

The Kingdom Brand Series

The Phases and The Progression

When we speak about the Kingdom of God, we feel 'at home' with the terminology. Unfortunately the expression might have lost its real content and therefore its cutting edge. No cutting edge means no question-mark and no challenge. No challenge means no growth. No growth means status quo, which equals what everybody hates to love and loves to hate... the comfort-zone.

When Peter spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem he didn't give a short and concentrated overview of the development of the Kingdom over the recent few years, but in the light of the centuries. The latter gave sense to the former. And without the former, the latter is quite irrelevant, as Mr Gamaliel had already noticed when he said:

'Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God." And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.'
Acts 5,34-42

Gamaliel was also Paul's law teacher. Wikipedia tells us that the Jewish tradition mentions that he was "the president of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem; although some dispute this, it is not doubted that he held a senior position in the highest court in Jerusalem. He also held a reputation for being one of the greatest teachers in all the annals of Judaism and his authority on questions of religious

law is suggested by two anecdotes in which "the king and queen" ask for his advice about rituals. The identity of the king and queen in question is not given, but is generally thought to either be King Herod Agrippa I and his wife Cypros, or King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Berenice".

Many religious lunatics had had followers for various causes, and even gave their lives for more or less noble causes.

Peter's listeners, who were probably more than the 3000, were surely affected by his words and their congruence.

However, the ones who didn't just listen but heard what he said were affected even more deeply by the insight he brought about the generational progress of God's agenda, despite the fact that there had been many periods of spiritual decrease and regression in the course of time.

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"
Acts 2,37

They also heard that in this long journey there had been people who radiated and represented the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with clarity, courage and consistency.

They also picked up Peter's deep respect for their heroes as he quoted Joel and underlined the truth spoken by king David:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Ps.119,105

Peter displayed honor to both kings and prophets and at the same time he brought understanding that they were way-makers and forerunners. Within minutes, a light was shining to their feet and to a path calling them forward in the next stages of the progression of the Kingdom.

They were very affected by the person of Peter, by his words, by the nature and the perspectives of insight which he brought; they became so clear about the path forward that a willingness to ask for guidance -and not only answers- as well as the courage to align, were immediately present.

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'" And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'" Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."
Acts 2,38-41

The simple response of the 3000 was overwhelming and highly unexpected after three years of training and turbulences ending with the death of Jesus and its aftermath. Both the prophetic ignorance of the Jews and the fears of the new forerunners disappeared. As the 120 rose, thousands joined them immediately.

The situation recorded in Matthew 4,19 where Jesus calls four men, who leave everything behind, into follower-ship and training, is taken by God to an unprecedented level.

There are no arguments, no negotiations, no hesitation, no rage or death threats... at least not for now.

The numerical part of what happened is not the primary issue, and doesn't need to call for exaggerated focus. However what must surely catch our attention is a massive people-movement not based on the explosion of physical miracles, but rather rooted in heart-circumcision, and on revelational understanding. We are watching a totally different type of explosion. This is neither church-growth nor crusade-explosion, this is the Kingdom of God deeply penetrating the hearts of men and women, of whole families, of work places and moving and spreading irresistibly through the city. This move became the 'womb' from which the church was birthed, the Kingdom-Church. And not the opposite.

As we in our days are presented with numerous good church-brands; as we do our very best to stay updated and sing the most recent worship songs; as we are trying to stay tuned with the mushroom-like growth off ine and passionate Christian events; as we are continuously challenged to get involved in well-organized and effective mission-thrusts, there is at the same time an increasing sense of profound dissatisfaction.

Could the main reason for that feeling be found in two extremely famous and utmost simple statements spoken by the Son of God at the very beginning of his work? Words which have been echoing endlessly in my heart, mind, soul and spirit.

The first one is:

"For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Matt. 6,32-33

His words addressed the legitimacy of human needs. He mentioned food and clothes, but there is a hidden side to it. We should know because He is not into the world of nutrition and fashion. In the next generation's first days of Kingdom-formation, He brought essential 'topics' into the program. He spoke about what 'nurtures' us and what we feed on; He spoke about what we 'clothe' ourselves with, maybe what we cover ourselves with, and hide ourselves behind. Well it could be meaning, blessings, success, satisfaction and fulfilment, professional progress, maturity, results, appreciation and admiration, wealth and health, rhetoric, friendships and mindfulness. The list is endless. Jesus knew and therefore He addressed it.

The Gentiles seek after all these things, He said.

Do Christians, even the most genuine and sincere ones, still carry 'gentile' mindsets and mentalities which form 'gentile' culture? Is it what is happening when worship-moments develop into concerts and church-meetings turn into TV-Shows? Jesus said to His coming heirs to not seek what the gentiles sought. Don't seek what is intended to be given. Seek the Kingdom and its righteousness and everything else will be given to you.

These issues were so essential to Him that at the end of this first training-session, He bluntly told them:

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock."

Matt. 7,24

He knew beyond any doubt that He was laying the foundations in people whose lives would affect communities and societies, systems and infrastructures, as well as governments and global institutions.

Their lives were supposed to do well under extreme circumstances of pressure and even evil. They were expected to become a city on the hill. Their words would challenge the untouchable hierarchies and their use of might over right. Their values would stand for truth, reason and morality and they would set hearts ablaze for justice and compassion.

Then He told them about the centrality and predominance of the Kingdom. He was clear when He instructed them to not seek and ultimately take what is meant to be given. Food and clothes are given. The Kingdom however is sought for. It must be the primary focus of our search. We love God, honor and worship Him... and He said: Seek My Kingdom. The Kingdom is not the focus of our worship but of our search. It is not a label we can put on both everything we understand and everything we don't understand in God. As we walk with Him, He will talk about Himself, about us, about hope, about His plans for mankind, its societies and institutions. Basically about bringing Heaven to Earth. It is so big that He will not throw it on us or after us. This journey is far from being that cheap.

Peter wrote:

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

2 Pet. 1,2-11

Obviously Peter learnt it well. He knew the difference between what is given and what we must seek and pursue with diligence, not afraid of making efforts to get there. The result:

An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus continued to speak and mentioned the need for the presence of a hunger in our hearts, but a hunger for more than personal benefits. Something far beyond our thoughts, appetites, and our very best agendas and imagination.

A personal note: There is within me an irresistible urge to know Him and grow in Him as well as to seek and find answers regarding His Kingdom. And I am desperately looking for kindred spirits in all generations. God wants His will to happen on Earth. Maybe it is the reason why God allowed me to do some years of intensive scientific training at the University of Paris in my younger years, to develop in me the insatiable mind of a researcher. And of a finder.

The second statement is:

"Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'"

Matt. 16,16-19

The passage speaks clearly and loudly...

- About the centrality of Christ, the Son of God.

We heard previously His statement about those who heard what He called "these sayings of Mine" and did accordingly to them. Nine chapters later -and we don't know how many days and months later- Peter reached the place of conviction. He is well on the way to become the wise man who is building his house on the rock. Therefore the vindicating statement of Jesus:

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church."

- About the possible access for Man to the Father's otherwise classified thoughts and plans.

Peter is the tangible and living proof... and no, Peter is still not totally 'there' as we see in the following verses. Nevertheless Jesus was extremely excited at that moment, because now there was tangible evidence that ordinary people can relate with His Father, their Father, and look into the extraordinary things which are set up for mankind. The words of Jesus in Matthew 6:

"Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. "Matt. 6,9-11

... are truly becoming reality: He did begin to give them daily 'bread', revelational insight and understanding; becoming a rock of convictions.

- About the Church as the sole assignment of the Son... and not of Man.

The Church is not what He came for. He came to save a lost mankind, His highest and ultimate Creation.

The Fall had had devastating consequences: sickness, pain, evil in all its forms, self-destruction and endless killings. But more than that, Man had been seriously and eternally damaged. To change that, God needed a 'new mankind' and His Son came to 'birth' it through restoring the fundamental relationship to the Father. After the relationship is restored, reformation must take place because Man has a deep flaw. That's where the Church, the dwelling place for God in the Spirit comes into the picture.

- About the consequences and effects of the Church when built and empowered by Christ.

There are many and these are the objects of our attention in this series of booklets.

In this 5th booklet in the series called THE KINGDOM BRAND, we will look into certain fundamental issues of the Kingdom, more specifically its patterns which are the reasons for its progression.

So welcome aboard!

1. The God of the Kingdom

The agenda of the Father, the centrality of His Son and the work of the Spirit.

The agenda of the Father, the centrality of His Son and the work of the Spirit.

And this is the way God wanted it. Jesus said nothing about church until the famous words recorded by Matthew:

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it'"

Matt. 16,17-18

Not a single word about the Church until this moment, accurately and intentionally set up by Jesus. Everything until then gravitated towards the Kingdom. Jesus wanted to make sure that the foundation was right, not the temple, not the tabernacle and not the synagogue. Therefore His only focus was the Kingdom and from there everything else would come naturally and supernaturally. Everything would be defined, settled and precisely interconnected.

As we read and re-read the first three chapters of the records made by Matthew, it is inevitable to see God at work. It becomes so clear and overwhelming that He is in charge. It seems that everything has been accumulated, stored up, intensified and brought to a place of phenomenal birthing power, which no man, no system, no forces in hell can question, challenge and even less hinder.

Therefore we are reminded of the genealogy of Jesus:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers."

Matt. 1,1-2

A huge 'ark' has been built, much bigger than the one God asked Noah to build. Generation after generation, generations have been meticulously lined up by God, first fourteen from Abraham to David, then fourteen from David to the captivity in Babylon, and finally fourteen more to Christ.

Interestingly enough Matthew wrote:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham..

Matt. 1,1

Where is that 'book'? Maybe it's not a physical book, but a spiritual one belonging in the hands of the Father documenting the earthly progression of the Kingdom of Heaven, of which Matthew just gave us a short excerpt letting us know that there is more to it, much much more. Matthew gave us just the top-line. But God has 'volumes' about the records of His moves through the genealogies of Man, and the history of the nations to bring His kind purposes to pass.

God's angels are working over-time, so to say. There is intensive activity in the Heavenlies and it's spreading to the earthly realm like rings in the water. An angel visited Mary and told her about what was going to happen. Then...

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

Matt. 1,18

She was found with child... God is moving with strength, with tenderness and deep respect for His partners.

The agenda of the Father is intensive and explicit.

The centrality of Christ is undeniable and meticulously unfolded.

The work of the Spirit is present and obvious all over the region.

Intensive and explicit

God leaves no space for doubt. Everything is crystal clear... for Mary, for Joseph, for Herod and his advisers on the Jewish issues, for the men from the East. The plan is working like a clock, decisive and loud.

"But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David"..."

Matt. 1,20

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"..."Matt. 2,1-2

"And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet".."

Matt. 2,4-5

"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."

Matt. 2,12

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word".."

Matt. 2,13

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel ..." "

Matt. 2,19-20

"But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside..." Matt. 2,22

Very intense.
Very explicit.

In another region something similarly intense and explicit took place in the lives of an elderly couple, Zechariah the priest and his wife Elizabeth. Both processes were well-synchronized. No wonder, the Creator of Heaven and Earth is at work and excited.

Undeniable and meticulously unfolded

The reality of this narrative is that the 'world' was reduced to be spectators of the coming of Christ. Maybe in the same way God had to be a spectator of the fluctuations of human minds and hearts through the past centuries. He wanted to walk with them, but they walked with others. Or they just walked with themselves. He wanted to speak to them and with them, but they didn't want to listen and hear. He wanted to be faithful to them, but they cheated on him.

But now the table had turned. He is walking, moving, speaking, creating... and the world watches.

"She was found with child of the Holy Spirit ..."
Matt. 1,18

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."
Matt. 2,2

"Behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."
Matt. 2,9-11

Absolutely undeniable, and Man is gently but firmly 'parked' outside the operation theatre. Nothing must go wrong, and nothing will go wrong.

And meticulously unfolded.

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2,1-7

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a

multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Luke 2,8-18

Present and obvious

Since the day of Creation we know beyond any doubt - even after the words of famous scientists and the discoveries of the Enlightenment era - that God operates by the Word and the Spirit:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day." Gen. 1,1-5

Even a superficial reading of the Old Testament will make it clear, that the Spirit of God is a powerful Person. It's not wind, or oil, or water or even fire... it's a forceful Person executing the Father's plans.

All the major events designed, initiated and completed by God were worked out by of His Spirit. The re-building of the temple in Jerusalem and its restart after 15 years of being paralyzed by fear:

"Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 4,23-24 and 5,1-2

Let's hear the words of Zechariah:

"Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts. Zech.4,1-6

More from Zechariah:

"Again the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: 7 am zealous for Zion with great zeal; With great fervor I am zealous for her.' 'Thus says the Lord: 7 will return to Zion, And dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, The Mountain of the Lord of hosts, The Holy Mountain.' 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit In the streets of Jerusalem, Each one with his staff in his hand Because of great age. The streets of the city Shall be full of boys and girls Playing in its streets.' 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, Will it also be marvelous in My eyes?' Says the Lord of hosts. 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east And from the land of the west; I will bring them back, And they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people And I will be their God, In truth and righteousness.' 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Let your hands be strong, You who have been hearing in these days These words by the mouth of the prophets, Who spoke in the day the foundation was laid For the house of the Lord of hosts, That the temple might be built.'"

Zech.8,1-9

The breathtaking return of thousands of people back to the land of the fathers after 70 years in captivity in Babylon:

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem. Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered. King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah."Ezra 1,1-8

Definitely present. His leading, inspiring, protecting and orchestrating activities are obvious and all over these pages of the Bible.

As Jesus grew up these patterns didn't alter or diminish. On the contrary all of them are fully valid, operational and increase to being even governmental. Thirty years that would change history forever. The world would never be the same again, so to say. Truly there is a B.C. and A.D. The purpose of the B.C. and A.D. dating system was to make the birth of Jesus the dividing point of world history.

And the push to replace this system with B.C.E (meaning 'Before Common Era') and C.E. (meaning 'Common Era') because of its biblical connotation is a purely semantic issue, because what distinguishes B.C.E from C.E. is still the coming of Jesus.

Listen to Him at the very beginning of his public life after He left the wilderness where He spent forty days and forty nights of deep testing, went to Galilee and Capernaum by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali:

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matt. 4,17

Then He called the first four disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John and He introduced them to the Kingdom. Not church, not programs, not leadership training classes and mentoring courses. They left their home-situation and walked with Him. Then what happened, what was said and told to them, what were they exposed to?

*"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people."
Matt. 4,23*

The results were overwhelming and immediate.

*'Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him-from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan."
Matt. 4,24-25*

Did these people come to church, join a church? No they followed Him. He was the Church, He was the mobile Temple. He was the apostolic training centre.

After His resurrection He showed Himself to them and gave them more insight about the Kingdom. The Church was still not born yet. Not even mentioned.

We have done the diametral opposite. We decide to 'plant a church', formulate some statutes, find biblical headlines and call them the vision of our church. Is it our church? Yes, it is. But not necessarily His. The embarrassing question is: Who told you to do it?

After the church is planted, we make a program. How? We look at other churches. Who told them... who knows? We initiate a variety of programs to help people with their needs... but do we know God's need?

And we have the whole package for our Instagram-church, and we display it on our website, and guest-speakers are coming and provide some credibility, speakers whom we intentionally flash on Facebook. The sum of all that is given the label "It's all about the Kingdom". It gives a feeling of safety. Even God must be happy and proud.

It is undoubtedly time for a dramatic U-Turn. Also called 'metanoia' in Greek, meaning repentance. That's truly confusing because we are 'saved', and we raise our tattooed arms in worship, and attend 'amazing' discipleship-sessions with 'amazing' people. And the 'amazing' barista made some 'amazing' coffee.

After this extremely strong beginning at Pentecost in Jerusalem, it went on for years, until the period when a severe and brutal persecution rose against the Kingdom-believers. Many left Jerusalem and Luke wrote about what happened with those who moved to Antioch:

"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts 11,26

They were Kingdom-believers and the Church was a Kingdom-House. But now non-believers gave them a name as they were like Christ, and their lives were like Christ's life... and they called them Christians. Today we are more conscious about our identity being Christians than being Kingdom-believers. I believe that this shift has had an effect on our lives and churches, much deeper than we might think. I do believe that this issue has deviated the church from her original identity. A vacuum was created and therefore the Church has picked up alien identities like community-associations, companies and franchises, all-purpose venues or social clubs. The loss of identity has had devastating consequences. Christians love God, praise Him, serve Him and speak about Him. They are glad and thankful.

They heal the sick, encourage the weary, comfort the grieving and win the lost. They clothe the naked, visit the prisoner and give to the poor. 'They empty Hell and populate Heaven'. All that is truly fantastic.

The Kingdom of God goes far beyond that, but it can only do so when it is sought first. We do all these things and hope the Kingdom will advance, spread and rule. But it does not.

Therefore Jesus didn't mention any of these activities to them; He just said:

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matt. 6,33

'All these things' means all that had to be done. And it includes all the Christian 'things' we want to do.

In the first years of the existence of the Church being a Kingdom-believer and being a Christian were totally identical. The first was God's definition, the second was the world's definition, meaning Christ-like. But today it is very different. You can be a Christian without being Christ-like because there is no forming and shaping taking place in our lives; and the Church doesn't provide such. Mainly because the Church has become a Christian church and has lost its Kingdom-identity and assignment. The Church provides knowledge about God and His Kingdom, it provides spiritual activities to give people a new culture, a Christian culture. And therefore the foundation of the Church has changed:

- Christ is not the cornerstone... He is a wonderful, saving and inspiring 'stone'... and of course a rescuing one in times of human disaster.
- The apostolic and prophetic presence and role are unknown or ignored.
- Therefore the three main actors are the pastor (shepherd) to look after people, the teacher to inform people and the evangelist to bring new people so they can be looked after and taught.

It is about time we return to the God of the Kingdom.

As He reveals Himself, His Kingdom will be disclosed, we will be instructed and shaped... and the Church will be built with such living stones and rise to full identity, capacity and role. These living stones - read: people -will be shaped and trained for influence in their social and professional spheres. The consequence will be a phenomenal harvest of people and families, and the Kingdom will penetrate societal environments and spread. Ultimately cities, regions and nations will be affected.

God has always been pursuing the same plan, through all centuries, since the days of Noah, Abraham and his descendants.

Listen to His word in the period of time when He had taken Israel out of Egypt and had them for Himself. They walked with Him. Actually they didn't walk with Him, but He walked with them and had to endure them. He spoke openly to them about their identity, His purpose for them, their common future and their role in the nations of the world.

It could be in Exodus 19, which is undoubtedly one of the highest peaks of Israel's history.

But let's go to another place where God said:

"Therefore you shall love the Lord your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. Know today that I do not speak with your children, who have not known and who have not seen the chastening of the Lord your God, His greatness and His mighty hand and His outstretched arm- His signs and His acts which He did in the midst of Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to all his land; what He did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and their chariots: how He made the waters of the Red Sea overflow them as they pursued you, and how the Lord has destroyed them to this day; what He did for you in the wilderness until you came to this place; and what He did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, their households, their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel- but your eyes have seen every great act of the Lord which He did. "Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants/a land flowing with milk and honey.' For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.' And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.' Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you. "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates..."

And then came the final statement:

".. that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth."

Deut. 11,21

Take note of the expression "The days of Heaven above the earth" and register the passionate desires in the Father's heart. He loved them, carried them, taught them, healed them, fed them,

protected them... all these good things in the Wilderness Church for just one main goal: The days of heaven above the earth.

So clear, so clean, so consistent.

How could we miss it?

The Father has prepared everything.

The Son has provided the road into it... through His redemptive work at the Cross.

The Spirit is always ready to communicate, guide, inspire, empower, shape and transform lives into the likeness of the Son.

The next points are:

2. The journey of the Kingdom

To be born in the Kingdom
To see the Kingdom
To enter the Kingdom
To be cleansed by the Kingdom
To represent the Kingdom

3. The people of the Kingdom

4. The target of the Kingdom

5. The Word of the Kingdom

6. The enemies of the Kingdom

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