

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Most Christians do not know how to properly define the Kingdom of God. Some think it is strictly a future hope tied in with Christ's second coming. Others have made it synonymous with the professing church. Neither is correct. The Kingdom of God is not strictly a future hope tied in with Christ's second coming. It is the realm of God's rule both present, and future. Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God, of which He was the embodiment, when He commenced His earthly ministry (CP Mt 4:13-17; 10:1-8; 12:22-28; Lu 17:20-21). *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Kingdom of God* mean the same. The terms are interchangeable (CP Mt 19:23-24). The requirements for entering into the Kingdom of God are repentance from sin, and being born again (CP Mk 1:14-15; Ac 2:38 and Jn 3:3-5).

Repentance is that divinely wrought conviction of sin in the heart that the soul is guilty before God, and a resolute turning away from sin. It involves both a change of mind about sin and a change of heart-attitude toward sin. It is at the time a renunciation of sin, and an acceptance of the Holy Spirit's enabling power for holy living. Repentance is both God's gift and man's responsibility (CP Ac 5:30-31 with Lu 5:11-24). This is called the parable of the prodigal son. It emphasizes the character of true repentance – a complete turnaround and return to our Heavenly Father is required. Truly repentant sinners have a deep conviction of their lost state and earnestly seek to be reconciled to God. They determine to be partakers of the Kingdom of God and all the salvation benefits it provides.

The second requirement for entry into the Kingdom of God – being born-again – expresses the change wrought in the life of a repentant sinner by the Holy Spirit after being converted to Christ. It means the sinner has died unto sin and has been born anew unto righteousness. This is called the doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth. It is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. It is not limited to the initial act of renewal when one is first converted to Christ, but is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, renewing and transforming lives as they are surrendered to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of His word, throughout their Christian walk (CP Ro 12:1-2; 2Cor 3:18; Eph 4:23-24; Col 3:8-17; Tit 3:5).

Next, we need to know why the Kingdom of God cannot be made synonymous with the professing church, nor the church with the Kingdom. Firstly, while the professing church is the visible manifestation of the Kingdom in its present earthly aspect – the Kingdom works in the world through the church, bringing to all who will receive it the blessings of God's rule – the church only represents those who profess Christ as Saviour. The Kingdom of God however, is the whole of God's redeeming activity in Christ in the world (CP Mt 13:1-23). This is called the parable of the sower. It and the following parables from Mt 13 all concern the nature and development of the Kingdom of God, both present and future. In the parable of the sower, Jesus teaches that among those in the Kingdom who profess God's name, there will be apostasy and

worldliness, as well as faithfulness and Godliness (CP Mt 13:24-30). This is called the parable of the tares of the field. The tares represent the wicked; the wheat, the righteous. Jesus teaches here that the wicked and the righteous must exist side by side with each other in the world throughout the Kingdom age until Christ's second coming, when they will be separated (CP V36-43). There will always be evil present in the world in opposition to the good and the Kingdom of God in its present earthly aspect will always be befouled by the presence and plots of Satan (CP Mt 13:31-32).

This is called the parable of the mustard seed. The most popular view of this parable is that the enormous growth of the tree from such a small seed illustrates the rapid spread of the gospel and the growth of Christianity throughout the earth from a very small beginning, with the figure of the birds of the air lodging in the branches of the tree as typifying new converts to Christianity finding shelter in the church. This view however illustrates the growth of Christianity and the professing church in the earth, whereas Jesus used the mustard seed to illustrate the present earthly aspect of the Kingdom of God, which as we learned earlier, having a much broader aspect than the professing church, covers the whole of human society (CP V32). The field represents the world here too as it does in the parable of the tares of the field, so the mustard seed represents the Kingdom of God embracing all nations and filling all ages throughout the earth until Christ's second coming. The parable illustrates the abnormal growth of the Kingdom from a small beginning to a vast sphere of operation for demonic powers represented by the birds of the air who lodge in the branches of the tree. (As Jesus, when outlining the principles of interpretation used the figure of birds – fowls of the air – to symbolize demon powers in the parable of the sower, so too He uses them to symbolize demon powers here. Jesus would not use the same figure of speech in two different senses, making one parable contradict the teaching of another). The birds, or fowls of the air which lodge in the branches of the tree here, are a figure of the emissaries of Satan hiding behind the cloak of Christianity, disguised as apostles of Christ and ministers of righteousness (CP Mt 24:5 with 2Cor 11:12-15).

Satan has had to watch the spread of the gospel and the growth of Christianity throughout the earth from the time Jesus ushered in the Kingdom, and he has ever sought to find a shelter in it. In the early centuries of church history he attacked the church from outside the Kingdom, but when that failed to extinguish the light of the gospel he changed his tactics and moved his forces inside the Kingdom. Since then countless millions of sincere people genuinely seeking the truth, have been condemned to hell after being waylaid and deceived by his false apostles, and caught up in their counterfeit Christianity (CP Mt 7:15, 24:11, 24-25; Mk 13:21-23; Ro 16:17; Col 2:8; 2Pe 2:1-3; 1Jn 2:18-19; 4:1-3, Jude 3-4).

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This interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed harmonizes with the previous two parables of the in Mt 13. There are seven all told and they all concern the nature and development of the Kingdom of God (CP Mt 13:33). This is called the parable of the leaven. Here Jesus uses leaven to symbolize the pervasive character of evil permeating the professing church which, as we learned earlier, is the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God in its present earthly aspect. Leaven is a fermenting agent used in bread - making to make the dough rise. It requires time to fulfill the process, but once introduced to the dough it permeates the whole mass and the process is irreversible. Because of its pervasive nature leaven signifies a corrupting influence among God's people. In the New Testament it is symbolic of any evil influence in the church which, if allowed to remain, can corrupt the whole body of believers (CP Mt 16:6-12; Mk 8:15; Lu 12:1; Ga 5:6-9). Both Jesus and Paul used leaven to symbolize the pervasive character of evil permeating the professing church, yet a great many Christians believe that Jesus uses leaven in a good sense in the parable of the leaven to symbolize the permeating effect of the gospel in Christianising the world. Nowhere in scripture though is it taught that the world will ever be Christianised. In fact the opposite is the case – most people who hear the gospel will reject it (CP Mt 13:18-23, 24:11-13; Ro 1:18-32; 2Th 2:7-12; 1Ti 4:1; 2 Pe 3:3-4; Jude 17-19; Rev 3:14-16). It must be re-stated here that Jesus would never use a figure of speech in two different senses, making one parable contradict the teaching of another. All the parables concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom in Ch13 harmonize.

As leaven is symbolic of evil elsewhere in scripture so too it symbolizes evil in the parable of the leaven. Another significant factor in this interpretation is the fact that the woman *hid* (KJV) the leaven in the *meal*. If the leaven represented something good why hide it. The word *hid* means conceal. The *meal* typifies God's word, and the leaven was concealed in it. It was not openly mixed in with the meal but covertly introduced to it. This represents the subtle way in which the forces of Satan are at work in the Kingdom spreading their corruptive influence by adulterating God's word and undermining its authority among professing Christians (CP Mt 7:15, 24:17,24-25; Mk 13:21-23; 2Cor 11:12-15; 2Pe 2:1-3). In the parable of the leaven Jesus foreshows professed Christianity's internal corruption.

There are still three more parables concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom of God in Mt 13. Let us see what Jesus likens the Kingdom to next (CP Mt 13:44). This is called the parable of the hidden treasure. The most popular interpretation of this parable is that the treasure symbolizes the Kingdom – the Kingdom is a priceless treasure to be desired above all else, and as such, one should be willing to part with everything in order to possess it. Another view is that Jesus Himself is the priceless treasure for whom one must also be prepared to sell all to possess. These are both commendable views and what they express should be the intent of every Christian, but they are not what the parable teaches.

sower and the tares of the field, and those following

Still another interpretation is that the treasure is Israel, which is called *God's peculiar treasure* in scripture (CP Ex 19:5; Psa 135:4). It would be easy to agree with this interpretation except for the fact that Israel was always openly in view as God's treasured possession right throughout scripture, whereas the treasure in the parable represented something hidden, even in Mt13, as Jesus spoke the parable (CP De 7:6; Isa 62:1-5; Mal 3:16-17). Israel was never hidden like the treasure in the parable. Furthermore, Jesus did not pay the purchase price for Israel alone in His redeeming death, but for the whole world of sinners – Jews and Gentiles alike (CP Jn 1:29, 3:16-17, 4:42, 6:33,51, 12:47; 2Cor 5:17-19; 1Jn 2:2, 4:14).

It is easier to understand this parable in the light of those scriptures. *World* here means all mankind. This is not teaching that all mankind will be saved as some think, but that the price Jesus paid was sufficient for all mankind. Although the man purchased the field in the parable, it was the treasure, not the field that was the man's object. He purchased the field in order to possess the treasure. The treasure represents something that was hidden even as Jesus told the parable. It was the church that was hidden. The church was decreed in God's eternal purpose from the beginning of time, but it was not revealed, even to the angels in Heaven, until Jesus revealed it to the disciples in Mt 16 (CP Mt 16:13-18). This is the first mention of the church in scripture. Until then the church was a mystery, known only to God (CP Ro 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:7-8; Eph 1:3-5, 9-10, 3:1-11; Col 1:25-27; 2 Ti 1:1,8-10; Tit 1:1-3; 1 Pe 1:3-12, 18-20). The church is the treasure, and the man who purchased the field in order to possess the treasure is Jesus. The field represents the world of sinners – the whole of human society – for whom He died. Jesus teaches in this parable that the church is the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God in its earthly aspect. This interpretation harmonizes with the rest of the parables in Mt 13 concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom of God. It also shows why neither Jesus nor the Kingdom could be the treasure as so many think.

(CP Mt 13:45-46) This is called the parable of the pearl of great price. It also has many different meanings ascribed to it, but it is generally agreed among Bible scholars that this and the parable of the hidden treasure form a pair, that they both teach the same truth, namely, that the object of the man's desire is of such great value that he sells all to purchase it. Again the man is Jesus and the church is the object of His desire. In the parable of the hidden treasure we saw the incomparable worth of the church underlined by the price Jesus paid at Calvary to possess it. He paid the redemption price for every living soul from that day forth to enter into the Kingdom of God through the church, but sadly, most will reject His redemption offer. We see in the pearl of great price in this parable a flawless pearl without spot or blemish, typifying the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom at the consummation of this age when Jesus comes back – after the battle of Armageddon –

to present to Himself a glorious church, without spot or blemish (CP Eph 1:3-14, 5:25-27). The merchant's purchase of the pearl in the parable symbolizes Jesus' redemption of His purchased possession – the church – in Eph 1:14. This interpretation of the parable also harmonizes with the rest of the parables concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom in Mt 13.

Let us summarize the parables here: in its present earthly aspect the Kingdom of God is fragmented by apostasy and backsliding; (parable of the *sower*); by the emissaries of Satan co-existing in the world with the children of the Kingdom (parable of the *tares of the field*); by counterfeit Christianity and false religious systems (parable of the *mustard seed*); by internal corruption in professed Christianity (parable of the *leaven*). Jesus then went on to show that the church would be the visible manifestation of the Kingdom in the world (parable of the *hidden treasure*), and then He foretells the Kingdom's ultimate triumph at the end of the age when He returns for a church that is without spot or blemish (parable of the *pearl of great price*).

Now to the last of the parables concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom of God in Mt 13 (CP V47-50). This is called the parable of the net. This teaching is similar to the parable of the tares of the field. They both teach that good and evil – the righteous and the wicked – are presently intermingled in the Kingdom. However, whereas the parable of the tares of the field describes the Kingdom in its present earthly aspect, and the day of judgement when the wicked will be cast down to Hell as a future event, the parable of the net depicts the day of judgement itself in the figure of the fisherman in V48 casting the bad fish away and keeping the good ones. The good fish represent the righteous who will rule and reign with Christ in the future eternal Kingdom (CP 2 Ti 2:11; 1 Pe 2:5,9; 2 Pe 1:11; Rev 5:8-10). In the seven parables relating to the Kingdom in Mt 13, Jesus gives us a progressive insight into the earthly aspect of the Kingdom from its inception until its ultimate triumph at the end of the age. Studied as a whole we see the contest between good and evil in the Kingdom; between the power of God and the power of Satan, which fulfills the first Messianic prophecy in scripture (CP Gen 3:15). Everything God said here is illustrated in the seven parables we have just studied from Mt 13. Not everyone will agree with this summation of what the seven parables teach, but they all clearly harmonize with each other and with what is taught about the Kingdom of God in its present earthly aspect elsewhere in scripture, as we have seen so many times in this study.

The second reason the Kingdom of God cannot be made synonymous with the professing church nor the church with the Kingdom, is because the church cannot redeem – it is the subject of redemption itself (CP Jn 15:3-5, 17:17; Eph 5:25-26). One can belong to the professing church but be lost forever to the Kingdom of God. This is taught right throughout the new testament (CP Mt 7:21-27, 12:30; Lu 9:57-62, 13:22-27; Ro 2:13; 1 Ti 6:17-21; Jas 1:22-25; 2 Pe 1:

5-11; Rev 3:14-22). The clear teaching in all these scriptures is that professing Christians can belong to the church but not to the Kingdom of God. The Laodicean church here is representative of nominal Christians throughout the Kingdom whose lives revolve around luxury living and accumulating material wealth and possessions, while all around them souls are dying, in need of the gospel. They love everything the world loves: sports, television, movies, the latest fashion trends and all forms of self-centered, self-indulgent and self-gratifying pleasures. Their church programmes are packaged to accommodate the culture of the world more than for worshipping Jesus. In fact, Jesus is so shut out of Laodicean Christians' lives that He has issued an invitation for them to fellowship with Him, *...behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me* (Rev 3:20). The irony of this scripture is that Christians use it to lead sinners to get saved; when in fact it is addressed to Christians who need saving, themselves. The letter to the Laodicean church is a warning to every individual Christian, because it is individual Christians who make up the church, and God holds them individually responsible for their own salvation (CP Mt 6:19-20; Lu 13:22-27; Jn 6:27; Php 2:12-13; 1 Ti 6:17-19; 2 Pe 1: 5-11).

When citing the beatitudes in His sermon on the mount in Mt 5, Jesus was laying down the principles of the Kingdom of God in its earthly aspect, and it is incumbent upon Christians to live out these principles in their daily walk (CP Mt 5:1-3). *The poor in spirit* are those who recognize their spiritual helplessness without Christ, and forego their own identities as individuals in order to possess the Kingdom. They see the Kingdom as the ultimate to be possessed (CP Mt 11:12). *The violent* here are those Christians who vigorously seek the Kingdom in all its power, no matter what it costs them. It is the responsibility of every professing Christian to seek unceasingly, in all its manifestations the Kingdom of God (CP Mt 5:4). This is the second principle of the Kingdom of God. *They that mourn* are those who are grieved over their own weakness in relation to God's standard of righteousness and Kingdom power, and are grieved in their spirit over the sin and immorality manifested in the world. They are comforted by receiving from God righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (CP Ro 14:17 with Ro 8:6).

*The meek* in the third Kingdom principle are those who find their refuge in God and commit their way entirely to Him (CP Mt 5:5). Meek is not weak, but controlled strength in gentleness and forbearance; self-control empowered by the Holy Spirit. *The meek shall inherit the earth* (CP Psa 37:11; Isa 29:19; Ga 5:22-23). The fourth principle of the Kingdom of God is to *hunger and thirst after righteousness* (CP Mt 5:6). The spiritual condition of Christians right throughout their lives will depend on how much they hunger and thirst after righteousness. The Christian's hunger for the things of God is destroyed by worldly anxiety, deceitfulness of riches (CP Mt 13:22), desire for other things (CP Mk 4:19), worldly pleasures (CP Lu 8:14), and failure to abide

in Christ (CP Jn 15:4). When the hunger for God and His righteousness is destroyed, those affected will forfeit their salvation, whereas those who continually hunger and thirst after righteousness will inherit the Kingdom of God (CP Mt 5:7). This is the fifth principle of the Kingdom... *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*. This means that Christians are to be not simply possessed of pity, but are to be actively compassionate toward those who are suffering from sin or sorrow. They mercifully desire to make such suffering less by bringing those people to the grace and help of God through Jesus Christ (CP Mt 18:21-35; Lu 10:30-37; Ga 6:1-2; 1 Pe 3:8-9).

The sixth principle of the Kingdom of God is the sixth beatitude (CP Mt 5:8). The *pure in heart* are those who have been cleansed from the pollution and the guilt of sin by the grace of God, and now strive to please and glorify God. They seek to have the same attitude of heart that God has – a love for righteousness and a hatred of evil. Only the pure in heart will inherit the Kingdom and see God. They shall be His children and dwell in His presence now, and in eternity (CP Mt 25:23; Ro 8:16-17; 1Pe 1:3-4; Rev 21:7, 22:4). The seventh principle of God's Kingdom is to be a *peacemaker* (CP Mt 5:9). Peacemakers are those who strive by their witness and life to bring sinners to be reconciled to God. Peacemakers are not simply ones who make peace between two parties, but ones who spread the good news of the peace of God which they themselves have experienced in His salvation (CP Isa 52:7; 2Cor 5:17; Eph 2:1-3; Tit 3:5; 1Pe 1:23). The eighth and ninth beatitudes are the last two Kingdom principles (CP Mt 5:10-11). *Persecution for righteousness sake and being reviled and persecuted* is a promised portion for Christians (CP Mk 10:29-30; Lu 6:22-23; 2 Ti 3:12; 1 Pe 4:12-16).

Christians will suffer unpopularity, rejection and criticism, but they are to rejoice when they do. They must beware of the temptation to compromise God's word in order to avoid these experiences, for the principles of God's Kingdom never change. All that live Godly in Christ shall suffer, but those who endure to the end shall rule and reign with Christ in the eternal Kingdom (CP Mt 5:12; 2 Cor 4:7-11). The Kingdom of God is established in the hearts of men, and the Beatitudes are the principles upon which the Kingdom, is based.

There are still five parables in Matthew's Gospel concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom of God which we still need to look at before bringing this study to the close. The first is called the parable of the unmerciful, or unforgiving servant. It teaches that forgiveness is also a Kingdom principle and it is incumbent upon Christians to live out this principle if they want to be a part of God's Kingdom (CP Mt 18:23-35). Next is the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. This teaches that salvation is by grace alone, not by merit. Everyone who responds affirmatively to God's call to Salvation will have a place of honour in His future eternal Kingdom. Length of service has no bearing on one's place in the Kingdom – new Christians are

just as important to God as those who have served Him for a long time (CP Mt 20:1-16). The phrase *many be called, but few chosen* simply means that while God's call to salvation goes out to all of humanity, only those who respond affirmatively to the call and conform to the requirements Jesus has laid down for salvation are chosen to inherit the future eternal Kingdom. The next parable is called the parable of the marriage feast (CP Mt 22:2-14). Jesus teaches here that in the present earthly aspect of the Kingdom of God, there are many professing Christians like the man in the parable. He wanted to partake of the king's provision, but would not wear a wedding garment as the king required. So too there are many professing Christians who want to partake of the Kingdom benefits, but on their terms also, not God's. They profess faith in Christ but are not yielded to the authority of God's word. And just as the man in the parable forfeited his place at the wedding feast and was cast into outer darkness, they will forfeit their place in the eternal Kingdom and be cast into Hell. (CP Mt 25:1-13) This is called the parable of the ten virgins. Jesus teaches here that only those who have prepared themselves for His second coming will inherit the Kingdom of God. It will not be open to those who profess to belong to Christ, but have no divine resources within.

The final parable concerning the nature and development of the Kingdom of God in Matthew's gospel is called the parable of the talents. It will be our final teaching in this study (CP Mt 25:14-30). What this parable teaches has a double application – present and future: what Christians do in the present earthly aspect of the Kingdom determines their reward and state in the future eternal Kingdom. What they receive then will depend on what they possess of the Kingdom now. Their position and inheritance of the future eternal Kingdom will be in proportion to their dedication and consecration to the service of God in the present earthly aspect of the Kingdom. The parable illustrates the attitude of many Christians in the professing church who are prepared to do the work of God's word – but on their terms, not God's. God has the last word however (CP Mt 25:28-30 with Mk 4:21-25). This is called the parable of the lighted candle. Jesus teaches here that what Christians do with the truth they receive will determine whether or not they will be given more or lose even what they have. The punishment the man in the parable of the talents received – being cast into outer darkness – is the equivalent of Christians merely professing faith in Christ being cast into Hell (CP Jas 2:17-26). It is incumbent upon everyone who professes faith in Christ to ensure that they not only belong to the church but to the Kingdom of God as well, because the church is relative, the Kingdom is absolute. They belong to the Kingdom of God by doing the work of God's word as well as belonging to a church (CP He 10:23-25).