

S e r m o n s o n
Matthew

The Kingdom of Heaven
Matthew 5:1-3

With Study Questions

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Matthew 5:1-3

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:1-3).

Preface

For Theirs is the Kingdom

Both John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching about the kingdom of God. Jesus would now preach, arguably, the greatest sermon in history. The Beatitudes (the "blessed be" portion of the sermon) begins and ends with statements regarding the nature of, and the blessings bestowed upon, the people who are genuine citizens of Christ's kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven has been a widely debated subject. Since the gospel of Matthew is so emphatic about the kingdom of God, it would do us well to dedicate one sermon uniquely to this topic.

When you think of the kingdom of heaven, what comes to mind? Let's examine various characteristics of this kingdom.

I. Kingdom Characteristics

Anticipated and Transferred

Although the kingdom of God existed in seed form in the Old Testament with the Nation of Israel, the full expression of the Kingdom (concurrent with the birth of the King, Isaiah 9:6, 7) was a much anticipated event. We are told that Joseph of Arimathea was "himself waiting for the kingdom of God" (Matthew 15:43). The kingdom of God was to be taken from Israel and "given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). The kingdom would no longer be merely one nation but it would be a holy catholic (universal) nation/church.

A Soon Coming Kingdom

Numerous times we read that the kingdom of God was "at hand." Jesus made it quite clear that His presence meant the ushering in of this kingdom by stating,

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matthew 12:28).

I might point out here that it strains the text to suggest that this kingdom is the future millennial kingdom we hear so much about in books like *Left Behind* and the *Late Great Planet Earth*. The King has come and also His kingdom. There is also no point (as some have attempted) in seeking to make a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 19:23, 24 Jesus uses the terms interchangeably. One might also compare Matthew 13:11 with its parallel in Mark 4:10, 11.

A Geographical/Spiritual Kingdom

In one sense the kingdom of God had a temporal and geographical side to it; it could "come near you" (Luke 10:9). But in another sense the kingdom is very spiritual

being “within” people (Luke 17:21) and something “flesh and blood cannot inherit” (1 Corinthians 15:50). The blessings of this kingdom are both eternal and in history.

So He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29, 30).

And yet we also learn that it is a kingdom that one enters through many trials (Acts 14:22).

Not a Political Kingdom

The kingdom of God is not like other kingdoms—with borders and flags and a military. The means by which the kingdom advances is not like worldly kingdoms.

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

Growth and Permeation

Yet at the same time it is a kingdom which, starting small, like a mustard seed, will continue to grow until the end of history (Matthew 13:31-33) and, like leaven, will have a profound affect upon all areas of life (Matthew 13:33). The Bible seems to indicate that even though this kingdom is not like other kingdoms; all other kingdoms will eventually be won over by this kingdom

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15)!

The success of this kingdom will be accomplished by the zeal of the Lord of hosts (Isaiah 9:7) and appears to be the task of Christ throughout history.

Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24, 25).

Entrance in the Kingdom

Entrance into the kingdom of God can also be very puzzling. Entrance into the kingdom of God is the context of Jesus’ well-known statement “**With men this is impossible**” (Matthew 19:26a). The kingdom seems to favor sinners.

Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you (Matthew 21:31).

Yet at the same time those who are committed to live lives of sin shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-12).

Jesus taught the necessity of having a child-like faith to enter the kingdom (Mark 10:15). This child-like faith includes belief and repentance (Mark 1:14).

Jesus had already taught the impossibility of entering the kingdom of God! But He followed that by teaching that “**with God all things are possible**” (Matthew 19:26b). When asked about His kingdom parables Jesus revealed the power of God at work.

He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11).

The faith necessary to enter the kingdom of God is granted by God Himself. This is accentuated when Jesus informs Nicodemus of the astounding prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom.

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

We seem to have gotten used to thinking that this re-birth (or birth from above) is something we are capable of achieving through the mere force of our own will; but clearly with man this is impossible.

Heaven

In perhaps its most consummated sense the kingdom of God is heaven itself.

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

II. A Brief Description

Having said all this, what do we make of the kingdom of God? Briefly it seems the kingdom of God can be thought of in the following terms:

Church

It is not confined to Israel or any other worldly nation. Yet it is not outside the grasp of humanity. In a temporal and physical sense the kingdom of God is associated with Christian churches—local churches—which together form the holy catholic (universal) church. These are the organisms where the King’s law and gospel is preached, His sacraments performed, His praises sung, and His victory proclaimed.

There has been recent downplay of the importance of the church. This has not always been the case. The Westminster Confession (1640’s) teaches something that many would find astonishing but actually should not surprise us at all.

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (italics mine). (Acts 2:47) (1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Cor. 12:12–13, Ps. 2:8, Rev. 7:9, Rom. 15:9–12) (1 Cor. 7:14, Acts 2:39, Ezek. 16:20–21, Rom. 11:16, Gen. 3:15, Gen. 17:7) (Matt. 13:47, Isa. 9:7) (Eph. 2:19, Eph. 3:15)¹

Clearly Christ ordained that there would be local churches with pastors, deacons, elders, sacraments, etc. (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) who would be responsible for the handling of the sacred message which is the power of God to salvation. So Christians must be leery of those who downplay or despise the local church for they, in a certain sense, are downplaying the kingdom of God.

The Spirit

But these physical, temporal, outward entities are not, in and of themselves, the full expression or force of God’s kingdom; they are instruments or means of grace. God,

¹ *The Westminster confession of faith*. 1996 (Chapter XXV, 2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

by His Spirit, uses these instruments to bring His children into His eternal and spiritual kingdom and nurture their souls. Hence Jesus can tell us the kingdom of God is within us. To neglect the church, therefore, is to deprive oneself and others of the biblical means by which God advances His kingdom.

To say one is advancing in his spiritual walk with God apart from the church is like a man saying he is advancing in his fatherhood even though he has neglected all normal means of access to his family. He may say, "But I pray and read the Bible." This would be equivalent to saying "But I talk to my kids on the phone." It might be an overstatement to say there is no relationship, but it is certainly not nurtured according to the design of Christ.

If church is neglected, eventually those blessings which Christ has instituted to flow through the church will begin to diminish.

The Affect

The Bible also seems to give the impression that when Christ is glorified through His church, church members will become salt and light in every venue of life. The kingdom of God will have its affect upon family and community. This will be widespread. The kingdoms of the world will be blessed by the advancement of the true King and coming of His kingdom.

III. The Warning

Having said all this, let us be cautious. In a physical sense, when we go to church we are in the kingdom of God. But we must be born again in order to enter spiritually. This explains the fact there are both physical things said about the kingdom of God (in terms of what will happen in God's kingdom in history) and spiritual things said about the kingdom of God (things that have happened or will happen invisibly and eternally). With this in mind we can more properly and easily understand Christ's parables about the kingdom.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind,⁴⁸ "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away" (Matthew 13:47,48).

Are You A Member?

We can look around this room as those who have been caught in that dragnet. The Sermon on the Mount will challenge us to examine whether we are merely members of the outward kingdom, or whether our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees; a righteousness that is wrought by God, proceeding from the heart, versus a righteousness that is wrought by the corrupt will of man, and is merely outward.

In Matthew 22:1-14 we read of a man who was in the kingdom (in an outward sense) but was not clothed properly (presumably in Christ). He was cast into the outer darkness. There is an aspect of this kingdom that is privately between you and God. Have you genuinely trusted in Christ? Do you believe in Him and Him alone to save you from your sins? Do you seek to repent of your sins and mortify your flesh genuinely and sincerely?

In perhaps His most well known sermon, Jesus will preach about His Kingdom. He will speak of its nature and the nature of its citizens. He will preach on the Spirit-endowed qualities of its members and the blessings bestowed upon those who have these qualities. Those specific qualities are what we will come to next as we study the Beatitudes.

Questions for Study

1. The beginning and end of the Beatitudes addresses what (page 1)?
2. Was the coming of the kingdom a surprise (page 1)?
3. To whom was the kingdom transferred (page 1)?
4. When would the kingdom begin (page 1)?
5. Is the kingdom geographical or spiritual? Explain (page 2).
6. How is the kingdom distinct from worldly kingdoms (page 2)?
7. Discuss the growth of the kingdom (page 2)?
8. What did Jesus mean when He said it is impossible to enter the kingdom (pages 2, 3)?
9. How does one enter the kingdom (pages 2, 3)?
10. What is the kingdom in its most ultimate sense (page 3)?
11. Is it proper to consider the visible church (made up of local churches) as the kingdom of God? Explain (pages 3, 4).
12. Explain the relationship between the visible church and the spiritual or invisible church (page 4).
13. What will be accomplished by the kingdom of God (page 4)?
14. Does being a member of the visible kingdom assure one of being a member of the invisible kingdom (page 5)?