

THE WHOLEHEARTED PURSUIT OF THE KINGDOM

A. Praying for the Kingdom

MATTHEW 6:9-10 "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

What does it mean to pray for the coming of the kingdom?

B. Seeking God's Kingdom

MATTHEW 6:31-33 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

What does it mean to make the kingdom our primary preoccupation?

C. Parables of the Kingdom

MATTHEW 13:44-46 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

What does it mean to sell everything you have in order to gain the kingdom?



We rarely think of our world in terms of Kings and Kingdoms. They inhabit a rich place in fantasy and fiction, so we often find ourselves escaping into foreign lands and distant times in movies like "Star Wars," "the Princess Bride," "the Lord of the Rings" or "Chronicles of Narnia," but as soon as the credits roll we quietly dismiss any real notion of King and Kingdom.

When we do think of Kings and Kingdoms, we often think of the dysfunctional family in Britain. It would be hard to imagine where tabloid journalism would be without them. Their scandals grace the racks at checkout counters in grocery story and gas stations, and leave us all too glad that we fought a revolutionary war to forever divest ourselves of any notion of King and Kingdom.

Yet when we enter the story of Scripture we are once again immersed in the reality of King and Kingdom. Many would say that the single biggest concept in Scripture is the eager expectation of a coming King and the establishment of his kingdom. Nothing should shape who we are, how we think and what we do than the gracious invitation of our King to know him and participate in his kingdom.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM

MATTHEW 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

LUKE 17:20 Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

MATTHEW 16:28 "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

John and Jesus preach an identical message, "Repent for the Kingdom of God has come near."

1. What do you think John and Jesus mean by "Kingdom of God?"
2. Are they describing a present or future reality (trick question)?
3. How is the kingdom a present reality?
4. How is it a future reality?
5. How should the future inform the present reality?

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

A. The Character of the Kingdom

MATTHEW 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

MATTHEW 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The Beatitudes describe the character of the kingdom. Jesus begins and ends the beatitudes with the singular blessing "for theirs is the kingdom of God." This is a literary device often described as "an inclusio." When a section of Scripture begins and ends on the same note, everything in between relates to the same topic. So Jesus is describing the character of the kingdom. The kingdom produces a people who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers and will often be misunderstood and persecuted.

How does the character of God's kingdom distinguish it from other kingdoms?

B. The Impact of the Kingdom (Matthew 5:12-16)

MATTHEW 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Immediately following the beatitudes, Jesus describes the influence of the kingdom. He tells us we are "the salt of the earth" and the "light of the world."

1. How does the character of the kingdom (described in the beatitudes) contribute to the Influence of the kingdom described in verses 13-16?
2. How can we lose our "saltiness?"
3. How does Jesus describe what it means to be the "light of the world?"
4. How would you describe the good deeds that characterize the kingdom?
5. What is the purpose of our good deeds?

C. The Righteousness of the Kingdom (Matthew 5:17-20)

MATTHEW 5:17-20 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

1. How does the kingdom relate to the Law and the Prophets?
2. If the Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, why do the "Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, (who were meticulous law keepers), fall so short of the kingdom ideal?"