

## FRIDAY NIGHT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

### THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

#### INTRODUCTION

- A.** There are few biblical subjects as vast and controversial as the present one.
1. It is folly to think we can cover this in much depth, but we will try.
  2. There are widely held differing views, both in the course of church history and among the best of Christian leaders at the present time.
- B.** For openers, here is the frequency of use of relevant terms in the Bible.
1. The word 'kingdom' is found no fewer than 184 times in the Old Testament; 162 times in the New Testament.
  2. There are various uses of the term, e.g.:
    - a. Kingdom of priests, Ex. 19:6.
    - b. Kingdom of Sihon, Num. 32:33.
    - c. Kingdom of Israel, I Sam. 24:20.
    - d. Kingdom of the Lord, 2 Chron. 13:8.
    - e. Everlasting kingdom, Ps. 145:13.
    - f. Sinful kingdom, Amos 9:8.
  3. The phrase Kingdom of Heaven is found 28 times in the New Testament; all in Matthew.
    - a. Synoptic gospels.
      - (1) Matthew, no fewer than 28 times.
      - (2) Mark, none; but the Kingdom of God no fewer than 15 times.
      - (3) Luke, none; but the Kingdom of God no fewer than 32 times.
    - b. Johannine literature.
      - (1) John uses the phrase Kingdom of God twice; John 3:3, 5.
      - (2) Book of Revelation uses the Kingdom of God once; Rev. 12:10.

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

4. The phrase Kingdom of God is found 68 times in the New Testament – 5 times in Matthew.
  - a. 49 times in Mark, Luke and John.
  - b. 7 times in the book of Acts.
  - c. Pauline literature 9 times, plus Kingdom of Christ (Eph. 5:5) Kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13).
  - d. 'Your kingdom' (Heb. 1:8); 'Eternal kingdom of our Lord' (2 Pet. 1:11).
  
- C. Is there a difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God? Answer: no.
  1. Proof: they are used interchangeably:
    - a. The same parables in which Matthew referred to the Kingdom of Heaven, Mark and Luke relate referring to the Kingdom of God.
      - (1) 'Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.'" Matthew 13:24.
      - (2) 'Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?"' Mark 4:30.
    - b. What Jesus refers to as the secrets of the kingdom:
      - (1) 'He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.'" Matthew 13:11.
      - (2) 'He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables"' (Mark 4:11).
    - c. The announcement of the Kingdom:
      - (1) 'From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" Matthew 4:17.
      - (2) "'The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"' Mark 1:15.
  2. It would seem that the terms 'heaven' and 'God', perhaps during the intertestamental period [between the Old and New Testaments], came to be understood interchangeably when referring to God's kingdom.
    - a. Heaven was known as the dwelling place of God. Cf. 1 Kings 8:27.

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- b.** Jesus said we should pray, 'Our Father in heaven'. Matt. 6:9.
  - c.** For reasons we cannot fully understand only Matthew uses the term Kingdom of Heaven.
  - d.** It is thought that the Aramaic too (which Jesus spoke) might be understood either way.
- D.** Definitions of terms.
- 1.** Kingdom is translated from the Greek *basileia*.
    - a.** It refers to realm, dimension, principality or empire.
    - b.** It presupposes a monarch – a king or queen.
  - 2.** It may refer to a country ruled by a monarch.
  - 3.** Kingdom of heaven: the rule of God.
    - a.** It is said of Her Majesty the Queen: she does not rule; she reigns.
    - b.** The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God.
      - (1)** However, there is a sense in which he reigns and not rules, that is, insofar as the world being in utter subordination (under control) to God's rule. 'In putting everything under him [Jesus], God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.' Heb. 2:8.
      - (2)** The complete and total rule of God will come when, in the future, 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ.' Rev. 11:15.
      - (3)** But this total submission is to be experienced now by those who receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
    - c.** Note: other definitions will emerge below as we see some of the ways the term 'Kingdom of God' is used.
- E.** Why is this lesson important?
- 1.** Any word or phrase used as often as Kingdom of God is worthy of careful study.
  - 2.** We must see the connection between the Kingdom of God and the New Birth.
    - a.** 'In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3.

## The Kingdom of Heaven

- b. 'Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'" John 3:5.
3. We must see the connection between the Kingdom and God and suffering. 'Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.' Acts 14:22.
  4. There is a connection between the Kingdom of God and our inheritance. 'For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' Ephes. 5:5.
  5. There is an obvious eschatological (doctrine of last things) significance to the Kingdom of God.
    - a. 'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge'. 2 Tim. 4:1.
    - b. 'The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.'" Rev. 11:15.
  6. Jesus assumed that the Kingdom is 'near' (Matt. 4:17). What did this mean?
  7. Why did Jesus refer to the Kingdom of Heaven (or God) in connection with the parables?
  8. Is there a difference between the Kingdom and the Church?
  9. Does the presence of the Kingdom mean the appearance of signs and wonders?
  10. Is the Gospel of Christ the same thing as the good news of the Kingdom?

### I THE NEARNESS (BUT INVISIBILITY) OF THE KINGDOM

- A. The earliest references to the Kingdom of Heaven are connected to repentance. (Gr. *metanoia*, change of mind).
  1. 'And saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" Matthew 3:2.
  2. 'From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" Matthew 4:17.

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- a. It is said that 'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.' Matthew 4:23. Cf. Matt. 9:35; 24:14.
  - b. The next reference is in the opening statement of the Sermon on the Mount. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 5:3.
  - c. Jesus talked about people being 'the least' and 'great' in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matt. 5:19.
  - d. He then spoke of entering it. Matt. 5:20. Cf. John 3:5.
  - e. He told us to pray for it. '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."' Matthew 6:9-10.
  - f. He told the Twelve to announce that it was near. Matt. 10:7.
  - g. He spoke of the Kingdom in the parables. Matt. 13:11-13, and throughout the synoptic gospels.
  - h. Jesus gave the 'keys of the Kingdom of Heaven' to Peter. Matt. 16:19.
  - i. The disciples asked, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' Matt. 18:1.
  - j. He spoke of the Kingdom of God being taken from Israel. Matt. 21:43.
  - k. He spoke of shutting the Kingdom. Matt. 23:13.
  - l. He spoke of inheriting the Kingdom. Matt. 25:34.
  - m. He spoke of drinking of the fruit of the vine with us. Matt. 26:29.
- B.** The assumption of the disciples – before and after Jesus' death and resurrection – was that the Kingdom was visible.
- 1. There is nothing in the verses above that says the Kingdom would be visible.
  - 2. Jesus even stipulated (insisted on as part of the argument) that the Kingdom to which he was referring was not visible.
    - a. He knew they thought it was visible here on earth.
    - b. But he said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is within you.' Luke 17:20-21.
  - 3. They never got the message!

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- a. After the resurrection of Jesus the Kingdom and its restoration was uppermost in their minds.
    - (1) They assumed all along that Messiah would restore the Kingdom to be what it was, say, in David's or Solomon's day; this meant the overthrow of Rome.
    - (2) They asked, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'
    - (3) It was an ill-posed question; Jesus never said this would happen in the first place.
  - b. Jesus' only answer was:
    - (1) 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' Acts 1:7-8.
    - (2) 'I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Luke 24:49.
- C.** But the Kingdom was near.
- 1. Jesus' very presence meant it was near.
    - a. He was a Monarch of the Kingdom.
    - b. He admitted this before Pilate (John 18:37) but said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.' John 18:36.
  - 2. The evidence of the Kingdom's nearness was in what Jesus did for people.
    - a. He healed. 'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.' Matthew 4:23.
    - b. He forgave sin. 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."' Luke 5:20.
  - 3. The next step forward was the coming of the Holy Spirit.
    - a. The Spirit came on people on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:1-4.
    - b. It then 'clicked' what Jesus had been teaching all along, but it took the Spirit to make this clear. Cf. John 16:13.

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- (1) They saw why Jesus came; why he died and rose.
  - (2) They experienced the Kingdom: the Spirit was in them.
4. There are thus two comings of the Kingdom:
- a. The coming of Christ which culminated (reached its high point) in the coming of the Spirit.
  - b. The future coming of Christ which will mean Final Judgment.
    - (1) 'Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.' Hebrews 9:27-28.
    - (2) 'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.' 2 Tim. 4:1.
    - (3) This Kingdom *will* be visible! 'Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.' Rev. 1:7.

## **II THE KINGDOM AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

- A. Jesus spoke of entering the Kingdom. Matt. 7:21; 19:23.
- 1. It necessitated being 'born again'. John 3:3, 5.
    - a. This required the work of the Holy Spirit. John 3:8.
    - b. This is also called regeneration or being 'made alive'. Eph. 2:5.
  - 2. This was also called being 'saved'.
    - a. 'That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' Romans 10:9.
    - b. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.' Ephes. 2:8-9.
  - 3. The New Birth, or being saved, is preceded by the preaching of the Gospel. Rom. 10:14.
    - a. This is what Peter did on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:14-36.

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- b.** From that time on their understanding of the Kingdom cohered with what Jesus taught. Cf. Acts 14:22: 'Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.'
- B.** It will be recalled that the first statement concerning the Kingdom of Heaven was connected to repentance. Matt. 3:1.
- 1.** Both John the Baptist and Jesus introduced the Kingdom of Heaven with the need for repentance.
    - a.** Repentance means 'change of mind'.
      - (1)** Agreeing with God.
      - (2)** Saying, 'I was wrong'.
    - b.** This has not changed since Peter mentioned it after he preached on the Day of Pentecost. 'Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38.
      - (1)** They had to correct their view about Jesus.
      - (2)** They needed to be sorry for their sin.
  - 2.** When Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount, he said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 5:3.
    - a.** This meant a broken spirit. Cf. Psalm 51:17.
    - b.** This meant asking God for mercy. Cf. Luke 18:13.
- C.** The Sermon on the Mount and the parables show Jesus' doctrine of the Holy Spirit.
- 1.** At this stage a clearer definition of the Kingdom of Heaven emerges: it is the realm of the ungrieved Spirit.
    - a.** The Kingdom means a realm which is ruled by a Monarch.
    - b.** The Monarch of the Kingdom of Heaven is Jesus.
      - (1)** The Holy Spirit took Jesus' place. John 14:16-17.
      - (2)** Jesus went to the right hand of God. Acts 2:33.
    - c.** Jesus rules his people by his Spirit.



## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- (1) The Holy Spirit is a person as Jesus is a person.
  - (2) He is called 'another' advocate, comforter, counsellor. Gr. *parakletus*, one who comes alongside.
- d. The rule of Jesus in us is effectual to the extent the Holy Spirit is utterly himself in us.
  - (1) He can be grieved. Eph. 4:30.
  - (2) He can be quenched. I Thess. 5:19.
2. The realm of the ungrieved Spirit is that dominion in which the Spirit is all that he is.
  - a. He is himself.
  - b. He is 'at home'.
3. The beatitudes show how the anointing works.
  - a. The beatitudes (beginning with 'blessed') show a logical sequence, or progression.
  - b. Each beatitude represents a stage that shows a slightly higher level of anointing.
4. The parables likewise show what it is like for the anointing of the Spirit to function in us.
  - a. The parables make no sense when you try to apply them to a visible or material world.
  - b. They show how the Christian life works, as well as how God is at work in the world.
- D. Overlapping of the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church.
  1. The Kingdom of Heaven is the realm of the ungrieved Spirit.
  2. The church are the 'called out'. Gr. *ekklesia*; called out.
    - a. It refers to a people, not a building.
    - b. The people are visible but the Spirit in them is not.
  3. The church is visible, the Kingdom is invisible.
    - a. You can be in the church but not in the Kingdom.

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- (1) False profession may get you into the church.
- (2) Baptism without saving faith may get you into the church.
- b. But if you are in the Kingdom you will want to be in the church.
  - (1) 'If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.' Mark 8:38.
  - (2) Being in the Kingdom but not a part of the church is unthinkable!

### **III THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (OR GOD) AND INHERITANCE**

- A. There is an intimate and inseparable connection between the Kingdom of God and our inheritance.
  - 1. It is no accident that the strongest admonitions to believers appear in the context of inheriting the Kingdom.
    - a. 'Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.' 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
    - b. 'The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.' Galatians 5:19-21.
    - c. 'But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' Ephes. 5:3-5.
  - 2. That is why we have what would otherwise seem like a strange verse, 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.' Acts 14:22. (AV: 'We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God.')
  - a. Is one saved by suffering? No.
  - b. Is one saved by holy living? No.
  - c. Then why these verses which may be taken to suggest such?

## *The Kingdom of Heaven*

- B.** The Kingdom of God is unfolded in the New Testament at no fewer than three levels.
1. First level: conversion. John 3:3; Col. 1:13.
  2. Second level: inheritance. See verses just quoted above.
    - a. Inheritance experienced below: an 'earnest'. Eph. 1:14 – AV.
    - b. Inheritance in heaven: reward. I Cor. 3:14; Col. 3:24.
  3. Third level: Second Coming of Christ. I Cor. 15:24; 2 Tim. 4:1.
- C.** Note: Those verses which appear to some to disprove the doctrine of eternal security of the believer do not refer at all to losing one's salvation but rather one's inheritance.
1. You cannot lose salvation; you can lose your reward.
  2. You cannot be ejected from the Kingdom but you can come short of what I called the 'second' level above, by:
    - a. Despising suffering when it comes.
    - b. Not walking in the light.

### **CONCLUSION**

- A.** What about the connection between the Kingdom of God and miracles?  
Answer:
1. When Jesus appeared there came with his power the authority over disease.
  2. To the extent we live in the realm of the ungrieved Spirit we should not be surprised to see signs and wonders.
- B.** But never forget that the first two references to the Kingdom of Heaven were given in the context of repentance.
1. Repentance leads to being saved.
  2. Salvation is more important than being healed.