

“The Kingdom of God”

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My brother-in-law and I were talking recently about ways in which contemporary Christian teaching may be missing the central issues of the Bible and its message.

Let’s set out by making a sweeping assumption: *As disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, our ultimate source for faith and instruction for living must be the exemplary life of obedience and clear teachings of the Master Himself.* Simply stated: As followers of Christ, we accept Jesus’ words as *the lens* through which everything including the remainder of Scripture must be examined.

Jesus words, recorded in Luke 6:46 are a graceful yet pointed rebuke. *“Why do you call me Lord,”* He asked some of His first disciples, *“and not do what I tell you.”* So what then is the key to understanding and experiencing the Lordship of Christ? It’s seems pretty simple: Do what He tells us to do. But what is it that He wants us to do?

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Now before we get ahead of ourselves there are a two things worthy of contemplation: 1) While the phrase **The Kingdom of God** or **The Kingdom of Heaven** (synonymous concepts) does not appear even once in the Old Testament and only 15 times outside the Gospels where it appears 103 times, it is at the very heart of Jesus’ teaching. 2) Establishing **the Kingdom of God** was the Master’s objective and providing entry into it His cost. *“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is on heaven,”* Jesus taught all of us to pray. And immediately following His desert temptation and the incarceration of John the Baptist, Matthew tells us, *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”*

Think about that for a minute. Is Jesus telling us that the Father’s will is to bring **the Kingdom of Heaven** to earth? Is this what Jesus so emphatically announced as He began His public ministry and the singular idea that dominated every parable and sermon? As His disciples should this be our focus as well? And if the answer to those three questions is *yes*, how does this stack up to the way we approach teaching the Bible today?

In the next few months we are hoping to address these issues and would thoroughly welcome your input and thoughts. In order to set the stage let’s begin by defining some terms... **Kings and Kingdoms:**

Is a King without a Kingdom really a King? Is a Kingdom without a king really a kingdom? Clearly not! As with earthly realms, **The Kingdom of God** requires both a king and a kingdom to have either. However, there are significant differences between worldly systems of every kind and the Kingdom of God.

For starters:

1. Worldly kingdoms are ruled by imperfect men. **The Kingdom of God** is ruled by the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. “Follow us” is light-years from “*Follow Me.*”
2. Worldly kingdoms are restricted by geographical boundaries, political partisanship, cultural norms, ethnicity, economics and language. **The Kingdom of God** is not limited by any of these considerations. The most well known address in the New Testament says, “*For God so loved the world*” and my guess is that we all fit in there somewhere.
3. Authority in worldly kingdoms is most often centralized in a small group of wealthy and influential people. **The Kingdom of God** operates on the principle that all men and women carry equal weight with God and strictly warns against the corrupting influence of wealth and celebrity.
4. The kingdoms of this world rule exclusively from the top down wherein leadership accrues power and the strong continue to oppress the weak. These types of hierarchal systems are anathema to **the Kingdom of God**, and Jesus had nothing good to say about them. The Master said that the greatest in **the Kingdom of God** is the one who takes the role of a servant. Kingdom authority, Jesus taught us, leads from the bottom up.
5. **The Kingdom of God** functions by rules that are upside-down and often appear nonsensical when compared to the regulations imposed by worldly systems.
6. A causal commitment to any worldly system is acceptable and commonly viewed as prudent. **The Kingdom of God** is an all-or-nothing arrangement. Oil and water doesn’t really get at it. It’s more like life and death.

***The Kingdom of God is the place where the will of
God and the obedience of His people intersect.***

“The Kingdom of God Vol2”

Last month we began by providing some contrast between worldly and Godly kingdoms. Our promise for this month was to unpack a working definition and the best way to do that is to go to the master Himself, Jesus, and examine His words. Last month we mentioned that establishing **the Kingdom of God** was the Master’s objective and providing entry into it His cost.

Establishing the Kingdom of God was the Master’s objective and providing entry into it His cost

In the Bible *The Kingdom of God* is mentioned over 100 times. Mark records in 1:14 that *Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God...* In **Mark 1:1** it says *the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ*. What then is this verse referring to? It is clearly talking about the gospel of *the kingdom of God*—not the four written gospels we commonly refer to. In most of Jesus parables He talked about *the kingdom of God*. When He sent His disciples out in **Luke 9:1-2** it says *then He called His twelve disciples together, and...sent them to preach the kingdom of God*.

Jesus, in response to questions about the end times says in **Matt 24:14** *...this gospel of the kingdom of God shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*. In **Acts 19:8, 20:25** and **28:23,31** Paul teaches extensively on *the kingdom of God*. Mark’s Gospel records that at the very beginning of Jesus public ministry He issued this declaration: *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15)*.

Luke 17:20-21 says, *The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, see here! or see there! For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you*.

In Chapter 4 Jesus tells a large crowd of people the parable of the Sower and the Seed. From this parable we can learn something important about *the Kingdom of God*.

- 1) *The Kingdom of God* is initiated by God. He plants the seed. This seed is not planted by the will or energy of people. This is so important. We may participate in God’s plan of establishing His Kingdom on earth, but our efforts and doctrine are not the source of the Kingdom.
- 2) *The Kingdom of God* appears almost insignificant in the beginning. It is hidden in our hearts so that it may form a strong root.
- 3) The seed of the Kingdom is planted without prejudice. A human farmer would be careful with the precious seed. God is willing to take many more chances than we would. His desire is to have all people respond to His generous offer of salvation.
- 4) Not all Kingdom seed produces a harvest. This is a sad but accurate description. However, these statistics should never deter us from our mission. Jesus’ final recorded command in Matthew 28 was that we should go to all the nations teaching the Gospel of

5) Jesus strictly warned that there are things that can hinder or destroy the seed of the Kingdom of God:

- The express work of Satan in stealing the seed through deception and falsehood.
- Troubles and hard times that drive a weak believer back to his former way of living.
- The satisfaction and celebrity that often comes with wealth and worldly success.

6) The future is guaranteed and the harvest will be bountiful because it is God's Kingdom. And for now, remember the prayer Jesus' Himself taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." Our job then is the same as that of the Perfect Servant: Announcing that the *Kingdom of God* is at hand, and then living like we believe what we're saying.

Jack Hayford says it this way, *when ordinary people like you and I receive forgiveness of sins and are born again, open access to "see" and "enter" the Kingdom of God is established within.* **John 3: 3,5** –a miracle of divine grace, given alone through faith in Christ and secured through His cross

When ordinary people like you and I receive forgiveness of sins and are born again, open access to (see) and (enter) the Kingdom of God is established within.

“The Kingdom of God vol3”

Luke 17:20-21 *The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, see here! or see there! For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you.*

Last month we concluded with a promise to talk about character and *The Kingdom of God* in our next volume. In the above verse Jesus is making it pretty clear that *The Kingdom of God* is resident in the believer. We must understand that He was talking to his followers when He made that statement. Conversely, He was also acknowledging that those who are not followers and do not have His Holy Spirit in them, are not only void of this kingdom within, but do not understand it.

***When ordinary people like you and I receive forgiveness
of sins and are born again, open access to (see) and (enter)
the Kingdom of God is established within.***

--Jack Hayford

The above quote from Jack Hayford provides a simple way of understanding how this works. When we ask Jesus into our lives and allow His Holy Spirit to lead us we appropriate not only the understanding of the kingdom but the power necessary, not only to experience, but to extend it through our lives.

So, this all begs the question what is the evidence (fruit) that suggests we are living a life governed by His Spirit? In other words, are there character traits visible in the life of a person that is manifesting living within this heavenly kingdom? I can think of no better place to discover what that looks like than to turn to Jesus' own words in Matthew chapter five where He gives one of the most profound messages ever recorded: *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now we need to remember a couple of things here that are very important. Each of these blessings are available today for those who are people of faith and have asked Jesus into their heart. Jesus was not laying out a set of rules or conditions but rather providing a description of what life looks like in the *Kingdom of God*.

The opening phrase of each Beatitude does not contain a verb in the Hebrew translation. They were not statements as much as exclamations. It would look more like, *O the blessedness of the poor in spirit*. He is saying, *congratulations, hurray—how happy*.

If pride is the characteristic of our fallen nature evidenced in living in our worldly kingdom than humility is the strong contrast Jesus is teaching here as He talks about the character of those living within *The Kingdom of God*.

Understanding this context, let's look again at what Jesus is saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is saying how blessed we are when we are broken of our earthly nature and can come before Him in a spirit of humility as a poor beggar. It's when we can come before Him seeking the truth in humility.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Here our Lord is suggesting an aching heart and genuine sorrow that leads to repentance of our sins and our ability to recognize and enter into mourning over the pain of others will result in our being comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

This has to do with our total surrender to our Heavenly Master. Just as a broken stallion is not void of its power and has only subjected it to the rider, we understand the importance of submitting everything we are to God. In Psalm 37:11 the word *meek* is translated *humble* or *gentle*.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Jesus is saying here hurray for you if you pursue righteousness in Him. Congratulation, when you understand that only I can meet your needs. (Read Revelation 7:16-17)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

This has to do with the powerful spiritual principle that say's as we forgive—we are forgiven. Jesus is communicating here one of His most important ideas in my view. He so wants His people to be full of mercy, forgiveness and compassion toward others. This is perhaps one of the most important characteristics of someone living within *The Kingdom of God* and so desperately needed today.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

I am convinced Jesus is talking about authenticity here—He is saying congratulations for being *the real deal*. This is another reminder of the powerful relationship between being obedient and living a righteous life and coming closer to God as a result.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom* and means *wholeness, completeness, reconciliation*, and not merely the absence of strife. Jesus is saying something very profound here—that those who pursue peace will be called the sons of God.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This blessing of heaven comes from a people who are not preoccupied with nursing their wounds but rather those who understand they are in good company as a result of their persecution.

The Kingdom of God is the intersection of Jesus' words and our willingness to live within them.

“The Kingdom of God vol4”

Then [people] also brought infants to [Jesus] that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it. Lk 18:15-17, NKJV

It is not the wealthy, the strong, or even the wise who are great, but the humble, the servants, the poor, the children. You cannot enter the kingdom unless you become like a child. Wisdom, wealth, power—these are worthless currency in Christ's kingdom. He deals in hearts of love, praise, and devotion. These are the gifts He longs to receive.

In our upside-down world we seem to get everything backwards. I think this tendency also exists within the church today. I was asked the question once, how many of the beatitudes would be considered gifts. I had to think about that and concluded, none. I am convinced that in our world we tend to look for people who are *gifted* rather than people who may reflect what Jesus is referring to in the beatitudes. We look for form over substance.

***In our upside-down world we seem to get everything backwards.
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I wonder what our world would look like if more Christians lived a life reflective of these wonderful attributes? The whole point of this series is to take us to this question and challenge all of us who call ourselves followers of Christ to examine ourselves and make a decision regarding what kingdom we want to live in. I am persuaded this is the fundamental reason why the church in our culture has often times failed to bring about real transformation. The deep authenticity represented in these character traits is seldom to be found.

How did this happen and what do we need to do about it? Good questions. It happened as over several decades we have allowed the culture to influence our behavior more than God's Word. We have indeed substituted the Truth for a lie. As we are experiencing in our current election cycle, we have a church that has lost her compass and voice and replaced it with political correctness and the desire to hide out buying into the world's version of separation of church and state.

We are also not involved enough in the education of our own kids in order to insulate them from the fallout of secular ideology. It takes no more than a casual look at where our culture is today and the unbiblical values it has adopted to understand the serious condition we are in. I know that I have personally experienced a tendency to believe we have come too far and a mindset that is inclined to give up. However, we must never forget that God is alive and well on planet earth and He is still on the throne.

With that in mind we must NEVER give up. Now we come to the hard part and our second question...what do we need to do about it? I say this is hard because what is going to be required of you and I is not going to be easy or convenient. We are going to have to ask ourselves some tough questions

about how we are living our lives. I hate to use an old cliché but it fits...we have to start with the person we see in the mirror.

I want to ask each person reading this to honestly rate yourself in the areas below. As you do I want to challenge you to take note of the areas that need improvement and develop a deliberate strategy to improve. **You, your family, your workplace, your church and friends are desperate for what only a transformed, authentic follower of Jesus can supply.**

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate yourself? (Read Matt 5-7)

The poor in Spirit: Those who are aware of their dependence on God. Religion has no place in this program. When was the last time you surrendered total dependence to God? It is an ongoing surrender...not a one-time event.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Those who mourn: Those people with the ability to enter into another person's suffering and loss. When was the last time someone else's problems took precedence over yours?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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The meek: People with little self-recognition or the need for it. Someone whose praise is always on another person's lips, someone who can give preference to others. These are men and women who have an inability to be offended. When was the last time you willing choose the lower place, or deferred to someone less skilled or less deserving?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: People who understand that righteousness comes from obedience. When was the last time you gave into that sin that is ensnaring you? Do you have a bondage issue?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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The merciful: These are the kind of people that display forgiveness and kindness toward others. When was the last time you were able to forgive an enemy or someone who did you a terrible injustice? Are you able to see others through Gods eyes and not your own?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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The pure in heart: People who have a *sincere* heart. When was the last time you did something without a self-serving inclination? When was the last time you blushed at anything? Have you ever found joy in someone else's pain?

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The peacemakers: These are people who are quick to reconcile, and are willing to risk interceding to bring peace. They are non-violent and non-judgmental. When was the last time you wished your enemies well and served them? Do you like bringing *division* or *unity* to the Body of Christ?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Those who are persecuted/insulted/lie about: And for Righteousness—added together. This is describing people who suffer for the sake of their testimony for Christ. Can you *be still* in the midst of persecution and know He is Lord and follow His lead?

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