

The Gospel of the Kingdom and Why it is so Important

Matthew 4:23

September 4, 2016
Steve DeWitt

Let's all imagine that we were all taking a college class together. Let's say it's a Bible College or Seminary class on the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. The purpose of the class is to learn what Jesus and the apostles taught about the most. What was their focus? We could ask that question and you might say, *sin. The gospel. Eternal life.*

As a bonus feature, the class will actually go back in a special time machine and hear the actual sermons as they are first delivered. So now this sounds like an exciting adventure. See and hear it first-hand. Then come back to our current day for debrief and discussion. What do you think we might be most surprised to discover in the teaching of Jesus?

John the Baptist

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2 ESV)

Jesus

"And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." (Matthew 4:23)

Paul

In Ephesus

"And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." (Acts 19:8)

Two years in Rome

"He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance." (Acts 28:30-31)

Phillip

"He preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 8:12)

Notice a theme here? What were the teachings of Jesus and the apostles about? What were Jesus' parables mostly about? What was the Sermon on the Mount about? What if what they talked about was actually something rarely talked about now? Might the church be missing something really important? Might you be missing the number one thing Jesus taught on?

What did Jesus talk about? What did Paul spend three months in Ephesus on and two years in Rome on? **The kingdom of God.** You say, come on, is that really important? If it was, we would hear teaching all the time on it and every Christian would know exactly what the kingdom of God is. If it was that important Jesus would tell us it was really important. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus does just that: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Do we seek first the kingdom of God? It is difficult to do if we don't know what it is. Many, many Christians don't because somehow the main thing in Jesus and the apostles' teaching become a minor thing in contemporary Christianity.

If you asked me, *Steve*, what has your teaching lacked most in your years at Bethel Church? I would say, *teaching on the kingdom of God*. Frankly, one reason I am excited about the series is that I myself get to dig deep into this important subject. My goal is to remedy our oversight with a series on the kingdom from the gospel of Matthew. Matthew more than any other gospel focuses on the kingdom.

Intro to the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament and the first in a series of four accounts and descriptions of the life of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are all called Gospels. The word *gospel* means "good news" and these books all declare the good/great news about Jesus. Each has its unique emphasis. Mark is the fast-moving Gospel with short snippets all showing Jesus as the Son of God. Luke was a medical doctor and his Gospel is written journalistically. John isn't a journalist; John is a theologian. Luke says what happens. John tells us what it means.

History says Matthew was written by one of the 12 disciples named Matthew. Mark and Luke call him Levi. He was a tax collector who left everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9). Matthew writes to show Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture and prophecy (e.g. Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). He wants his Jewish audience to believe Jesus is the prophesied Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of God. Most people believe Mark wrote first and there is a great deal of overlap with Mark and Matthew and Luke.

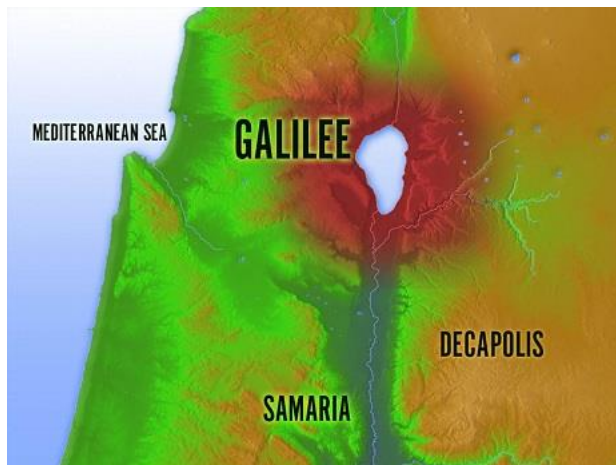
Matthew uniquely presents Jesus as king. He begins his gospel with Jesus' royal genealogy tracing his lineage back to King David through his earthly father Joseph. Matthew is the only gospel who tells of the Magi coming from a foreign land to worship Jesus and give him extravagant, royal gifts.

He ends his gospel with the famous words, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* (Matthew 28:18) What authority is that and where is he exercising it? Matthew highlights Jesus as king of the kingdom of God more than any other Gospel or book of the Bible.

Jesus and the Kingdom of God/Heaven

"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction." (Matthew 9:35)

This is a summary of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Galilee is in the north of Israel. (See map at the top of the next page.) It is relatively small. 70 miles by 40 miles. Maybe roughly the size of the larger Chicagoland area. Josephus says Galilee had 204 cities and villages (D.A. Carson, *Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 1*, p. 121). It was among these villages that Jesus went. As his fame increased, the crowds increased too. An example is massive crowds forcing short Zacchaeus up into the sycamore tree just to get a glimpse of him. Jesus would go to the synagogue of the village and teach.



So what would you suppose that Jesus would speak on IF he was only there for a limited time and had this one chance to speak? We may think, sin. The problems with Jerusalem and Roman occupation. How to improve your marriage or parenting. No. His main theme wasn't what the typical American church hears sermons on. His main theme it says here was "*the gospel of the kingdom.*" (Matthew 9:35)

Jesus proclaimed the good news about the kingdom. What kingdom? Why would that be good news?

What is the Kingdom of God/Heaven?

I put "heaven" in there because Matthew most often uses "kingdom of heaven." There is debate about any nuance difference but most scholars say they are synonymous. What is the kingdom of God?

Part of why it's not a popular teaching subject is that there is some complexity to the concept. Do you remember this exchange between Pilate and Jesus after Jesus' arrest and before his crucifixion?

"So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.' Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'" (John 18:33-38)

Even after his resurrection, the disciples were confused. Moments before his ascension, what are they wondering about? *"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.'" (Acts 1:6-7)* There was a great expectation that when the Messiah came he would deliver Israel from the Romans and usher in a rule and reign as described in Old Testament prophecy. The assumption was that the kingdom would be political.

Then Jesus arrives and is radically different from the expectation. He made none of the political moves needed if you were going to assume power. Some people speculate that one reason Judas betrayed him was to force his hand toward a political revolution. But the kingdom Jesus is talking about was very, very different from the expectation, and ultimately, much more wonderful.

What is a kingdom?

A kingdom must have a king/ruler

In other words, there must be some form of authority structure. It could be a representative democracy or other form of governing authority structure. But a kingdom without any authority is not a kingdom. A kingdom divided will not stand. There has to be unity under authority; under the king. A kingdom without any authority is described in Proverbs: "*When a land is in rebellion it has many rulers.*" (Proverbs 28:2 HCSB)

A kingdom must have a realm

A kingdom will exert its authority in some realm. A king without a realm has no kingdom.

I saw a World War II documentary this week that said after Germany conquered France, the king of Germany who was in exile in the Netherlands wrote Hitler saying, "I hope now you will reinstate Germany's monarchy." Hitler read the note and said, "What an idiot." Wilhelm was a king of royal lineage but without any kingdom; a ruler without a realm. Kingdoms have rulers and kingdoms have realms.

Here is where the kingdom of God is different from Prussia or England or the United States. ***The kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God through Jesus.*** The authority of the kingdom was given to Jesus the Son by God the Father. Remember, Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, "*All authority...has been given to me.*" God's kingdom has absolute authority as it is sourced in God.

Any C.S. Lewis fans here? Have you read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? You'll get this even if you haven't read it. Aslan is the king but he's been gone from the kingdom of Narnia for a long time. In his absence, the White Witch has assumed authority in Narnia. With her provisional reign, everything was winter. Everything was cold and frozen. But rumor had it that Aslan was possibly back in Narnia. Nobody was sure but why else would everything be melting? Flowers were blooming. Frozen rivers were starting to flow. The presence of Aslan was having its effect even though his full power and presence were not yet seen.

The kingdom of God is like that. When Jesus came into the world, the kingdom of God came too. When the king shows up, authority comes with it. It's kind of like Air Force One, wherever it goes, it is The United States of America.

So we have a king—Jesus. He has authority. But where is his realm? Where does he rule?

For now, the realm of God's rule is the human heart in submission to Jesus as king expressed by faith in him as Savior.

The kingdom of God is ***the saving reign of God through Christ.*** The kingdom is not the people or the church or heaven or earth. The kingdom is the rule of God itself. This kingdom

has a king—Jesus. He has authority—all authority has been given to him. He has a realm—redeemed people in willing submission.

"Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'" (Luke 17:20-21)

The present invisible nature of the kingdom is part of the challenge. When you leave Canada and come into the US, there is a sign that says, "You are now entering the United States of America." The kingdom of God is not presently like that. It can't be so easily "observed." Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) His authority and reign are not derived from any power in this world. But that doesn't mean it isn't real and someday this kingdom will be very visible as Jesus returns and begins his earthly reign in the millennial kingdom and establishes an eternal reign in the new heaven and earth.

But for now, all we see is melting snow and flowers appearing. Sinners repenting of sin and turning in faith to Jesus. People uniting in churches around doctrine and mutual love. These are signs of the breaking in of the eternal kingdom which began when Jesus came and will come in fullness when he returns.

The kingdom of God is here but it is not yet what it will be.

The Story of the Kingdom

Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen have accurately told the story of the Bible in terms of the kingdom. Look at this:

Act One	God establishes His kingdom: Creation
Act Two	Rebellion in the Kingdom: Fall
Act Three	The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated
Interlude	A Kingdom story waiting for an ending: The Intertestamental Period
Act Four	The Coming of the King: Redemption Accomplished
Act Five	Spreading the News of the King: The Mission of the Church
Acts Six	The Return of the King: Redemption Completed

(Craig Bartholomew & Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, p. 27)

Here's the thing. We are not illustrating something saying it's like a kingdom. Jesus is a real king and there is a real kingdom. It is here right now and like wheat and tares, everyone is either one or the other. Someday it will be clear who is in what kingdom because Jesus will separate all humanity like sheep and goats. The kingdom will have absolute power as Satan is defeated and in hell. Zechariah 14:20 says that Jesus' reign will be so complete that the bells of the horses will be inscribed, "Holy to the LORD."

Why is the Kingdom of God so Important?

Because the king says so

It is what Jesus preached and emphasized. The kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven. He said to seek it above everything else. Lay up treasures there. Live for that kingdom. The kingdom of man is temporary and fleeting and corrupt and satanic. The kingdom of God is glorious and the king is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is on the throne now and rules with a name and glory that is above every name.

It is here now – are you in it?

"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." (Colossians 1:13)

Which kingdom values are you living by? Which kingdom agenda are you advocating?

We are by birth and nature sinners. We are all born into the kingdom of darkness. But Jesus came to deliver us from that kingdom and to transfer our citizenship to the kingdom of light—the kingdom of God.

You don't have to understand everything about the kingdom, all you have to do is know the king. Jesus is the king. You can know him in the way he requires. Repentance for sin. Personal trust in his saving work on the cross. Following him and his teachings as king of your life. I pledge allegiance to Jesus.

This is what Jesus taught. This is what the apostles taught. This is what we will be teaching for months ahead. *"Seek first the kingdom of God."* (Matthew 6:33)

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