

The Kingdom of God Is R. P. & J.

**Romans 14:17** (New American Standard Bible)

*<sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

## **Introduction**

This morning, I am going back to the theme of God's Kingdom. We will listen to God's Word saying that His kingdom is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. In the sermon title, I put the acronym "R. P. & J."

Look at the banner on the wall here. This year's motto is "Thy Kingdom Come." We pray that His Kingdom come to us and to our family. May God's Kingdom come and be established on earth as well as it is in our hearts. Christ has called us to advance God's reign on earth: in one person, one family, one church, and one community at a time. Let us strive to restore God's reign on earth until Christ comes again.

Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom of God is in our midst (Luke 17:21). It is in us and among us. It is in our heart and among the people who belong to Christ. I hope and pray that all of us make every effort to bring the Kingdom of God in wherever we are.

## **Content**

In today's Scripture, Paul the apostle points out what the Kingdom of God is and is not. First, God's Kingdom is not eating and drinking. In other words, it is not about our physical realm. His Kingdom transcends the visible, tangible, and natural world. It also means that our physical circumstances and limitations have no control over our understanding or experience of God's reign, and everything associated with His rule. For instance, I have seen amazing believers in Christ who are severely handicapped. Despite their physical limitations, every day they live with peace, joy, and purpose. Sometimes, they put me to shame. E.g., Joni E. Tada. She fractured the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae when she was a teenager due to diving accident. She's been quadriplegic (paralyzed from the shoulders down) over 50 years. She has her own ministry to encourage handicapped people to go on with their lives with meaning and purpose. She has her own broadcasting program and has written over forty books. Her ministry also sent out thousands of wheelchairs all around the world. All because of Christ who reigns in her heart giving her

meaning and purpose to serve others. I bet the Lord has prepared a great reward and crown for her ministry. The Kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking.

Beware of “health and wealth” teaching in the Church. Don’t get me wrong. It is God’s will for us to have an abundant life, both in health and wealth. This generally happens when we follow His will and walk in His ways every day. However, it is dangerous to think that if you are not healthy or wealthy, God doesn’t love you; or you are not following His will; or God has not blessed you. Do not judge your relationship with God by those material and physical measures.

Let me reiterate: the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. Instead, it is about the spiritual realm that is invisible. It is about your relationship with God. One thing we must be mindful in church ministries is not to lose our focus from this spiritual well-being of people whom we serve. For instance, we the Methodists are well known for our involvement in changing the world to a better place. It is called ‘social holiness’ (John Wesley) / social justice. We do food pantry, soup kitchen, diaper drive, Loads of Love---they are all good. But if we stop on that level, failing to connect them to Christ, our mission is not complete. In other words, we must bring them to their Heavenly Father for their eternal good. Otherwise, the Church of God will be no different from secular charities such as United Ways.

Now, let’s check out three qualities of God’s Kingdom. Righteousness, Peace, and Joy. The three marks of a believer in Christ.

First, **righteousness**. Don’t let this theological jargon scare you. The word ‘righteousness’ simply means “being right with” in your relationships. With God first and with others next. Righteousness with God means ‘peace with God,’ which is the outcome of what Christ has done on the cross for us. Before we came to faith in Christ, due to our sins, we had no communication with God. Our sins blocked our access to God, and we were the outsiders of salvation. The Bible says that sin made us ‘the enemies of God’ (Romans 5:10). However, when Christ paid the wages of our sins on the cross through His own death, we were reconciled with God. When we accepted that truth into our hearts through our repentance, then the peace between God and us was restored. We have redemption and forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7-8). God reckons our faith in Jesus as ‘righteousness’ (Romans 4:9).

Once we are right with God, and once we are reconciled with our Heavenly Father, then, we move onto our relationships with others. Same idea. We make peace with one another by obeying Christ’s commands, that is, to repent, to forgive, and to love. We

become right with each other by mutual acceptance and kindness, repentance and confession, and forgiveness and love. E.g., Matthew 5:44. *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* Only those who know Christ can do these things, because they want to make it right even with enemies.

**Peace:** Once a friend of mine, retired farmer, said that all he wanted was to have ‘peace and quiet.’ I agree. Who doesn’t want it, right? Here’s a simple question for you. Do you have peace in your heart? I am not just talking about peace and quiet when everything is well in your life. Rather, I am talking about the peace that surpasses all understanding that keeps your heart and mind. The peace that overflows from your heart. The peace that transcends adversities. E.g., Mr. Horatio Spafford (who lost four daughters in one day in the Atlantic Ocean) wrote: *“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”* Only those who have the Kingdom of God in their heart can say that.

**Joy:** Joy is the Christian terminology. But before I proceed, let’s hear how the world defines ‘joy’: *“The word joy refers to the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune, and is typically associated with feelings of intense, long lasting happiness”* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy>). Joy is the emotion evoked by success or good fortune. It is a long-lasting happiness. It doesn’t make a clear distinction between joy and happiness. In fact, many people use both words interchangeably. Joy is happiness and happiness is joy.

However, in our faith, joy is far different from happiness. You may lose your happiness if you fail, for example, yet you still can have joy. This is what I mean by that. I am talking about the joy of Christ. Christ is the source and the giver of our joy. Only Christ, none other, can give this joy to us. Christ says so, that the world cannot give us His joy (John 16:22). Therefore, people who don’t know Christ cannot have this joy nor know it. Unlike happiness, this joy of Christ transcends our daily circumstances. I hope by now you understand the difference between joy and happiness. How? Happiness comes and goes, and it hinges upon success and good circumstances. Therefore, it disappears quickly when things turn wrong. Joy stays with us even in adversity. Happiness is conditional. Joy is transcendental.

E.g., C. S. Lewis, in his book ‘*Surprised by Joy*,’ says that all pleasures are not substitutes for joy (*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Kindle Edition, p. 169). He writes, "I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again... I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is" (*ibid*, p. 18). Did you hear? Joy is never in our power. That’s the joy I am talking about. Such joy only Christ can give. No one or nothing else can.

The world doesn't understand it, nor can give it or take it away from us no matter what happens. Joy is the Kingdom property.

**In the Holy Spirit.** All these things, righteousness, peace, and joy are possible only in the Spirit. God's Spirit is specialized in this business. Holy Spirit is the channel through whom our Heavenly Father grants us righteousness, peace, and joy. Such gifts from above come to us naturally when we submit ourselves to the Spirit of God who guides us into all truth (John 16:13). When we obey His voice and walk in the ways of the Lord, we will bear fruits of righteousness, peace, and joy. The opposite is true, too. If we don't walk in the Holy Spirit, that is, to follow desires in the flesh, and we will bear the fruits of the flesh instead. Paul, in Galatians 5, demonstrates the stark contrast between the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

<sup>16</sup> *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.* <sup>17</sup> *For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want.* <sup>18</sup> ... <sup>19</sup> **Now the deeds of the flesh are evident**, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, ..., that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> **But the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:16-23).

## Conclusion

It is God's will for you to be in His kingdom and to live in righteousness, peace, and joy. When you believe in Christ and know Him, you are right with God. Ask yourself if you have peace with God and with your neighbors. Do you have peace and joy in your heart? If you do, then, thank God, and continue. If not, reconcile with God by repenting your sins, believing in what Christ has done for you, then you will have righteousness. Reconcile with your family and friends through mutual forgiveness and repentance. Submit yourself to the Spirit of God in you and start walking in His guidance. Then, you will have joy and peace that last. You won't regret it. Amen.