

Growing up I didn't hear much about the "*kingdom*" in "kingdom of heaven." Eventually, after never hearing about the kingdom, I thought of "the kingdom of heaven" as simply "heaven" which is too easily equated with our personal individual paradise. Basically, we've taken "kingdom" out of "kingdom of heaven" and have come to imagine "heaven" as our personal paradise. Just like everything else in modern culture, this is an appeal to the self- or the individual- and his/her desires. Also, I grew up thinking about the kingdom of heaven mostly as a place where we will be taken when we die. No doubt Christ will rule in the kingdom of heaven but I did not think about it coming here. To this. Very. Earth.

*Kingdom of Heaven* means it is not a socialist or communist paradise where everyone is equal and treated equally. There is a "least" and a "greatest" in the kingdom. This idea of a hierarchy tends to bother modern people. In our modern world that idealizes equality, a hierarchy where one person is in charge seems unsettling since we are so used to tyrants and the countless heartbreaking examples of absolute power corrupting. So we invade countries and topple foreign governments to proliferate our solution: democracy. It is a humanistic answer, using the power of the people. But a kingdom is not run by democratic or capitalist means (which the Western world views as ideal) but, instead, it is a place where one person rules. As Christians, this is our model. Not a republic run by democracy. Not a society thriving off capitalism. A kingdom.

"Kingdom" is an unfamiliar word because we don't typically have kings anymore. Having a king means listening and doing what we are told by the one person. It means giving up rights as individuals and being subject to one person. We need to think and speak less individualistically and that starts by recognizing how individualistically our culture operates and then adjusting our language corporately to remind ourselves and others again and again that it is all about the kingdom of God coming to this earth, not some personal paradise/heaven.

The kingdom emphasizes serving God and becoming part of something larger for the sake of something/someone other than self. It is not some personal paradise but is a community, a body, and a place. And it is coming here to this very earth. It is not coming in the distant future but is in the process of coming. But not only that, we are helping to bring it about. It is breaking through, moment by moment. Every time we act as Christ to someone, every time we create beauty and goodness, every time we forgive someone who has wronged us, every time we love we are bringing about heaven to this very earth.