



FIFTY
A JOURNEY INTO
FORGOTTEN
THE AGE TO COME
DAYS

Ray Hollenbach

50 Forgotten Days:
A Journey Into The Age To Come

By Ray Hollenbach

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Introduction: Why wasn't Jesus in a hurry to leave?

We are big on Easter, and rightfully so—God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, putting an exclamation mark on the life of his Son. Some branches of the faith are big on Pentecost, celebrating the coronation of Jesus in heaven, and the overflow of the Spirit dripping down to the earth. Between the two there's a span of 50 days.

In the hubbub of Easter, we sometimes forget Jesus stuck around for another 40 days after resurrection. Apparently he had more to say and do. The very first verse in the book of Acts teaches us that the gospels were about “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach.” The rest of Acts teaches us that Jesus is *still doing and teaching* in the days, weeks, months and decades after the gospels. The work of the first century church *was* the work of Jesus. Isn't that true today? It's all too easy to substitute our work for his, to engage in ministry apart from his direction. What is Jesus is doing and teaching in our day? Are we still working *with* him or simply working *for* him?

Jesus' message in the 40 days of resurrection was really no different than his message during his three years of ministry: he taught about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Acts opens and closes with the Kingdom of God front and center. The very last verse in the book shows us Paul, three decades later, proclaiming the Kingdom of God (Acts 28: 31). Have we meditated on the meaning and importance of the Kingdom, or have we reduced the message of Jesus to only his sacrifice of the cross? Individually and corporately, we need to rediscover the Kingdom message.

The angels who were present at the ascension asked a pretty good question: “Why are you looking toward heaven?” (Acts 1:11) It's a question worth considering. Frequently we are more concerned with heaven than with the Kingdom of God. The breathtaking sacrifice at Calvary purchased the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven, but in our generation many followers of Jesus have limited his work and message to heaven and heaven only. We should ask: if the gospel is only about going to heaven, why did Jesus invite us to take up the yoke of discipleship?

I'd love to get the podcast of everything Jesus taught in those 40 days, but it hasn't shown up on iTunes yet. In the meantime, he invites us to work with him just as closely as the first disciples.

So why 50 forgotten days instead of 40? Simply because there were ten days of waiting, watching and praying before Something Big happened to the church. The idea of ten days to do nothing is desperately needed in the church today, and this is the perfect time of year to embrace that very thing.

The gospel accounts end with Jesus saying, "Go!" Acts opens with Jesus saying, "Wait!" What was so important that Jesus told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem? In our day many Christians are familiar with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) but are we aware that Jesus also told us to wait? Jesus said, in effect, "Don't go anywhere, and don't do anything until you receive all that I have for you." Have we meditated on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? We can work *for* God without any special empowerment. We cannot work *with* him apart from the Holy Spirit.

There are plenty of Lenten devotionals. They help us reflect on the gravity of the cross and the glory of resurrection. But what do you do after Easter? That's really the question of what it's like to live in the Age to Come. The days *between* Easter and Pentecost are usually an after-thought, yet they can become an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the resurrection in our lives. The risen Jesus didn't leave in a hurry: he hung out with his disciples and put the finishing touches on three years of training. He wants to do the same for us.

This devotional will take you 50 days into the Age to Come.

We'll discover what the ***resurrection of Jesus*** means for us in everyday life.

We'll discover Jesus' message of the ***Kingdom of God***.

We'll discover the possibilities of ***life in the Spirit***.

The time for fasting has ended. Let's feast together in God's Kingdom.

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY ONE

A Preview of Coming Attractions

Resurrection makes all things new: Jesus, in a physical, resurrected body is operating under a whole new set of rules. He is physical enough to eat and drink with the disciples, and “spiritual” enough to appear behind locked doors or disappear before the eyes of the two guys on the road to Emmaus. This resurrection is the hint of what is to come for all of us. We will not simply come alive in the old way. Resuscitation is resuming the old life; resurrection is entry into a new kind of life.

Ask Yourself: Have I merely added Jesus to my menu of choices and then simply resumed the old life?

Live Into It: What would a resurrected-kind-of-life look like in my home, my job, my school, and my life?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY TWO

A Premature Ending

Once upon a time there was a very nice God-Man who acted perfectly and never did anything wrong. And then we all killed him. The End.

Even if we respond with gratitude and repentance, too often we allow Jesus to die on the cross and stay in the tomb. He never meant for his story—or ours—to end in death. Jesus *chose* the Cross, but the resurrection *authenticated* his choice. Without the resurrection, the Cross is meaningless; Paul said, “Our hope is in vain.” The character of Christ comes first—it led Jesus to the Cross—but the power of God is indispensable in order to fulfill the mission beyond the cross.

Ask Yourself: What does godly character look like when accompanied by godly power?

Live Into it: Don't settle for imitating his character without possibility of his resurrection power flowing through your life now.

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY THREE

The Walking Miracle

Resurrection means a new identity--it means a *fulfilled* identity. He did not say, "I replace all things," he said "I make all things new." In the garden tomb and on the road to Emmaus Jesus was both recognizable and somehow mysteriously unrecognizable. We, too, are called into this newness. If we do not walk in newness, perhaps it is because we are not experiencing the power of the resurrection. The resurrection is not only an historical event: Jesus offers a resurrection-quality of life as a present reality.

Ask Yourself: What does the power of the resurrection look like in my everyday life?

Live Into it: Try saying this out loud (really, try it!): "The power of the resurrection can flow through me, today."

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY FOUR

The Welcome Interruption

The phone. A knock at the door. Running errands that never seem to end. When something interrupts your life, how do you respond? Luke's resurrection story is an account of what actually happened on the road to Emmaus, but it's a parable as well. The good news was hidden inside an interruption. The two disciples discovered a burning heart comes only by walking with Jesus—or rather, by inviting him to walk with you. The miracle came after they chose to show hospitality, and when they finally recognized him they realized their true destination.

Ask Yourself: Have I considered the possibility that my next interruption might be God wanting to hang out with me?

Live Into it: Could you insert time into your daily everyday schedules to include the possibility of a welcome interruption?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY FIVE

“The doctrine of the resurrection affirms the goodness of creation” ~ N.T. Wright

I once met a man who said, “This world is filthy. Heaven is my home, and I’m not fit for this place.” I wondered what he thought of the God who created such a horrid, dirty world.

Heaven met earth in Jesus Christ, and God’s will was done on earth as it is in heaven. In the resurrected Jesus the New Heaven and the New Earth come together. The Father is fully invested in creation, both old and new. If the Creator God said, “it is good” when he made the world, how much better is the resurrection? The Father raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus was no mere spirit or vision. The cold dead body came back to life, miraculous and new. It’s God’s way of saying, “this world—this life—matters.”

Ask Yourself: If the Lord’s body carried over from one life to the next, what does it say about my body?

Live Into it: Search out the goodness of God in your everyday world: your body, your home, and your city—everything you encounter.

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY SIX

Doubting Thomas (part one)

John's gospel (chapter 21) tells the story of a guy who just wasn't around when the resurrected Jesus showed up. Who could be surprised that he didn't buy into the impossibly good news? And yet, even though he folded his arms and refused to buy into their joy, there was room for someone like Thomas to belong to the group—even if he didn't have the same faith as the others. He was missing the first time Jesus appeared. He even doubted the testimony of his friends, but he was courageously honest—open and vulnerable. And no one kicked him off the team.

Ask Yourself: Could I express my doubts so openly? What would happen if I did?

Live Into it: Sometimes the path to faith requires that we voice our doubts. Am I willing to take that chance?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY SEVEN

Doubting Thomas (part two)

Thomas wanted the same experiences the others had. He demanded to see and touch Jesus' wounds. He wanted not only to see the resurrected Christ, but also to assure himself that the wounds were real. His stubborn honesty was another way of saying, "Don't give me some flashy substitute, I want the real Jesus, the one I walked with and learned from. The one I came to love."

Ask Yourself: Is it okay to want the same experiences as other people?

Live Into it: Whether my answer is "yes" or "no" to the above question, the more important question is "why or why not?"

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY EIGHT

Doubting Thomas (part three)

The text in John 21 tells us Thomas doesn't see Jesus until a week later." Even though Thomas stood his ground and demanded his terms be met, Jesus came in his own time and in his own way. He did not come simply because Thomas demanded it. We live in a hurry-up age, especially if we find ourselves uncomfortable or on the outside looking in. Jesus knew Thomas had issues, but the Lord kept to his own schedule, not the demands of unbelief.

Ask Yourself: Do I find myself frustrated when things take longer than I expect?

Live Into it: How can I develop the patience to see things through or wait them out? What practice steps build patience in the midst of doubt?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY NINE

Doubting Thomas (part four)

Here's a 30-second exercise: put yourself in Thomas' place. Try to imagine what he saw *and felt* when Jesus finally showed up. The resurrected Jesus invited Thomas to touch the nail-scars. More strange: the Lord uses the phrase "put your hand into my side," in reference to the spear that had pierced him—can you imagine putting your hand into his side?

Part of the beauty of resurrection is the Lord's suffering is not forgotten or denied, but broken and put to God's use. The power and hope of the new life was purchased at the suffering of the old, a suffering not to be forgotten or denied, but reversed. What other mean for evil, God can—and will—use for good.

Ask Yourself: Do I live as though the power of the past is unbreakable?

Live Into it: Make a list of those events from the past that still hurt you today. Ask the Father to show you the path forward.

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY TEN

Doubting Thomas (part five)

There comes a time when Thomas kneels and worships. His honest doubt helped bring him to the Truth, but once he meets Jesus, he worships. *This is a difference between a doubter and a skeptic.* Honest doubts should be faced head on; skepticism starts with the assumption there is no answer. Philip Yancey found freedom from skepticism when he realized he could question his doubts just as vigorously as he questioned his beliefs.

Ask Yourself: Have I ever given myself the freedom to honestly express my doubt?

Live Into it: Take an inventory of your doubts and evaluate each one, doubt, or skepticism?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY ELEVEN

Is He Still a Man?

Perhaps you've never taken time to consider this possibility: there's a *Man* on the throne of heaven—because a *Man* was raised from the dead. He is the “Last Adam” and “the firstborn over all creation.” Mary Magdalene thought the risen Lord was the gardener. This small detail God reveals that the work of the old creation was completed at the Garden Tomb, and the New Creation is under way. We can anticipate the day when there is a new heaven, a new earth, a New Jerusalem, filled with people, each born of woman, each worshipping their Older Brother. This means that Easter is not only about the Father has done in Jesus Christ, it is also about what awaits us.

Ask Yourself: Have I ever thought about the fact that Jesus, the Man, sits at the throne of heaven?

Live Into it: The bridge from the old to the new is the risen Lord. How does that resurrection show itself in me—now?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY TWELVE

I'm Only Human

"God became man:" it's daring, but commonplace among the gods of the ancient world.

"God suffered the shame and agony of a torturous death:" this is more scandalous, because when the ancient gods become men they usually stacked the deck in their favor.

"God--risen from the dead? Still today fully Man and fully God?" That's off the charts. There is a Man seated on the throne of heaven: born of a woman, toiled in sweat, bled and died, risen in body, seated on the throne, and still human, yet always divine. God begot himself, and he sits enthroned, surrounded by humanity worshipping the image of God in a Man, because that Man is God.

Ask Yourself: Why is the humanity of Jesus a big deal?

Live Into it: We use the phrase, "I'm only human" to let ourselves off the hook for our shortcomings—but how does the Lord's example alter that rationale?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY THIRTEEN

The Father's Resurrection Role

The scriptural way of thinking of the resurrection is not that *Jesus got up*, but that he *was raised*. This required a trusting relationship between the Son and the Father. Jesus faced death the way we all face death: it is opaque and final. He had no power to raise himself—nor do we. The Father raised him. Every resurrection phrase in the New Testament is passive, meaning Jesus relied on the Father's goodness, promise, and power to bring him back from the dead. Resurrection power flows from divine, trusting community.

Ask Yourself: Do you think Jesus knew--100% for certain--that resurrection would follow the cross? Or did he exercise faith?

Live Into it: Perhaps our Lord exercised faith beyond what he could see. If that's true of him, shouldn't it be true of us?

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY FOURTEEN

Our Bodies Matter

The Apostle Paul pities the fool who only follows Jesus in this life without hope for a life to come--a literal, physical, *corpuscular* life in the next age. Jesus was raised bodily: the Father assures us that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not only Jesus' victory over sin and death, but also the guarantee that we, too, will be raised up in the same manner as Jesus. In an actual body.

Ask Yourself: If this body will be raised to life someday, what attitude should I have toward physical things right now?

Live Into it: Sometimes we confine the word "stewardship" exclusively to matters of money. Perhaps it should extend to how we care for our own bodies.

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY FIFTEEN

Scars Without Pain

The body of the risen Jesus exerts dominion over sickness and death, yet it also bears the scars of its earlier existence. The Father raised the body of Jesus to life, but chose to leave the scars of crucifixion in place. It tells me that we will carry the *memories* of our suffering from the past into our resurrected life, but the pain will be gone. In fact, the scars will become part of our testimony to the greatness of God. There's hope for every suffering person. Their pain can become the fuel to burn with testimony for Jesus. He despised the shame associated with the cross, but not the pain or the scars. The wounds have no more power. They are a reminder, but not a hindrance.

Ask Yourself: What part of my past is still a hindrance to me?

Live Into it: If I've gained victory over some of my past sins, perhaps this is a starting place for ministry—showing others the way to freedom.

The Resurrection of God ~ DAY SIXTEEN

Why Did He Stay?

The resurrection was not a one-time event. While many of us may be familiar with the details of Easter Sunday--the empty tomb, the fear and confusion, the bewildered joy of seeing Jesus alive again--most of us are a bit fuzzy on the forty-day stretch *after* his resurrection. Jesus remained on the earth forty days and appeared to his closest followers time and again. The subject most important to Jesus during that time was *the Kingdom of God*. This should not surprise us. Before Jesus began his ministry, John the Baptist declared that the Kingdom of God was close at hand. In his earthly ministry Jesus himself preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Now, with just a few days remaining with his friends, the Kingdom of God is still his passion.

Ask Yourself: How does the “gospel of the Kingdom of God” differ from my understanding of “the gospel”?

Live Into it: The resurrection is an announcement of a new Kingdom, a new way of living. What could my life look like under the reign of Christ?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY SEVENTEEN

What could possibly be missing?

Imagine (just for a moment) you're Jesus: you've just paid the price for every sin ever committed, past, present, and future. You've opened the way to heaven for every person who turns toward God, and you've accomplished all this in just 33 years of living. But after purchasing the redemption for all mankind, you decide to stick around a few weeks more. What could possibly be missing? Jesus opened and closed his earthly ministry with the Kingdom of God (it was the middle, too). Now, after the resurrection, we see Jesus reinforcing the same message he had always preached: God's Kingdom is at hand.

Ask Yourself: Am I living in an old, dying kingdom, or an ever-new kingdom?

Live Into it: Survey the things Jesus says about the Kingdom of God. His death and resurrection opened the way to make his promises a present reality.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY EIGHTEEN

Who's Upside Down?

I've heard people say, "God's kingdom is an up-side down kingdom." In truth, his way is right side up: we are the ones standing on our heads. In the true, right side up kingdom, authority and power are tools to serve the least among us. In the right side up kingdom blessings are distributed, not hoarded. When we finally see God's kingdom for what it is, we understand why the kingdoms of this world come and go, but "of the increase of his kingdom and of his peace there will be no end."

Ask Yourself: In which kingdom did I grow up, and where do my values come from?

Live Into it: Imagine moving to another country: you would have to learn a new language, new customs, and new ways. So it is in God's Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY NINETEEN

The Radical Difference

I had been a Christian for five years before I ever heard the gospel. One night at a summer camp I listened to the story of a God who loved the world so much that he sent his only son to pay the price for other people's sin. My sin. I believed the message, I prayed the prayer and asked Jesus into my heart. It was five years later before I began to discover that the good news was so much better than I had been told. Jesus didn't proclaim the gospel-of-forgiveness-and-heaven; he proclaimed "the gospel of the Kingdom of God." His gospel of the Kingdom of God differs radically from the gospel of go-to-heaven-when-you-die.

Ask Yourself: What was the gospel I heard when I decided to follow Jesus?

Live Into it: Is it possible that the good news is better than I've been told?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The Holy Spirit inspired more than 150 references to God's Kingdom in the pages of the New Testament. "Eternal life" doesn't get even one-third the same number of mentions. Eternal life is God's promise, but it's not all there is to the gospel. In fact, his Kingdom is our true destination, immediately *and* ever after. If the words "Kingdom of God" seem awkward when they appear after the word "gospel" perhaps it's because we have shortened the gospel to mean exclusively redemption from sin and going to heaven. The rediscovery of the gospel of the Kingdom, along with Jesus' commission to "make disciples and teach them to obey" stand as the greatest need in the North American church today. Discipleship under the Masters' hand and maturity in Christ depend on receiving the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Ask Yourself: Have I limited my spiritual life by pushing all his promises until after I die?

Live Into it: Becoming a part of God's Kingdom means I am—right now—subject to the king, and empowered by him.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-ONE

Heaven Is Breaking In

We have confused Heaven with the Kingdom. Heaven is a great place. I'll get there someday because Jesus paid the price, but in the meantime Heaven is breaking into the here and now. Many of us have become preoccupied with an arrow pointing to Heaven even though God is bringing the Kingdom to Earth before our eyes. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught us to pray, "Let your Kingdom come, let your will be done *on earth* as it is in Heaven." (Matthew 6: 10, emphasis added) Jesus said plainly that God's Kingdom should be our highest priority: "Seek first the Kingdom of God." (Matthew 6:33) Do we really think he meant that we should place going to heaven after we die as our highest earthy priority?

Ask Yourself: Have I trained myself to push "pause" on the promises—and assignments—of God?

Live Into it: Try thinking through the Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase, with an emphasis for what it looks like in everyday action.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-TWO

The Father's Business

The Kingdom of God is the true context for discipleship. No serious student of Jesus ignores his teaching or demonstration of the Kingdom. Yes, demonstration: Jesus explained his actions in terms of the Kingdom of God. Healing, deliverance, and feeding the masses were all signs of the Kingdom of God. The world longed for the rule and reign of God to come to Earth, and they received their answer in the actions and teaching of Jesus. In his absence, Jesus encourages—expects—us to demonstrate and explain God's Kingdom today. To be about the Kingdom is to be about the Father's business.

Ask Yourself: What lies within my power to demonstrate the Kingdom of God?

Live Into it: As we try to apply ourselves to walking out the Kingdom of God, we will discover the limits of our own power, and our constant need for his power.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-THREE

Battleground

Just when we are tempted to think these times are unique, the Gospels remind us that people of every generation, every race, and every society have had to cope with fear and uncertainty. That's because these are the weapons of the god of this age. The answer is always the same: there is a King in Heaven who will return to earth, and we can participate in His Kingdom right now, even before he returns.

Ask Yourself: Have I ever thought of my life as the battleground between two kingdoms?

Live Into it: In the on-going mission of God's people living in this present age, there is no such thing as a "non-combatant." The only question is whether I'm aware of the conflict raging around me.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-FOUR

If There's a King . . .

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12: 29 - 32)

Jesus assures us that the same Father who provides for our eternal life also provides for our needs right now. That is, the benefits of the Kingdom of God can begin right here and now for those who walk in a trusting relationship with him. Jesus is the Father's gift to the world, and this Jesus is the King. Why receive the King but miss his Kingdom?

Ask Yourself: Do I really believe that my Heavenly Father is pleased to give me the Kingdom?

Live Into it: What general would send troops into conflict unprepared? What's more—we do not serve a general, but a loving Father. How much more will he give us what we need in the fight?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-FIVE

The King's Cause

Do we really believe that our Heavenly Father is pleased to “give us the Kingdom?” Perhaps we trust him for the assurance of eternity, but Jesus tells us when the Father gives his Kingdom, he is committing himself to look after our needs day-to-day: our needs for food, and shelter, and clothing. But he has more in mind than simply our basic needs. He is also calling us into his mission, and he will equip for that as well. To receive the King means we embrace his cause as well.

Ask Yourself: Do I ask him only for my sustenance-level needs, or do I ask for his equipping as well?

Live Into it: Take an inventory of your neighborhood or workplace. Identify that part of the world beyond you that needs the Kingdom to come, and ask the Father to equip you for the task.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-SIX

Discovering The Permanent Things

When Jesus said, “store up riches in heaven” he was contrasting temporary things with permanent things. Yes, he was talking about heaven-after-you-die, but he was also trying to reveal the things of heaven are all around us here and now. These are the “permanent things.” The kingdom of God places great value on these permanent things. They are the kind of things that do not wear out and cannot be stolen from you. You can begin to “invest” in them now, and your investment goes with you wherever to go. (The Introduction to this devotional is based on this passage, if you haven’t read it yet perhaps you should circle back and give it a look!)

Ask Yourself: Am I aware—or comfortable with—the idea that my actions now have some impact on my life in in Heaven?

Live Into it: A pastor-friend of mine is fond of saying, “you can’t take it with you, but you can wire it ahead.” Apparently the Kingdom of God has some kind of 401-K plan.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Finding The Treasure

So what are these permanent things, and how do we store up these treasures? Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by talking about the kind of people who are fortunate in God's eyes. The kingdom of God values the poor, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers. If you want to store up treasures in heaven, you can find them among the poor. You can find them by showing mercy to others. You can become rich in God's kingdom by becoming the kind of person who makes peace. Every act of mercy and kindness (especially to those who cannot "repay" you) makes a deposit in the kingdom of God.

Ask Yourself: Have I ever tried to identify "the poor" in my world? Do I recognize the meek around me? The merciful? The peacemakers?

Live Into it: "To align yourself with love is to align yourself with victory, because love never fails." ~ Adam Russell

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Investment Advice

Investing in God's kingdom is like any other kind of investing. In the everyday world we invest in things with our time, energy or money. It may not sound spiritual, but we invest in the Kingdom of God the same way: with our time, energy, and money. Do we give ourselves to the Kingdom of God? Jesus said it is the best investment: *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33) Investing is a matter of taking limited resources and placing them where we think we will find the greatest return. Like any investment, it's always about delayed gratification—and returns that will never run out.

Ask Yourself: Am I "all in?"

Live Into it: Where else will two fish and five loaves feed 5,000 people, with a residual of twelve baskets full. But it starts with the investment.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY TWENTY-NINE

The Lessons of Heaven (part one)

Revelation 21 shows us what life is like when God lives among men. Some people call it “heaven,” but the book of Revelation says simply the dwelling of God is among men. Is heaven reserved for another day? What if he wants to live among us now? All the comforts and glory mentioned in this wonderful chapter find some expression among us now. Today’s devotion asks that simple question: what if heaven (or at least some of it) is available now? In the coming days let’s keep looking at heaven for clues about today.

Ask Yourself: When does “eternal life” begin, and where?

Live Into it: The prime characteristic of the New Jerusalem is God’s manifest presence (Revelation 21:3). What about God’s presence in our everyday lives?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY

The Lessons of Heaven (part two)

Heaven has abundance. *Supply and demand. Limited resources. Worry over whether we will have enough when we can no longer work for a living. ~~* These are the realities of an earth-bound economy. The present value of gold comes from its scarcity. The economies of this age are, in part, built on what we do *not* have—and because we do not have something, society sets the price high. But in God's presence there is always enough. There's no scarcity in his presence. Can you imagine how we would live today if we were confident there was always enough?

Ask Yourself: Scarcity and lack lead to fear: do I order my economic life around fear, or peace?

Live Into it: Think through the power—and love—of a God who can raise the dead and sent his Spirit. Reorder you priorities around not only his good intentions, but his power to deliver?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-ONE

The Lessons of Heaven (part three)

Heaven has its values in order. When God lives among men, gold has no more value than asphalt. In our age *wealth* means possessing what other people value: in God's kingdom he is the *source* of wealth! Imagine—how would we live today if we could put the values of this world were beneath our feet, and elevate his presence to our highest value?

Ask Yourself: Do I really believe God's presence is available to me today—in tangible ways?

Live Into it: Perhaps we have had trouble embracing God's presence because our perceptions have become dull to the evidence of his nearness.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-TWO

The Lessons of Heaven (part four)

Heaven values beauty. Main Street, New Jerusalem, shines with the radiance of transparent gold. It's an amazing revelation: God delights in beauty. He makes all things new in ever-new ways: the pavement shines, and the common paving material is gold—perhaps not for its value, but for its beauty. How would we live today if we valued beauty above wealth? In this presence age beauty is valued as a means to wealth. In the age to come beauty is simply . . . beauty.

Ask Yourself: Am I able to separate beauty from any desire to possess or control it?

Live Into it: In U2's song, Grace, Bono says, "Because Grace makes beauty. Out of ugly things." We may not have God's capacity, but we can search for the beauty he makes.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY THREE

Wealth

In the West, rich people go to the head of the line. Money buys a seat even when the house is sold out. Money means a backstage pass. Money can bend the will of those desperate to feed their families, and the greedy are only too happy to turn the lever. In the hands of natural men, wealth is no blessing: it is a curse to themselves and those whom they try to control. In God's Kingdom our wealth is the shared presence of God. His presence renders anything possible—available to his children. How should we use money in light the Kingdom's true wealth?

Ask Yourself: Do I consider myself wealthy? In which kingdom?

Live Into it: Generosity is not about money. Even the poorest among us can be generous. Meanwhile, some of us wait. We think, "When I become rich, then I can be generous."

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-FOUR

Memory Work

Take five minutes to memorize these words: then, carry them with you and think on this: How your world would change today if *“the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*

Ask Yourself: Is His dwelling with me?

Live Into it: “All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we knew how to touch them” Gerard Manley Hopkins

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Darkness and Light

Each year at Easter millions of people sing the popular chorus from Handel's Messiah, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." This chorus is drawn from Revelation 11:15, where the seventh (and final) angel declares the final victory of God. Why does the angel use "kingdom" singular when throughout history there have been so many kingdoms? Ultimately there are only two kingdoms: darkness and light. There are only two ages: "this present age" and "the age to come."

Ask Yourself: What does this have to do with me—a schoolteacher, businessperson, parent, or citizen?

Live Into it: To fully embrace God's Kingdom means we must ask ourselves where our "citizenship" lies.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-SIX

Kingdom Passages (part one)

“The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17) This is breath taking! God’s entire kingdom is summed up in three ideas. The Apostle Paul encourages us not to think about how to apply the rules, but whether these three things are alive within us. The Holy Spirit is offering us a new yardstick. Not one made of rules and regulations, but one that measures the three components of living in God’s presence.

Ask Yourself: Righteousness. Peace. Joy. Which of these are alive in me? Which are not?

Live Into It: Some people are concerned that subjective, emotional experiences will lead us astray. What safeguards are there?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Kingdom Passages (part two)

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood . . ." (1 Peter 2:9-10). We are not simply citizens in God's Kingdom, we are priests. Some people might think the title and task of priest is presumptuous. Yet it's exactly how God's word describes us. Perhaps Peter didn't really mean these words. Maybe he was just trying to say nice things to those who read his letter. Simply put, here's what priests do: they represent God to men, and men to God.

Ask Yourself: Am I comfortable in that role?

Live Into It: If heaven and earth intersect in me, what role do I play in either realm?

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Kingdom Passages (part three)

*Behold, a king will reign righteously
And princes will rule justly.
Each will be like a refuge from the wind
And a shelter from the storm,
Like streams of water in a dry country,
Like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land.* (Isaiah 32:1-2)

What a picture of the Kingdom: one king, with princes (and princesses) who help him rule. The words refuge, shelter, streams, and shade are not about the king, but about the royal family.

Ask Yourself: Do I think of myself as part of the royal family?

Live Into It: Take inventory of your “realm.” You may discover more places of refuge and shelter than you had suspected—not for you, but for others.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY THIRTY-NINE

Kingdom Passages (part four)

“The LORD shall reign forever and ever.” (Exodus 15:18) These are the final words in a song of victory, celebrating the freedom of Hebrew slaves as they escaped oppression in Egypt. These words are also the first mention of God’s rule and reign in the earth. The rest of the Old Testament is the story of a loving and rescuing God who establishes his representative kingdom on earth—Israel. He wants to bless the world through the very people the world enslaved. He’s still doing the same thing.

Ask Yourself: Have I really experienced God’s dramatic rescue? In what practical ways?

Live Into It: First God rescues us. Then he wants reign in us.

The Kingdom of God ~ DAY FORTY

Kingdom Passages (part five)

After Jesus demonstrated his first-hand knowledge of our everyday needs, he gave us these foundational words: *“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:33) Even though these words have become so famous, we have often gotten it backwards: we seek “all these things” and expect the kingdom to be added to us.

Ask Yourself: What are the “all these things” I anxiously seek?

Live Into It: When we are active toward his kingdom we can have the assurance to be passive about everything else.

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-ONE

Not So Fast!

“ . . . wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:4-5) The gospel accounts end with Jesus saying, “Go!” Acts opens with Jesus saying, “Wait!” What was so important that Jesus told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem? Jesus said, in effect, “Don’t go anywhere, don’t do anything until you receive all that I have for you.” Have we meditated on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? We can work *for* God without any special empowerment. We cannot work *with* him apart from the Holy Spirit

Ask Yourself: Have I meditated on the role of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Live Into It: Talking about the Holy Spirit is scary, and some would say impractical. How can I deal with my uncertainty and my fear?

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-TWO

Do You Need A Spirit Guide?

“ . . . When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” (John 16:13-15) Theologians are fond of pointing out the work of all three persons in the trinity. And they are right: the Spirit is the executor of all the Father and Son have for us.

Ask Yourself: Do I really think I can find the truth without a guide?

Live Into It: Do the math: The Father gives everything to the Son, and the Spirit distributes all that Jesus has to give. How much do we get?

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-THREE

How Did He Become The Man He Was?

“You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” (Acts 10:37-38) The Apostle Peter provided a powerful one-sentence summary of Jesus’ ministry—including the hope that we, too, can be like him because God is with us as well. The concept of the Holy Spirit’s anointing is nearly lost in many quarters of the church. If Jesus needed this anointing, how much more do we?

Ask Yourself: Is the same Spirit-empowerment Jesus used available to me?

Live Into It: If we conclude Jesus lived his life because he had some special advantage over us, we may appreciate him, but we will never be compelled to imitate his example.

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-FOUR

Born of the Spirit

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8) Nicodemus wasn’t the only one to have his mind blown: centuries later this conversation still leaves us astonished. How foolish of us to seize on one truth (“you must be born from above”) to the exclusion of so many others in this passage. How do we know the Spirit is moving? We can only see the evidence of that motion, not the Spirit Himself. The Spirit bears us along in its (His) own way, wherever it pleases.

Ask Yourself: How do I navigate life in the Spirit unless I experience it and am familiar with its (His) ways?

Live Into It: A simple exercise: train yourself—your body, your thoughts, even your intuitive thoughts to become alive to the movement of the breeze. First the natural, then the spiritual will follow.

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-FIVE

The Fruit of the Spirit

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”
(Galatians 5:22-23) Are you kidding me?!? Who in their right mind would make laws against such things? Apart from whatever government there is around us, we may discover that we are tyrants over our true selves, driving ourselves by the whip of the expectations of this present age.

Ask Yourself: Have I made my own internal laws that resist the work of the Spirit in me?

Live Into It: Go ahead: memorize all nine. It won't take you five minutes. But how long will it take to live all nine?

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-SIX

The Gifts of the Spirit

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) It’s such a long passage—let’s just say that it’s possible to build a house without power tools, but it’s a lot more difficult.

Ask Yourself: Just because they are called gifts, does that I should be passive?

Live Into It: Go ahead: memorize all nine. It won’t take you five minutes. But how long will it take to live all nine?

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-SEVEN

What To Ask For

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:13) I have three children, and I qualify for this verse: I’m evil, yet I love my children intensely. I’d give them anything I thought would help them. Earth-bound parents have the best of intentions, but lack wisdom and power. The Heavenly parent has the best intentions and has the wisdom and power to be effective.

Ask Yourself: Am I among those who ask him?

Live Into It: Jesus tells us of a perfect Father, ready to give us his Spirit. We should ask for what he suggests.

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-EIGHT

The Upper Room

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:1-4)
Now here’s something you don’t see ever day! It’s a description of Pentecost. Is it possible God could do it again?

Ask Yourself: Do these verse merely describe history, or should they be normative for me today?

Live Into It: Jesus said the Father would give the Spirit to those who ask him. After reading this passage, dare we ask?

The Spirit of God ~ DAY FORTY-NINE

The Promise

“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:39) This promise has reached a hundred generations, and will perhaps reach a hundred more. (We are among the *far off*, and it has reached us.) Maybe the real question is whether we will reach for the promise. On the day the church was born Peter sowed the Spirit across the continents and centuries. Now, in our day, we must ask whether we want the promise to continue on, or are we content to keep it to ourselves.

Ask Yourself: Do I see the promise? Can I identify all it contains?

Live Into It: The original day of Pentecost fulfilled the prophecies of the past and changed to the future. It could happen again.

Epilogue: DAY FIFTY (Monday, and beyond . . .)

The taxi driver watched while we emptied our pockets, shoveling money and tears toward people we barely knew . . .

I'll never forget my first trip to Peru. As a rich North American I had traveled the world previously. I had stayed at the finest hotels and soaked up the sun on privately owned beaches manicured by Marriott and Hilton. This trip was different. I had gone to Peru to talk about the Kingdom of God. I lived among the people of Lima and worked with them each day.

We stayed in a modest hotel and ate our meals with newly found Peruvian friends in local restaurants. We encountered Peruvian believers who owned but a single pair of shoes and just one Bible. This is nothing new. Countless North Americans have had their world rocked when they discover the economic needs of others around the world. But I caught a glimpse of Kingdom of God on the very last night of the trip. Our translators had been with us for ten days. We had spent more time with them than anyone else in Peru. As we waited for a midnight plane to take us home we invited our translators to one last meal together. We chatted like old friends and basked in the romance of a very short visit. Then it was time to head for the airport.

Our translators, three young Peruvians, hailed a couple of taxis and negotiated the price with the cabbies. As they turned to say their final good-byes, a revelation swept over the North American team: we were going home: *all of our Peruvian money would be worthless in a few hours.*

There was only one sensible solution: give it away. The taxi drivers watched while we emptied our pockets, shoveling money and tears toward people we barely knew. We all searched for every coin, each paper bill: whatever might be of benefit to our new friends. If someone was watching from the sidewalk it made no sense: there was an awkward and mad scramble to give it all away. There was no accounting. There were no instructions. No strings attached. As "employees" they had already been paid in full. Now the affections of our hearts and our immanent departure commanded a different kind of transaction. That night we began to understand radical generosity. We were living a parable.

What if your money's no good where you're going? The old rules no longer apply, new priorities become urgent. The way you see the world has changed. Others may call you foolish, but you don't care, because your values have changed.