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Kingdom Reflection, Prompt #3

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An understanding of the Kingdom of God is essential to the faith of a Christian, yet I think that many Christians struggle to grasp what exactly the Kingdom of God is. I know that I definitely did and it was amazing to have my eyes opened to a deeper and truer meaning of the Kingdom. My narrow and largely incorrect understanding of the Kingdom of God was flipped upside down and made clear by the time that I spent in New Testament class. Before New Testament, I thought that the Kingdom of God was Heaven and that I would not encounter it or be a part of it until I died. Now, I understand that the Kingdom of God is actually present in our world here and now, although is it not present in all of its fullness just yet. We are still awaiting the second coming of Christ for the Kingdom of God to be in its fullest form.

Prior to this taking New Testament class, I thought that the Kingdom of God was Heaven. I thought that it was the streets of gold where there would be no more death or mourning, pain or sorrow. I thought that it was a perfect place where God and His children would live together and everything would be as it should. I actually never really gave much thought to the true meaning of Kingdom of God at all; I had heard the phrase many times in church and at youth group, but I never had it actually defined, or explained in depth, to me. It was just one of those “churchy” phrases that everyone who grew up in the church grew up hearing and used on occasion, though probably in the wrong context. I thought that the Kingdom of God was a place that one entered into after death. I thought that my life on earth and the Kingdom of God were two mutually exclusive things; they could not occur at the same time. I believed that the Kingdom of God could not be present in a world where there is so much suffering and evil. Now don’t get me wrong, I did, and I still do, believe that God is present in the world and that He is moving in amazing ways. But I did not think that just because God is present in the world that His Kingdom is present also. I thought that these two things were mutually exclusive as well. I did not think that the Holy Spirit had anything to do with the Kingdom of God; I merely thought that the Holy Spirit was the form that God took on when He came to live within a person once he or she became a Christian. My understanding of the Kingdom of God was very narrow, and, for the most part, very incorrect; it took me being in New Testament class to even begin to understand what the Kingdom of God is all about.

Now that I have taken BIB102, my understanding of the Kingdom of God has expanded and I now can produce a better definition of what the Kingdom of God is. Although I had read the gospels many times before, I had never analyzed them as deeply as we did in class; this analysis brought me a new understanding of what the Kingdom of God is. Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, there is a big focus on the Kingdom of God and its expected coming. Many of the parables that Jesus teaches in these Gospels point toward the coming of the Kingdom. Before Jesus was born, there was much hope for a Messiah to come, reunite, and liberate the children of Israel. The Jews believed that the Kingdom of God would be a literal one in which their Messiah would give them vindication against their enemies. During Jesus’s life, He does many symbolic things that show Him fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. For example, Jesus’s calling of the 12 disciples is symbolic of Him re-gathering the 12 tribes of Israel. Through many signs like these, Jesus reveals that he is the long-awaited Messiah and that, with Him, He has brought the Kingdom of God, though not in its entirety. This is where my understanding of the Kingdom of God has changed; I now understand that the Kingdom of God is “already, not yet”. This is the eschatology that stands behind everything in the New Testament. This eschatology is one in which the Kingdom of God is present on the earth, but not yet in its fullness. The Kingdom of God will not come in its fullness until the day that Jesus returns. Thus, right now, the world is in a state of overlap in which there in sin, death, oppression, sickness, and poverty; yet, at the same time, there is the presence of God, the blessing of God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. I now see the Kingdom of God as the New Age, or the Age to Come, where Jesus comes back and there is resurrection for all of the believers and there is perfection. However, I also recognize that the Kingdom of God is present in the world we live in today. The Old Age continues because the world is plagued by sin and death, but the Age to Come is upon us as well because Jesus came and dwelt among us as a man and left us with His Holy Spirit. Jesus is like the “down payment” on the Kingdom of God; He is the assurance that the Kingdom is coming in the same way that a down payment is the assurance that the rest of the money for the house being bought will be coming. Jesus is also referred to as the first fruits of the Kingdom; when you plant a garden and begin to see the first few plants bloom, you know that it is a sign that the rest of the plants will bloom soon. In the same way, Jesus’s coming is a sign that he will come again and bring the Kingdom of God in its fullness. Pieces of my former perception of the Kingdom of God are correct; in the Kingdom, there will be perfection and God will dwell amongst His people in harmony. These are the pieces of the Kingdom that we are so anxiously awaiting. These are the pieces of the Kingdom that will turn the phrase “already, not yet” into “now”. After much reflection upon and analysis of the New Testament, I have this new understanding of what the Kingdom of God is. It is a beautiful picture that I cannot wait to see become a reality. I am so glad that I had my definition changed because I now understand a part of my faith much more clearly. I look forward to the day in which we as believers can dwell in the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

Now that I have a better understanding of the Kingdom of God, I am able to recognize it in my day to day life. From the small acts of kindness that I see every day to the hugeness of my LoveWorks trip to Armenia this past summer, I can see the Kingdom of God at work. It is so amazing to me that we live in such a world where, as Tim Whetstone often says, “joy and sorrow kiss every day”, a place where we can witness the work of the Kingdom even in the most broken situations. I am so grateful that I now have a better grasp of what the Kingdom of God is because now I can better recognize beauty in even the most awful situations and it gives me great hope.