

## STUDY 8

### Responding to the Kingdom

#### 1. **The Kingdom is resistible and yet it cannot fail. How can this tension or paradox be explained?**

God has given to humankind the gift of free will. We are not made like machines nor computers. A drill will not make a hole because it loves its operator. A computer will not perform a calculation because it loves the person typing at its keyboard. These devices do what they do because they are made that way. Men and women have the capacity to choose to do what pleases God because they love Him. Love and free will go together.

This means that people have the freedom to reject the gospel and to refuse the good news. God wants the Kingdom of God to be a kingdom of love where people freely choose to serve and obey their King.

So on an *individual* level the kingdom is resistible. Nobody is forced to enter. Jesus told a parable about a banquet to which people were invited. When they refused, the invitation went out to others (*Matthew 22:1-14*). But the Kingdom of God will not fail because God knows that there will be others who *will accept* the invitation. Jesus promised to return when the gospel has been fully preached in all the world. **“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”** (*Matthew 24:14*). The gospel may be rejected by some but it will not be rejected by all.

#### 2. **If the Kingdom is definitely going to come in the future, does that mean we can just ‘sit back and wait for it to happen?’**

No, absolutely not. The mandate given by Jesus to the church is to go into all the world and make disciples (*Matthew 28:19-20*). It has not yet been fulfilled. Paul taught that preaching was the means by which people should hear the invitation (*Romans 10:14*).

If individuals find that they are not very effective in sharing the gospel, they can always help someone who is.

#### 3. **Explain how the beginning of the Kingdom of God seemed insignificant at the time. In what way does this fact offer encouragement for us today?**

Jesus was born in a stable, in the small town of Bethlehem to a mother who appeared to be an insignificant Jewish girl. He grew up in an out-of-the-way place called Nazareth. Although popular with the people, He was stripped naked, flogged and crucified as a criminal. His body was buried in someone else’s tomb. The disciples on the Emmaus Road (*Luke 24:13-35*) thought things had come to a disappointing end. But then the resurrection, Pentecost and the Holy Spirit!

Sometimes, we feel that things have not worked. Sometimes we feel that we have completely failed. But God is able to turn things around; see *Romans 8:28*.

**4. God's ways are often paradoxical. Apart from the weak / strong tension explained here, what other paradoxes have you discovered in the Bible?**

Here are a few:

Jesus said: ***"Blessed are those who hunger."*** (*Matthew 5:6*) and He also said ***"No one who comes to me will ever be hungry."*** (*John 6:35*).

Jesus said: ***"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works."*** (*Matthew 5:16*). He also said ***"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them."*** (*Matthew 6:1*).

Isaiah said of Jesus ***'He will be named...Prince of Peace.'*** (*Isaiah 9:6*) and yet Jesus said of Himself ***"Don't assume that I came to bring peace."*** (*Matthew 10:34*).

Jesus said, ***"I did not come to judge the world."*** (*John 12:47*) and He also said, ***"I came into this world for judgment."*** (*John 9:39*).

All of these can be resolved by understanding the individual statements in their particular context.