

KINGDOM CULTURE

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“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

A kingdom is the domain of the king or king’s domain. It is an area within which a king can exercise legitimate dominion. The Online Dictionary defines kingdom as “the domain over which the spiritual sovereignty of God or Christ extends, whether in heaven or on earth.” The kingdom of God is the rule of the sovereign God over all creation. God, as the creator of all, exercises unquestionable sovereignty over all His creation. The Psalmist affirmed, *“The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalms 103:19)*. Daniel reveals that God is not merely the King over all creation but One who rules in perpetuity—*“...His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:3)*. The Psalmist affirmed the unending nature of God’s reign and points at righteousness as the hallmark of that kingdom. *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom” (Psalms 45:6)*.

The Bible introduces Jesus as a King. When the wise men from the east came to pay Him homage at birth, they inquired, *“saying, ‘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” (Matthew 2:2)*. Jesus was born a king and not a priest being a descendant of the royal family David from the lineage of Judah and not a descendant of the priestly family of Levi.

Jacob had earlier prophesied about Jesus saying, *“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. (Genesis 49:10).* The sceptre is the symbol of royal authority and Shiloh refers to Jesus to whom the sceptre belongs (Hebrew 1:8-9).

Jesus began His ministry on earth by announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God and calling people to embrace the culture of the emerging kingdom, *“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).* He spent His nearly three and half years of ministry promoting His kingdom philosophy and lifestyle which He called the Gospel of the Kingdom. He was crucified by claiming to be a king. He spent His last forty days on earth expounding the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 1:3). He called on all His followers to prioritize the kingdom and embrace its culture saying – *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).* Before Pilate, Jesus acknowledged that He was destined to kingship – *“Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “you say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37).*

SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE KINGDOM

- The kingdom of God has been prepared from the beginning of the world – *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come,*

you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

- The kingdom of God is designed to be the abode of the righteous – *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).*
- The kingdom of God is the sphere of salvation entered into by new birth – *“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again” (John 3:5-7).*
- The kingdom of God is the inheritance of the righteous – *“And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30).*
- The kingdom of God is for the enjoyment of the righteous – *“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).*
- The kingdom of God prioritises spiritual values over the mundane – *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).*

UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM CULTURE

Let us begin with attempting to understand the meaning of culture.

- According to Samuel P. Huntington, “Culture is the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among a people in a society.”
- To Richard A. Shweder, “Culture is a community–sensitive idea of what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient.”
- Finally, according to Isaiah Berlin, “Culture refers to goals, values, and pictures, of the world that are made manifest in the speech, laws, routines practices of some self-monitoring group.”

Culture is a way of life of a people, consisting of their cherished values, beliefs, norms, ideas, customs, language, and social behaviour. Every kingdom is defined by its culture – its unique way of life. Just like every other kingdom, the kingdom of heaven also has its own culture – a way of life, a set of values and expected social behaviour. A kingdom’s culture is determined by the values the king holds and promotes. It is easily noticeable around the world that whatever ideals the leading elites espouse form the basis of how the people think collectively and influence what they do and how they behave.

Hence, Jesus as the King called people to have a change of heart and embrace the new way of life which He expounded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. According to Mark’s Gospel our Lord’s first sermon was a proclamation of the Kingdom and an open invitation for people to subscribe to its citizenship: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15, NKJV). In effect Jesus

announced the arrival of the kingdom of God and enunciated the conditions for its citizenship – “*repent and believe the gospel.*”

Vine gave the Greek word for “repent” as *metanoia*, which implies a “fundamental shift or change of mind or more literally, transcendence of mind.” Therefore, by “repent,” Jesus implies what in today’s parlance would mean paradigm shift. Repentance is a fundamental change in the way one views the world, the way one perceives, understands, and interprets reality. It is a radical restructuring of mindset due to transformed worldview. It is a call to a new way of thinking, of being and of living. People who would participate with Christ in His kingdom must radically change their customary way of thinking and adopt the new way He is enunciating.

The level of change is such that it should bring about a transformation of the hearts of believers and generate a multiplier effect in the society. It is not the superficial change of mode of dressing or types of cosmetics, but rather, a heart change brought about by the operations of the Holy Spirit. Such was the change Jesus envisaged. Thus, in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jesus described the effect of repentance in people. It is such a radical inward change in people’s basic assumptions that enables them to post so radical a lifestyle as to love their enemies and pray for those who despitefully use them.

In effect, our Lord’s call to repentance is a call to reject the aspects of the cultures of this world that are inimical to the culture of the kingdom of God and a wholesome adoption of the culture of the kingdom of heaven. In the cultures of this world, it may be alright for the proud and arrogant

to be considered blessed, but in the kingdom of God, it is the poor in spirit that is blessed. In the culture of the world, the strong and the powerful acquire and monopolize wealth and power, but in the kingdom of God, the meek inherits the earth. In the world's culture, the strong person is one who returns slap for slap and blow for blow. In the kingdom of God, the strong person is the one who turns the other cheek. These thoughts are revolutionary to say the least, but such is the difference between the cultures of this world and that of the kingdom of God.

When Christ calls for repentance, He is calling for the emergence of a new humanity who will be so unlike the world because it is so much like Him. The depth of transformation can only be possible through the obedience of individuals and communities to the gospel of Jesus Christ – the gospel of the kingdom. In this way, people yield to the Lordship of Christ, whose power changes the lives of people by releasing them from guilt, the power and consequences of sin, thus enabling them to respond with love towards God and toward others, having been made “new creatures in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The people, who wholehearted respond to the Lord's invitation to the radical way of the kingdom, are empowered to become the kingdom ambassadors, and *ipso facto*, agents of reconciliation, as they bear witness to the reality of the kingdom through Christ-centred lifestyle of love and Spirit-inspired testimonies. When Jesus enjoins His followers to seek first the kingdom of God and all its righteousness, He is in effect inviting them to subscribe to His kingdom citizenship and embrace its culture which is righteousness.

RIGHTEOUSNESS – THE CULTURE OF GOD’S KINGDOM AND THE HALLMARK OF ITS CITIZESHIP

The kingdom culture is all about promoting the interest of the king “so that the king would suffer no loss” (Daniel 6:2). Our Lord referred to the kingdom culture when He taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The will of God is the righteousness of the kingdom, which the Lord enjoins believers to seek alongside seeking the kingdom. The righteousness of the kingdom is the essential meaning of the kingdom culture.

Righteousness is a core value of the kingdom of God as can be seen in the following:

- Righteousness is the foundation of the throne – “...Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (Psalms 97:2).
- Righteousness is the authority of the kingdom of God – “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8)
- Righteousness provokes the anointing to rule – “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions” (Hebrews 1:9)
- Righteousness is the character of the kingdom – “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

Righteousness can be counterfeited in two ways, namely: By claiming citizenship of the kingdom without embracing its laws and culture. The testimony of the kingdom culture is the proof of kingdom citizenship. You can be in the kingdom and behave contrary to its norms. If you doubt this consult Lucifer. He was thrown out of the kingdom when he attempted to disrupt its culture.

The second way you can counterfeit righteousness is by pretending to embrace the kingdom culture without authentic citizenship. The only way one can acquire citizenship of the kingdom is through new birth. Accordingly, our Lord admonished Nicodemus – *“...Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’ (John 3:3-7).* It is important that each of us make sure we are genuinely born again – saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

DIMENSIONS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

There two equally important dimension of righteousness, namely, righteousness as right-standing with God and righteousness as right-living before God.

Righteousness as right standing with God is a gift God freely bestows on every believer in Christ. Paul carefully explained how this was accomplished. *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. One cannot earn this righteousness by any form of human effort. It is a gift to be received by faith. Paul speaks of it as a gift – *“For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17)*.

Righteousness as right living before God is the fruit of the believers deliberate commitment to living according to the word of God and in consistent obedience to the Holy Spirit. Whoever has received the gift of righteousness must endeavour to live righteously before God and men. Imputed righteousness must lead to demonstrated righteousness in the behaviours and actions of the people. Righteousness implies right-consciousness. A righteous person must ever be conscious of doing what is right at all times. Paul masterly expressed it as follows – *“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” (THE RIGHEOUS) and “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity (RIGHTEOUS LIVING)” (2 Timothy 2:19)*. Those whom God has made righteous in Christ, must live righteously here on earth. This must have informed our Lord’s stunning declaration: *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20)*. The hallmark of the kingdom culture subsists in the righteous living righteously on earth.

Righteousness consists of attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with the nature of God and compliant with His kingdom culture.

KINGDOM CITIZENSHIP AND KINGDOM CULTURE

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

The gift of righteousness makes one a kingdom citizen. The practice of righteousness establishes one in the kingdom culture. Believers are citizens of the kingdom of heaven who are sent to colonize the earth. Their mandate on earth is to ensure that the will of God is done here on earth as it is being done in heaven. They are to ensure that the culture of heaven becomes the prevailing culture on earth.

The role of the kingdom citizen is comparable to the experience of the many nations that were colonised during the era of colonization. The role of colonial masters was mainly to implant the culture of their native country in their colonies by changing their mindset and their historical narratives. Take the case of Nigeria, which was colonized by Britain, the colonial masters imposed their culture on us, demoted our God-given languages to mere vernaculars and categorised them as substandard means of communication. Today English is our official language. Our civil service and legal system were patterned after the British. They replaced our pristine educational system with theirs as well as our security and defence systems and so on. The goal of all of these was to supplant our cultures with theirs. God expects the citizens of heaven to replace the culture of the world with the culture of His kingdom not by

the fiat of imperialism but by modelling its superiority. Hence, He enjoins us – *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2)*. Renewed mind will lead to renewed culture. The culture of a kingdom is determined by the wishes, preferences, and desires of the king. Whatever the king does not allow does not become part of the culture. Therefore, the scripture warns – *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16)*.

Having thoroughly considered the culture of the world and its contrariety to His cherished ideals, our Lord concluded, – *“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you ...” (Matthew 20:26)*. He does not want us to live and act according to the culture of the world but to live in contrariety to it. Our Lord cited several key points in the culture of the world including its religious culture and ordered that such should not be countenanced in His kingdom. Some of these are recorded in Matthew 5:21-48, where they are prefaced with *“You have heard that it was said to those of old (world’s culture) But I say to you... (the proposed kingdom culture).”*

- Matthew 5:21-26 – Kingdom culture of godly relationships as against the world culture of hate.
- Matthew 5:27-230– kingdom culture of chastity as opposed to immorality

- Matthew 5: 31-32 – kingdom culture of marriage as a permanent relationship of love as opposed to the world’s contractual approach.
- Matthew 5: 33-37 – Kingdom culture of integrity instead of the world’s culture of falsehood and double talk.
- Matthew 5:38-42 – Kingdom culture of forbearance rather than the world’s culture of revenge.
- Matthew 5: 43-48 – Kingdom culture of unconditional love, forgiveness, and accommodation as against the world’s culture of transactional love.

We can add to these the kingdom culture of servant leadership instead of the world’s self-centred leadership (Matthew 20:20-28), the kingdom culture of commerce and investment instead of the world’s self-deluding indolence (Luke 19:11-27) etc. The kingdom culture is antithetical to the outward religiosity of the Pharisees and the retrogressive piety of the Sadducees (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18). The main thrust of the kingdom culture is stated by Paul as follows – *“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21)*. This statement stands on the foundation of our Lord’s declaration – *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12)*.

CONCLUSION

The world eagerly awaits the revelation of the kingdom of God as more and more believers understand and embrace the kingdom culture. The kingdom of God is an accomplished reality to the believer by the declaration of our Lord when He said, *“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For*

indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21). It is the unveiling of this kingdom within that creates the kingdom culture and thus fulfil *“the earnest expectation of the creation”* namely, *“the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19).* Our Lord *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12*

Thanks for listening.