

Journey Through the Bible

(SE College Conference Review)

Message 7: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Outline:

- I. Message 1: The Gospel of the Kingdom**
 - A. **Focus:** The Bible reveals that the central, primary, and most important goal of the gospel of God is to bring us into the kingdom of God; for the sake of the kingdom we must repent to be brought under the authority and heavenly rule of God.
 1. Mark 1:15 And saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel.
- II. Message 2: The Divine Life and the Kingdom**
 - A. **Focus:** The kingdom of God is the Lord Jesus sown as the seed of the divine life into us; by allowing this seed to grow and develop in us, we are kept under the ruling of the divine life and become kings who reign in life and exercise His dominion on the earth.
 1. John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- III. Message 3: The Exercise and Reward of the Kingdom**
 - A. **Focus:** If we are exercised and disciplined to live in the reality of the kingdom today by seeking Christ and living a restricted life under His rule, we will receive the reward in the manifestation of the kingdom of having the uttermost enjoyment of Christ.
 1. 1 Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold.
- IV. Message 4: Kingdom and the Church**
 - A. **Focus:** As we live the kingdom life in the church life - which is a life of righteousness toward ourselves, peace with others, and joy in the Holy Spirit - we submit to the heavenly rule, exercise the subjective keys of the kingdom, and preach the gospel of the kingdom to bring in the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.
 1. Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

READING EXCERPT

THE GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM

In these messages we will consider the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church, but let us first ask a question that is vitally related to our subject: What is the object of the gospel? In our preaching we generally tell the gospel story from the human standpoint, seldom from the divine. For one thing, we preachers lack a lofty enough concept of the gospel; for another, it is easier to preach from the human angle, for then we can make a more personal appeal to our audience. If we preach the gospel from God's standpoint, our hearers are apt to consider it too remote, and because they feel it is of no immediate interest, it is difficult for us to touch their emotions; so we make salvation from sin the object, and we offer our audience joy and peace. Occasionally, we raise the standard a little and present life as the goal. Our starting point is man's sin, man's unrest, man's misery, and man's dead condition. Our goal is pardon, peace, joy, and life. Because we stress man's need when we preach the gospel, our converts stress their gain when they accept the gospel. They will say, "I believed on the Lord Jesus, and I obtained forgiveness of sins; I obtained peace and joy and life."

But if we look carefully through the Bible, setting aside our own concepts, we see that the scriptural presentation is quite different from ours. It is this: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). It presents the kingdom as the object of the gospel. We should repent, not merely to obtain pardon, not merely to obtain peace, not merely to obtain life but because there is a heavenly kingdom that requires our repentance. We must repent in order to become partakers in this kingdom. We may be satisfied to have obtained pardon, peace, and life, but God is not satisfied with that.

It was not only John the Baptist who began his gospel preaching with the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (3:2). These same words were also spoken by the Lord Jesus when He began His ministry (4:17). In the New Testament dispensation, when presenting the gospel to man, God presents the kingdom as its one transcendent object. When in the New Testament He substitutes grace for law, He does it for the kingdom's sake, because the law is impotent to lead men into the kingdom. Once we see the kingdom, we realize how inadequate was our former apprehension of the gospel.

What a familiar topic the new birth is! How many have preached on the subject from the third chapter of John! But how many have seen the purpose of the new birth? Our Lord said, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The object He presented was the kingdom. The purpose of the new birth is to enable us to enter the kingdom.

I fear that not many have this concept of the new birth—that thereby God has given us His life so that we may be able to partake of His kingdom. If I am to live in the kingdom of God, I need to possess a life other than the life that I have by nature. I must be born again. I must receive the life of God, for unless I possess His life, I cannot live in His kingdom.

What we have said makes it sufficiently clear that the gospel always has the kingdom of God in view; it is therefore called "the gospel of the kingdom." Matthew 24:14 says, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole inhabited earth." But what is the kingdom?

The Christianity of today has made the matter of the kingdom largely a matter of prophecy, a matter related to the future. Many think to "enter into the kingdom" is equivalent to "going to heaven." When I was a child, I heard much preaching of this kind—setting forth "the kingdom of the heavens" or "the kingdom of God" as a place of eternal happiness reserved for the future. This presentation is contrary to the Scriptures. The Scriptures show that the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the heavens, relates to our life in this present time. We acknowledge there is an aspect of the kingdom that is in the future, but the scriptural emphasis is on the present rather than the future. The kingdom touches our actual, everyday life.

The word kingdom used in the New Testament is a strong term in the Greek. Some translators have advocated the use of sovereignty as its equivalent. The idea is one of sovereign rule, of kingly authority. Do you recall the words of Revelation 20:4 and 6? Both verses speak of the resurrected saints reigning with Christ for a thousand years. The word reign used in both verses comes from the same root as the word kingdom. The kingdom of God is the reign of God; the kingdom of the heavens is the reign of heaven. But what does this imply? Surely, it is not difficult for us to understand. Before we were saved, we were under the dominion of Satan, and outwardly, our lives were governed by men. As children, we were under the authority of our parents; as students, we were under the authority of our teachers; as citizens, we were under the authority of the state; but there was no divine authority in our lives.

Look at the modern cities. What order prevails! A white line runs along the middle of the road and controls the comings and goings. No one crosses that white line. When someone is about to drive in a certain direction, and he sees a notice indicating one-way traffic, he does not go that way. Elsewhere, he sees No Parking, so he does not park there. How orderly! But remove the government, remove the police, remove the law courts, and see what the cities would look like. There would be utter chaos. Why is it that today people are so orderly? It is because the government, the police, and the law courts are exercising control over them. Are they under the authority of God? No. And neither were we before we were saved. We were not under the rule of God, which means that we were not in the kingdom of God.

But one day, through the gospel, God came to us and said, "You must repent!" Repent of what? It is not just to repent of certain wrongs, not just to repent of certain sins, but to repent radically—to repent of not being subject to the authority of heaven, to repent of not submitting to the sovereignty of God.

The reason for our wrongdoing is primarily our nonacceptance of God's government. Men commit all kinds of sins because they will not let God exercise His authority over them. But how can He bring them under His authority? It is by means of the gospel. The gospel that the New Testament reveals is a gospel proclaimed to rebels—to men who have resisted God's authority, to men who have rejected His rule, to men who would not have Him to reign over them. That gospel cleanses such men and puts God's life within them so that they can accept God's government. That is the New Testament gospel.

You have heard the gospel, you have believed, and you have been saved. But have you seen that the gospel has brought you under the rule of God? Have you seen that you have been saved for this specific purpose, that you might come under His control? Have you seen that your salvation is not merely a question of pardon, peace, and life but that the very object of your being forgiven and having life imparted into you is to bring you under the sovereign rule of God? That is the gospel. Revelation 1:5-6 reads, "To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom." The reason God washed us in the precious blood was that we might be brought under His government.

As I have preached the gospel in different places, I have had personal contact with numbers of people who have been clearly saved and who, after their salvation, have said something like this to me: "How is it that ever since I was saved, I seem to be under some sort of control? It seems as though someone has taken over the management of my life so that when I want to do this, something in me says, 'You can't!' And when I want to do that, it says, 'No! No!' Formerly, I was my own master; now I can no longer do as I please. What does it all mean?"

Is not that your story too? Yes, that is the story of every saved person. Yet at the time of our salvation we never thought that Someone would come into our lives and take control. Many people, when they are first saved, do not understand this and have asked me for an explanation. I have sought to explain it this way: How did you believe in the Lord? Did you not receive Him into your life? Then do you know that the Lord you received is not only Savior but also King? He is not only the crucified One; He is also the One who has been exalted to the throne. He has received "all authority...in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). "God has made Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Today He is no longer the Savior on the cross. He is the Savior on the throne. It is as King that He has become your Savior, so His coming has brought His throne into your life. Every saved person is under an inner government, and this government is the government of the kingdom. Hitherto you have been aware of a restraint upon you, but you have not realized that there is a throne within your life. The kingdom of God is within you.

A few days ago I met someone who said with amazement, "My fellow students can enter heartily into all sorts of recreations, and I long to do the same. Yet when I want to take part in those amusements, there is a strong inner restraint. Why is there all this trouble inside?" We sometimes tell people that there is trouble inside because they have the life of the Lord inside. That is true enough, but it is not the whole truth. The question is not just one of a life within but of an authority within.

Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). What are "eating and drinking"? These are the very practical matters of daily life. God's kingdom is likewise a practical matter of daily life—as practical a matter as eating and drinking. God's kingdom is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." When the authority of God's kingdom is allowed to operate within us, these three things will characterize our daily life—toward ourselves we will be strict in all matters of "righteousness"; in our relation to others we will be characterized by "peace"; and in our walk with God we will have "joy in the Holy Spirit." If we lack joy in the Holy Spirit, something has gone wrong with us. It is when we throw off the divine restraint that we are silent while others are praising. While they sing their Hallelujahs, we cannot even produce an Amen. Our spirit becomes weighted so that we cannot rejoice. When righteousness marks our personal walk, when we have peace in our relation with others, and when we have joy in the presence of God—then the kingdom is manifesting itself in our everyday life.

Let us cease to think of the kingdom as a matter merely of prophecy. The New Testament reveals that as soon as we are saved, the throne of God is brought into our inner being so that, thereafter, our lives are lived in subjection to His kingdom.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between the gospel of grace and the gospel of the kingdom?
2. In Matthew we see that Christ is the King; have you had any personal experiences of Him being your king?
3. How do we come under this heavenly kingdom?
4. Where is the kingdom of God today?