that Jesus is God and have embraced a relationship with Him) can see the Kingdom of God.

Secondly Jesus teaches Nicodemus that to actually *enter* the Kingdom of God is a different matter; to *enter* God’s Kingdom Christians need to be “born of water and by the Spirit.”

What this means is not simply that we need to be water baptised and receive the Holy Spirit; again, there are plenty of baptised and Spirit-filled Christians whose lives are not lived in the full experience of the Kingdom of God; what this means is that our lives need to be *completely* transformed by the power of God, by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is an outward sign of a commitment to repentance – it’s not simply a ‘one-off’ event that happens. Baptism happens only once, but repentance means accepting forgiveness from God and then beginning and *continuing* the process of bringing every area of our lives into line with God’s desires for us.

This morning we will look closer at what it means to live in the Kingdom of God *today*.

To do this we will examine this passage we've just read and then look through the New Testament for examples Jesus used of living in the Kingdom of God today. From this we can see how we can move into ourselves.

Born From Above

Jesus first tells Nicodemus that he must be "born from above" in order to see the Kingdom of God.

As I mentioned, obviously this means 'to be a Christian', but there is actually a lot more to it when we look at the context Jesus said it in and by what Nicodemus would have understood.

I have had the privilege of growing up in a Pentecostal Church; this phrase "born-again" is one that I have heard used synonymously with beginning a relationship with Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus, however would not have grown up singing "Bullfrogs and Butterflies", he would have understood this in the sense of a natural birth – that is also the context Jesus would have used it in.

So let's look at what a 'birth' is in relation to the Kingdom of God. We generally think of birth in the sense of a new creation, something new is made and delivered. This is true of becoming a Christian, but it doesn't tell the full story of what Jesus is saying here.

Birth is our means of entry into this world. We can't enter this world unless we are born into it. We are formed perfectly in the womb to suit the conditions of this world and to be able to adapt to the changing conditions of this world.

Being "born from above" means to be transformed so that we can enter the Kingdom of God and adapt to its conditions.

To be "born from above" is to completely embrace the culture of the Kingdom of God.

To enter the Kingdom of God we need to be transformed to suit its conditions.

The Culture of the Kingdom

If I was to move to another country, in order to survive and function effectively I would need to adapt to the culture of that country.

Say, for example, I was to move from New Zealand to Japan; in order to fit it and be able to function effectively and to my complete potential in Japan I would need to submit my culture – I would need to humbly accept that in Japan my expectations and understanding of how to interact with people are simply that – they're my expectations. I would need to transform my behaviour in order to become a part of that society.

Obviously I would need to learn the language, I would need to – if I was wanting to live there permanently – surrender my loyalties or devotion to my local sporting team because in order to truly become a part of Japanese society I would need to have my loyalties firmly rooted in their favourite sports and teams.

If I was a businessman and wanted to succeed in Japan I would need to accept the ethics and values of the Japanese businessman. The things / think are important or *my* preferences and comfort zone would be irrelevant because I'm not in my "kingdom" anymore but I'm living in someone else's.

If I want to move into another kingdom I need to surrender my citizenship of that kingdom and embrace my new home.

It's the exact same thing with the Kingdom of God.

For Christians, we need to move from our "kingdom" into God's Kingdom. We need to move from the place where our rule is in effect to the place where God's complete and perfect rule is manifest.

The truth is, even though we may think of it as "our kingdom", the Bible describes the place where God's rule is not established as the "Kingdom of Darkness."

Colossians 1:13-14 (NIV)

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

The Kingdom of Darkness also has a 'king', Satan. In the same way that the Kingdom of God is where God's rule is established and His characteristics are the 'law of the land', so too in the Kingdom of Darkness, Satan's character and authority are in effect.

If we're to move from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of God then we need to have a look at the characteristics of these two kingdoms.

Two Kingdoms

Kingdom of God	Kingdom of Darkness
King = Jesus	King = Satan
Purpose = Life, abundantly (John 10:10)	Purpose = Steal, kill & destroy (John 10:10)
Culture = Surrender to God, holiness, faith, forgiveness, 'Fruits of the Spirit'	Culture = Selfishness, sin, unbelief, unforgiveness, opposites of 'Fruit of the Spirit'

The key attribute of the Kingdom of God is "surrender".

Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 (MSG)

Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In the Kingdom of God there is no room for an attitude that says "I want it like this; what about *my* needs? I don't like that." The Kingdom of God is where God's desires are the priority and at the forefront of everything in our lives.

You see how this is the complete opposite of the Kingdom of Darkness?

The Kingdom of Darkness is also called the "Kingdom of the World" and it's no surprise that the qualities we see here in the Kingdom of Darkness are the exact same qualities we see all around us in this world.

Selfishness is the key attribute of the Kingdom of Darkness. Selfishness says "I *deserve* this; I *want* this; I have a right to be unhappy because things haven't worked out according to *my* view of how they *should!*"

Selfishness puts 'self' before God; that's why it's so destructive. In essence it is rebellion against God's authority because it's an attitude that says "I am more important than God." That's what we're saying, whether we consciously acknowledge it or not – when we put our wants before God's desires or commands then we're saying to God that we're more important here.

And what do you know? We read in the Bible that Satan rebelled against God's authority – when we do this we are displaying the characteristics of the ruler of the Kingdom of Darkness.

Christians may be technically 'in' the Kingdom of God, but not truly experiencing the benefits of God's rule because they're still in the airport; stuck behind the doors, unwilling or unable to adjust their culture to fit into the culture of the Kingdom of God.

If we want to experience the benefits of the Kingdom of God then we need to be transformed and embrace the culture of the Kingdom.

There's no point going through the effort and cost of visiting another country to simply stay in the airport and view it from the observation deck; there's no point making the effort and counting the cost to enter God's Kingdom and then simply reading about the benefits of it and hear about other people's experiences in it and never actually set foot inside it yourself!

Surrender is the Culture of the Kingdom

The culture of the Kingdom of God is characterised by surrender to God. It goes hand-in-hand with worship and sacrifice; we said during our 40 Days of Purpose campaign that whatever you spend your time doing and thinking about is the thing that you worship.

By looking at the things we worship we can quickly get a picture of how far we are, or how far we're not, living in the Kingdom of God.

Remember; the Kingdom of God is where God's perfect and complete authority is recognised and where His perfect will is fulfilled.

If we want to truly live in the Kingdom of God today then we need to surrender the values and culture of the Kingdom of this World and exchange them for the values and culture of the Kingdom of God.

So what's actually involved in us doing this?

Born of Water and Spirit

Let's return to our scripture:

John 3:5-6 (CEV)

Jesus answered:

I tell you for certain that before you can get into God's kingdom, you must be born not only by water, but by the Spirit. Humans give life to their children. Yet only God's Spirit can change you into a child of God.

Just as being “born from above” means much more than simply becoming a Christian, so to being “born by water and Spirit” has a much deeper meaning than simply going through the ritual of water baptism and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. Repent

Remember that Jesus was teaching Nicodemus at a time shortly after John the Baptist had begun calling on people to repent and be baptized.

To Nicodemus being “born by water” would have been an obvious allusion not just to water baptism, but also to this call to repent.

Repentance means not simply being sorry for doing something wrong, repentance involves turning away from doing that thing and making reparation.

One of the dictionaries defines it as “to make a change for the better as a result of remorse.”

This is not a one-off ‘act of repentance’ but a commitment to a life of continual change for the better as piece by piece God transforms us so we display His character to the world.

2. Transformation

This *transformation* is what Jesus is talking about when He says we need to be born “by the Spirit.”

We cannot transform ourselves into something better or greater than we are – we need some external influence greater than ourselves to lift us beyond our abilities. This is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The rest of this verse describes the mystery of the Holy Spirit:

John 3:7-8 (NLT)

So don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

Moving Into God's Kingdom

When God fills us with His Holy Spirit we have the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God. Only with the power of the Holy Spirit can we say:

"I know I can't do this alone, but God's promised His strength and power to me and I want to live in the Kingdom of God so I'm just going to trust Him and obey Him knowing that God will see me through."

The thing with this, though, is that first we need to trust and obey. The Holy Spirit will not force us to act and will not force us into the fullness of God's Kingdom and His blessings; it is something we need to decide to be obedient in and act on *then* the Holy Spirit will respond to our obedience and faith and be there to strengthen us.

Most of you know the story of Peter walking on water – Jesus called to Peter to get out of the boat and come to Him. Peter took what he knew of Jesus; His character, His love; His power; and responded to His call. Peter would never have walked on water if he hadn't decided to trust Jesus, risk it all and get out of the boat in obedience.

Many Christians never experience the Kingdom of God in their lives because they never actually respond to God's call, to God's commands that require a sacrifice, a risk. Many Christians never ever make it past the airport doors and into the Kingdom of God.

Who knows that it's not easy to obey God all the time? Who knows that sometimes the cost of following God is everything we have?

To live in the Kingdom of God we need to take God's commands, look at the cost of obeying Him, accept that the benefit of living in the Kingdom of God is worth more than anything we have and truly surrender to God's total authority. Then we need to actually act in obedience and faith, be prepared for it to hurt, be prepared for it to cost us, be prepared for things to be tough – but know that the power of the Holy Spirit has been promised to us and that God's strength will hold us and guide us into a life that is truly lived in His Kingdom.

The Benefits of the Kingdom of God

Just as we come to a close, I want to very briefly go back to our diagram of the two Kingdoms.

You know, most people know this stuff in one way or another. But most people also spend their lives on the observation deck. God hasn't created us and called us to live in the airport – He's called us to enter His Kingdom and experience a life under His blessing.

So let's look briefly at the results of Living in the Kingdom of God – your entry permit could cost you everything you have, and for many people it seems that God's commands are not reason enough to do something, they want to know the benefit to them. We, let's have a look:

Kingdom of God	Kingdom of Darkness
King = Jesus	King = Satan
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Working backwards we can see that living by the culture of the Kingdom of God results in life, and not just 'life', but *abundant* life! If, on the other hand, we choose to live by the culture of the Kingdom of Darkness, it results in being robbed, destroyed and killed.

Surrender to God = Life
Self-first = Destruction

Besides that fact that God has called us into His Kingdom, we are given the choice between life and death; regardless of what the costs may be initially or how difficult it may seem – these are the end results, and the choice is up to us.

When I made the decision to really follow God it meant I had to surrender the whole of my little 'kingdom that I'd built up. I had to leave behind a lot of my former friends, who were in the D.J and party scene, I had to put aside a lot of the popularity and 'success' I had built up by dropping a whole heap of the kinds of gigs I was D.J'ing at, I had to examine the use of my time and energy and money and realise that I could no longer do what I wanted when I wanted and needed to get busy do what God wanted when He wanted it. Instead of D.J'ing huge dance parties and living it up I knew that in order to be in the place God wanted me, the place where I could learn from Him I needed to be in a church with no-one my own age, a youth group with no-one my own age – it was a test of obedience and humility and at times the sacrifice seemed so great.

Then, when I was 19 I think, I was reading my Bible and God spoke to me through a passage in Deuteronomy. I'd like to read it because, in essence, this is God's call into His Kingdom.

Deuteronomy 30:11-19 (NIV)

The Offer of Life or Death

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹ This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live

This is God's offer to us; there is no alternative; Obedience, sacrifice, and God's blessing; or rebellion, selfishness, and destruction.

Conclusion

There is nothing worth more than the blessings of living in God's Kingdom. Whatever the cost, whatever the sacrifice, even if it means hardship now and struggle and even financial cost and sacrifice – *whatever* it costs to obey God and trust God – know that the rewards of living in His Kingdom will make any sacrifice pale into insignificance.

In Matthew 13 Jesus explains that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price – the most precious things possible. He gives these two illustrations of how those who find these things sell everything they have to get them because no price compares to the worth of the Kingdom of God.

Challenge

Today, even if you don't fully grasp all the details of the benefits of living in the Kingdom of God, know that the Bible teaches it is the most valuable thing ever and we need to do everything and give everything we possibly can in order to be there.

Today, this day, make the decision to move from the observation deck, through the front doors and into the Kingdom of God.

Make the choice to obey God, to *fully* obey God – even in the things that cost you, the things that are hard and hurt – make the commitment to follow God completely and start experiencing life as God intended you to.

Pray this week and ask God to reveal to you one area where you are living your life according to the culture of the Kingdom of this World, and ask Him to give you the strength and courage to start obeying Him fully and to be transformed into the culture of His Kingdom.

Do it today, start today, don't waste another moment on the observation deck – God didn't save us to sit on the sidelines and wonder what it would be like to play the game, He didn't call us to read about and hear about other peoples experiences in His Kingdom, He didn't send Jesus to die so that we could continue living the same way we always have.

[Worship team]

Pray – those who want to claim their inheritance as Children of the King, who are prepared to obey God and to be transformed by the Holy Spirit to embrace the culture of the Kingdom of God. Those who want to choose 'life'...

[End]