



Week six –
The Kingdom of Heaven

You Are Here



You Are Here tells the story of the Bible in its own words. It comes in eight parts, and is meant to be read aloud and shared with friends.

Week six - The Kingdom of Heaven

Introduction

The people of God may have failed as a nation, but as our series enters the New Testament we realise that God is creating a new paradigm. In Jesus, the long-promised Messiah, we have a new way to encounter God.

As before, there is an optional imagination exercise before the main reading.

Imagination exercise (optional)

If you're using the imagination exercise, read on below without any further introduction. If you feel you're ready to head straight into the story, just skip straight to the next section.

Close your eyes and relax. Think about what you have done today ... Imagine your day written down, the good things and the bad things together, written in the pages of a book ... If there's anything worrying you, or something you need to remember, note those things down in the book too. Take a moment to add them.

Now close the book and put it to one side. Allow your mind to go somewhere different.

You are sitting on the ground. You can feel the grass at your fingertips ... a gentle slope beneath you. The sky is blue overhead, interrupted only by the birds wheeling over the hillside.

You are not alone. Your family is with you. Next to them are your neighbours, your friends, half the town seems to be here. You have all walked here today, with one purpose in mind: you want to see for yourselves.

You have all heard the rumours. A man, a remarkable man – everyone is talking about him. He can heal the sick, and cure the blind. Two towns over, a local beggar who had never walked in his life danced right there in front of everyone. And he teaches – with warmth, and wit, and wisdom. You had to see for yourselves.

From where you are sitting, look up. Look across the seated crowd, across the heads of the men and women who have walked here with you, past the little children running in and out amongst them.

What does he look like, the man you came here to see?

He is speaking to the crowds. Is he animated? Quiet? Do the crowd laugh, or nod, or scratch their heads?

What is he saying?

As he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

Matthew 5:1-12

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“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

Matthew 5:13-16

“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment!

“If you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

Matthew 5:21-22,23-24

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“To you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

“Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”

“I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and



then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins."

Luke 6:27-31,35-38,47-49

After Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, for he taught as one who had real authority – quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

Matthew 7:28-29

Growing fame

Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of Nain, and a large crowd followed him. A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The young man who had died was a widow's only son, and a large crowd from the village was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Don't cry!" he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. "Young man," he said, "I tell you, get up." Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk! And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

Great fear swept the crowd, and they praised God, saying, "A mighty prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited his people today." And the news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding countryside.

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By this time John the Baptist had been arrested for criticising Herod, the local ruler.

The disciples of John the Baptist told John about everything Jesus was doing. So John called for two of his disciples, and he sent them to the Lord to ask him, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

Then Jesus told John's disciples, "Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor."

Luke 7:11-19,22

Teaching with power, miracles and healings, the word about Jesus is spreading. Rumours abound. People travel for miles.

And we are here, part of an unstoppable movement.

Jesus and the Pharisees

One day while Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of religious law were sitting nearby. (It seemed that these men showed up from every village in all Galilee and Judea, as well as from Jerusalem.) And the Lord's healing power was strongly with Jesus.

Some men came carrying a paralysed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to push through the crowd to Jesus, but they couldn't reach him. So they went up to the roof, took off some tiles, and lowered the sick man down into the crowd, still on his mat, right in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

"Who does this man think he is?" the Pharisees and teachers of religious law said to each other. "This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you think this is blasphemy? Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'? I will prove that I, the Son of Man, have the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, take your mat, and go on home, because you are healed!"

And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped to his feet, picked up his mat, and went home praising God.

Luke 5:17-25

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One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to come to his home for a meal, so Jesus accepted the invitation and sat down to eat. A certain immoral woman heard he was there and brought a beautiful jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who was the host saw what was happening and who the woman was, he said to himself, "This proves that Jesus is no prophet. If God had really sent him, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"



Then Jesus spoke up and answered his thoughts.

"A man loaned money to two people – five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, cancelled their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't give me a kiss of greeting, but she has kissed my feet again and again from the time I first came in. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. I tell you, her sins - and they are many - have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

The men at the table said among themselves, "Who does this man think he is, going around forgiving sins?"

And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Luke 7:36-50

Spreading the message

Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where the birds can come and find shelter."

He used many such stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they were able to understand.

Mark 4:30-33



Not long afterwards Jesus began a tour of the nearby cities and villages to announce the Good News concerning the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women he had healed and from whom he had cast out evil spirits. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

Luke 8:1-3

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. On the way across, Jesus lay down for a nap, and while he was sleeping the wind began to rise. A fierce storm developed that threatened to swamp them, and they were in real danger. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

So Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waves. The storm stopped and all was calm! Then he asked them, "Where is your faith?"

And they were filled with awe and amazement. They said to one another, "Who is this man, that even the winds and waves obey him?"

Luke 8:22-25



Healing encounters

One day as Jesus was speaking, the leader of a synagogue came and knelt before him. "My daughter has just died," he said, "but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her."

So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him. Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe, for she thought, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed."

Jesus turned around, and when he saw her he said, "Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed at that moment.

When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. "Get out!" he told them. "The girl isn't dead; she's only asleep." But the crowd laughed at him. After the crowd was put outside, however, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up! The report of this miracle swept through the entire countryside.

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After Jesus left the girl's home, two blind men followed along behind him, shouting, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

They went right into the house where he was staying, and Jesus asked them, "Do you believe I can make you see?"

"Yes, Lord," they told him, "we do."

Then he touched their eyes and said, "Because of your faith, it will happen." Then their eyes were opened, and they could see! Jesus sternly warned them, "Don't tell anyone about this." But instead, they went out and spread his fame all over the region.

Matthew 9:18-31

Passing the baton

Jesus travelled through all the cities and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease



and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers for his fields."

Matthew 9:35-38

One day Jesus called together his twelve apostles and gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the coming of the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 9:1-2

He told them: "Anyone who welcomes you is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me. If you welcome a prophet as one who speaks for God, you will receive the same reward a prophet gets ... And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will be rewarded."

Matthew 10:40-42

So they began their circuit of the villages, preaching the Good News and healing the sick.

Luke 9:6

When the apostles returned, they told Jesus everything they had done. Then he slipped quietly away with them toward the town of Bethsaida. But the crowds found out where he was going, and they followed him. And he welcomed them, teaching them about the Kingdom of God and curing those who were ill. Late in the afternoon the twelve disciples came to him and said, "Send the crowds away to the nearby villages and farms, so they can find food and lodging for the night. There is nothing to eat here in this deserted place." But Jesus said, "You feed them."

"Impossible!" they protested. "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish. Or are you expecting us to go and buy enough food for this whole crowd?" For there were about five thousand men there.

"Just tell them to sit down on the ground in groups of about fifty each," Jesus replied. So the people all sat down. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and asked God's blessing on the food. Breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they picked up twelve baskets of leftovers!

Luke 9:10-17



Jesus' mission

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

Then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you."

Matthew 16:13-17

Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became dazzling white. Then two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking of how he was about to fulfill God's plan by dying in Jerusalem. Peter and the others were very drowsy and had fallen asleep. Now they woke up and saw

Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, this is wonderful! We will make three shrines – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But even as he was saying this, a cloud came over them; and terror gripped them as it covered them.

Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." When the voice died away, Jesus was there alone. They didn't tell anyone what they had seen until long after this happened.

Luke 9:28-36

They were now on their way to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them ...

Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him in Jerusalem. "When we get to Jerusalem," he told them, "the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

Mark 10:32-34

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Enter the king

Jesus went on towards Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. "Go into that village over there," he told them, "and as you enter it, you will see a colt tied there that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying our colt?" And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it." So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on.

Then the crowds spread out their coats on the road ahead of Jesus. As they reached the place where the road started down from the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.

Luke 19:28-37

But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he began to cry. "I wish that even today you would find the way of peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from you. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you. They will crush you to the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you have rejected the opportunity God offered you."

Luke 19:41-44



So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the temple. He looked around carefully at everything, and then he left because it was late in the afternoon.

Mark 11:11

The following morning, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants from their stalls. He told them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be a place of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves."

After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him. But they could think of nothing, because all the people hung on every word he said.

Luke 19:45-48

In Jerusalem

Every day Jesus went to the Temple to teach, and each evening he returned to spend the night on the Mount of Olives. The crowds gathered early each morning to hear him.

Luke 21:37-38

As Jesus was walking through the Temple area, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders came up to him. They demanded, "By whose authority did you drive out the merchant from the temple? Who gave you such authority?"

"I'll tell you who gave me authority to do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human? Answer me!"

They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe John. But do we dare say it was merely human?" For they were afraid of what the people would do, because everyone believed that John was a prophet. So they finally replied, "We don't know."

And Jesus responded, "Then I won't answer your question either."

Mark 11:27-33

One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

Mark 12:28-31

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Betrayal

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which begins with the Passover celebration, was drawing near. The leading priests and teachers of religious law were actively plotting Jesus' murder. But they wanted to kill him without starting a riot, a possibility they greatly feared.

Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, and he went over to the leading priests and captains of the Temple guard to discuss the best way to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted that he was ready to help them, and they promised him a reward. So he began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus so they could arrest him quietly when the crowds weren't around.

Luke 22:1-6

Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. The

leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

John 18:1-3

When the other disciples saw what was about to happen, they exclaimed, "Lord, should we fight? We brought swords!" And one of them slashed at the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

But Jesus said, "Don't resist any more." And he touched the place where the man's ear had been and healed him. Then Jesus spoke to the leading priests and captains of the Temple guard and the other leaders who headed the mob. "Am I some dangerous criminal," he asked, "that you have come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the temple? I was there every day."

Luke 22:49-53

At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 26:56



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The trial

Then the people who had arrested Jesus led him to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the religious law and other leaders had gathered.

The high priest said to him, "I demand in the name of the living God that you tell us whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say. And in the future you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror, shouting, "Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" "Guilty!" they shouted. "He must die!"

Then they bound Jesus and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Matthew 26:57,63-66,27:2

Pilate called together the leading priests and other religious leaders, along with the people, and he announced his verdict ... "Nothing this man has done calls for the death penalty. So I will have him flogged, but then I will release him."

But they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"Why? What crime has he committed? I have found no reason to sentence him to death. I will therefore flog him and let him go."

But the crowd shouted louder and louder for Jesus' death, and their voices prevailed. So Pilate sentenced Jesus to die as they demanded.

Luke 23:13-16,21-24

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The cross

Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with Jesus. Finally, they came to a place called The Skull. All three were crucified there – Jesus on the centre cross, and the two criminals on either side.



Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. The crowd watched, and the leaders laughed and scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Chosen One, the Messiah."

Luke 23:32-35

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself – and us, too, while you're at it!"

But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

By this time it was noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the thick veil hanging in the Temple was torn apart. Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" And with those words he breathed his last.

When the captain of the Roman soldiers handling the executions saw what had happened, he praised God and said, "Surely this man was innocent." And when the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw all that had happened, they went home in deep sorrow.

Luke 23:39-48

Mourning

As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who was one of Jesus' followers, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance as he left.

The next day – on the first day of the Passover ceremonies – the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will be raised from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he came back to life!"

So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Matthew 27:57-60,62-64,66

How quickly things fall apart; how fragile even the best of us turn out to be. His disciples scattered, God's long-awaited Saviour fails.

After centuries of waiting, Israel's second chance comes to nothing.

We are here, full of doubt, confusion, and questions.



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