

THE

KINGDOM OF GOD

IS LIKE...

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1. My Kingdom is not of this World

JOHN 18:33-36

No matter our political perspective here in the United States, we should be grateful that we still have the freedom to vote and voice an opinion about our government, unlike other places. Try asserting your voting rights in Cuba, for example, or go to China and see how far you'll get in casting a fair vote there. As Christians, however, we need to remember not only our blessings of freedom here and the opportunity to participate in the government of this nation, we must also remember that we belong to the government of another world as well. This government is referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God.

Jesus explained the duality of our situation when He answered Pilate concerning His true identity as the King of this other nation, or of this other government. Let us read Jesus' words to familiarize ourselves with this idea since it is the theme of our brief study.

³³ Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

- John 18:33-36

I want to describe the Kingdom of God, the government that we actually belong to that is present in this world and will exist in the world to come, when this world will no longer be. The first thing the Bible teaches concerning the Kingdom that is not of this world is the following:

1. This Kingdom was the subject of prophecy – Daniel 2:31-44

The government of the United States has existed for over two hundred years and rules over a vast nation with millions of citizens, however, no one in the distant past predicted when it would come into existence or when it would cease to be. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, was the subject of prophecy centuries before it was realized here on earth. And, as previously mentioned, was spoken of in the book of Daniel some six hundred years before its arrival which makes it a truly amazing thing! In addition to this it was also prophesied that it would continue to exist without end.

We're familiar with the book of Daniel so let me just summarize what it said about the Kingdom. Daniel and other young Jewish

men of noble blood were carried off into Babylonian captivity where they were, by the grace of God and their faithfulness to Him, raised to high levels in the court of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Soon after, Daniel was called upon to interpret a strange and disturbing dream that the king experienced. In this dream, God revealed the sweep of history that was to come, as well as historical markers for the arrival and the development of God's own Kingdom here on earth. Daniel's inspired interpretation of this dream was recorded in Daniel chapter two, and its accuracy concerning future earthly kingdoms was firmly established as history unfolded.

³¹ "You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. ³² The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴ You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

- Daniel 2:31-35

We haven't read the entire passage in Daniel dealing with this topic, but I want to mention what a miracle this prophecy was. First of all, Daniel described the dream that the king had without any help from the king, who kept the nature of his dream secret as a way of testing the legitimacy of his interpreters. He said in

testing his magicians and soothsayers, "I want you to interpret my dream." And they answered him, " Give us the dream and we will give you the interpretation." He said, "No, you tell me what I dreamt and you will interpret its meaning." Of course, none of them could do that until Daniel was summoned by the king. At this point Daniel not only described the King's dream but he also detailed the meaning of the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had. In his explanation Daniel accurately described the rise and fall of four world empires in correct succession over a period of six centuries into the future. Actually, twenty-six centuries, if you count the Kingdom of God and its continuation to this day.

If we examine his interpretation we note that the statue is made of many parts: a head of gold, a breast and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, and legs and feet of a mixture of iron and clay.

In the dream, a stone cut without human hands appears and strikes the statue not on the head, but on its feet of iron and clay, reducing the entire statute to dust, which is blown away. Daniel then describes that in the place of the statue the stone used to destroy it becomes a mountain that eventually fills the entire earth.

³⁶ "This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king. ³⁷ You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; ³⁸ and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

³⁹ After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

⁴⁰ Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. ⁴¹ In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. ⁴² As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. ⁴³ And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.

⁴⁴ In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

⁴⁵ Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."

- Daniel 2:36-45

And so, in his interpretation, Daniel names five separate kingdoms.

1. Babylonian Empire – Head of Gold

This was a fitting symbol because Babylon was the finest of the ancient kingdoms, lasting over a hundred years, 625 to 539 BC.

2. Medo-Persian Empire – Breast of Silver

Daniel mentions two arms, which describes the dual nature of this empire ruled by a combination of the Medes and the Persians. They were noted for their great wealth often seen in the abundance of silver coinage during their period 539 to 331 BC.

3. Greek Empire – Belly and the Hips of Brass

Alexander the Great defeated the last of the Medo-Persian kings, Darius the third, in 330 BC. The Greeks innovated the arms of war by using brass armor as protection. Greece was then defeated and absorbed by Rome in 146 BC, their kingdom lasting from 330 to 146 BC.

4. Roman Empire – Legs of iron with the Feet of clay and iron

Iron, because the Romans innovated the use of this metal in warfare. As it grew, Rome would make alliances with foreign kings, which ultimately weakened its empire and was a factor in its demise in 476 AD, when Romulus, the last of the Roman emperors, was overthrown by the German leader Odoacer, who became the first barbarian to rule in Rome. The idea of the mixture of iron and clay suggested the following: normally Rome would simply conquer a people and take over, but with time as their empire expanded, did not conquer other peoples, they simply made alliances with them. This explains the clay/iron

mixture imagery. These nominal alliances proved to be the weakness that led to the Empire's downfall.

Note carefully that all these kingdoms succeeded each other in history, and Daniel correctly described their appearance and their demise in proper order, doing so in the power and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nowadays, no offense intended to meteorologists, but they try to figure out the weather and often make mistakes for predictions that are just a few days away, could you imagine correctly predicting four different kingdoms over a period of 600 years? Nothing short of Divine power could achieve this. Daniel not only mentions the four kingdoms, he also describes the arrival and ascent of the fifth and final Kingdom which we now know as the Kingdom of God. This was the stone that grew into a mountain which covered the earth just as God's Kingdom has done.

5. The Kingdom of God – Stone/Mountain

Note carefully what Daniel says about the fifth kingdom appearing as a stone that grows into a mountain:

1. **It's time of appearance** – It appeared during the fourth kingdom, which was the time when Rome dominated the world scene.
2. **The place of its appearance** – It says that the stone struck the feet of the statue, not the head. Now in the context of the Roman Empire the head would have been the capital city of Rome itself, which in reality was the continual target of all of its enemies. Yet in his dream and in his interpretation, Daniel says that the stone doesn't hit the head to destroy the empire, it strikes at the feet, representing the outlying provinces. This would include provinces like Judea, where Jesus ministered and established the Church.

3. **The type of kingdom** – The stone cut without hands is a way of denoting that this would be a supernatural kingdom, not a temporal kingdom, like those before it. And note that unlike these other kingdoms, Daniel states that this fifth kingdom would be established by God (Daniel 2:44).
4. **Duration of this kingdom** – The other kingdoms had periods of glory and power lasting centuries, but Daniel says that the fifth kingdom would be everlasting, never to fall. The image of the stone growing into a mountain, filling the earth, symbolizes a kingdom that would dominate every other kingdom in history.

Therefore, some 600 years before Christ, a Jewish prophet spoke of four kingdoms that would rise and fall until a fifth kingdom would be established that would dominate the world and last forever. The Bible tells us that for six centuries the Jewish people waited for this kingdom prophesied by one of their own prophets, Daniel. Then one day a prophet in the spirit of Elijah proclaimed, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:3). Can we understand then, why John the Baptist's preaching caused so much excitement among the people?

And so, in speaking of the Kingdom that is not of this world, we note first of all, that this Kingdom was spoken of in prophecy, which has since been confirmed by history.

2. The Kingdom is on Earth, but it is Spiritual in Nature

Daniel predicted that the Kingdom was to come, John the Baptist preached that it was at hand, and Jesus proclaimed that it was here. For Jews, who as a people, had actually lived through the four empires mentioned by Daniel, this was exciting news. For

some it rekindled nationalistic aspirations that had appeared throughout their history.

Many had a Davidic concept of the kingdom. In other words, their hope was that God would send a king like David who would lead them out of bondage and regain their lost earthly and political territories. They believed that the day of the Lord was to be a time when the nation would be restored (Amos 9:14 and Zechariah 8:4-8). They believed that the nation would be restored and other nations would be judged. Their hope was kindled and dashed repeatedly throughout the post-united kingdom history. In other words, after the united kingdom, this hope of a Messiah kept rising and falling, as one leader after another appeared, claiming that they were the Messiah. From Zerubbabel leading the first wave of exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem, to the Maccabean revolt. Their hope was for a kingdom of this world peopled by Jews. Their "kingdom dream" was a dream of Jewish nationalism.

During the inter-testamentary period (400 BC to 6 AD), another view of the kingdom began to develop among non-inspired writings of that time. Writings that we call "apocalyptic" literature. The writings of this era hoped for a heavenly kingdom that would end the present evil age. For example, in the book of Jubilee 23:29 the author suggests a golden age to come in which God Himself would usher in His kingdom, reversing the rule and the evil of Satan. Because of this type of uninspired literature, there were many false ideas of the kingdom that were swirling among the people for centuries before Jesus arrived.

These and various combinations of uninspired ideas were present in the minds of the people as John the Baptist spoke of the Kingdom. So I think we can understand, therefore, that when the people heard Jesus teach that the Kingdom had arrived, and they witnessed His powerful miracles, they were ready to crown

Him King, whether He liked it or not. He fulfilled all of their aspirations.

Imagine if a candidate for president was able to do miracles? What would you think of him if at a rally with 10,000 people present he miraculously produced food to feed everyone there? Would you not want to vote for this person to be leader of the nation? This was the feeling at the time about Jesus, but then He began describing the Kingdom in detail, and it didn't fit any of the notions that the writers and the people had hoped for. In addition to this, Jesus explained the nature of the Kingdom in abstract terms with the use of parables and without references to political power, military dominance or any kind of economic features.

For example, He said that the Kingdom was like:

- A mustard seed
- A man who sowed seed
- Leaven, that leavens dough
- A net that catches fish
- A relationship between a master and a servant
- A person that finds a pearl, or a treasure

True to Daniel's words, Jesus began to teach the people that the Kingdom was supernatural in nature, not political; and furthermore the Kingdom, "...is not of this world." They were expecting a kingdom definitely of this world. Jesus didn't mean that the Kingdom had no power or authority, it simply meant that as a spiritual kingdom, its power and authority were derived and controlled by God, not armies or human leaders.

The Kingdom that Jesus and His Apostles announced,

- was small enough to exist in one person's heart
- was big enough to include all who would enter in
- was powerful enough to dominate every other kingdom
- was so precious that when someone found it they would abandon everything they owned in order to possess it

And yet, was so elusive that some people stood right next to it but didn't even see it. Finally, the Kingdom that Jesus spoke of was being built in their lifetimes, exactly as Daniel had spoken.

3. The Kingdom was Something that has been Established

Many years ago I had a friend who worked in Saudi Arabia for several years and when I would write to him, because we corresponded by conventional mail, I would address his envelope with the term, kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was part of the address. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia included all the territory over which the king of Saudi Arabia ruled. And throughout history, this has been different according to how much land the king obtained through war and other means.

The point here is that the kingdom is that which belongs to the king. This is the earthly and physical understanding of the term kingdom.

⁹ "Pray, then, in this way:
 'Our Father who is in heaven,
 Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ 'Your kingdom come.
 Your will be done,
 On earth as it is in heaven.
 - Matthew 6:9-10

In this passage Jesus mentions one Kingdom existing simultaneously in two spheres. One kingdom is on earth, that had yet to be established and the other one was in heaven, already established. Therefore, Jesus was praying that the will of God be done on earth as it was already being done in heaven. An important point to note here is that the Kingdom of God exists wherever His will is being done, because the word kingdom comes from a Greek word which means sovereignty or will.

In Matthew 6:9-10 Jesus prayed that God's will be done here on earth as it was done in heaven. In essence He was praying that God's Kingdom be established here just as God's will was being done in heaven. When this happens, God's will (the Kingdom established) is being fulfilled in both the heavenly and the earthly realms. And so, if we want to know what the Kingdom looks like, we need to examine what God's will is for all men, because the Kingdom exists wherever and whenever God's will is being done. Paul writes,

³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

- 1 Timothy 2:3-6

WHAT IS GOD'S WILL?

That all men come to know that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and be saved through Him. This is God's will. When that will is being accomplished, the Kingdom of God is being established. An important point to note here is that the Kingdom of God exists wherever His will is being done. And Paul summarizes His will in this brief passage.

As the Apostle writes, God's will is that all mankind recognize the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and they will be saved as a result. Insofar as the Kingdom is concerned, it is being established whenever and wherever people are confessing Jesus and expressing this faith in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). When they do that, the kingdom of God on earth is being established and the kingdom is growing.

This knowledge unlocks all of the parables about the kingdom.

- Isn't Jesus the pearl of great price, and are we not willing to abandon everything in order to have Him?
- Isn't the word of God the leaven that permeates the entire life of a man or a woman?
- Isn't preaching the gospel a great net that draws in many hearers, that are eventually reduced to just a few believers?
- Isn't Jesus the master that leaves His disciples to care for the Kingdom and will return one day to examine their stewardship?
- Isn't the knowledge of God's will small enough to exist in one believer's heart, yet big enough to reach every soul in the world?
- Isn't God's will powerful enough to destroy every human kingdom while sustaining His own Kingdom, to the end of time and beyond?

We are not Premillennialists who are waiting for the kingdom to come. Nor are we Post-Millennialists, who think much like the Jews of the first century, that the Kingdom will be some kind of golden age, where the church will dominate here on earth until Jesus returns. We don't believe that. Our view is much simpler to understand, taken primarily from the previously quoted

Matthew 6:9-10 where Jesus prays that the Kingdom is simply God's will being done on earth as it is being done in heaven.

When seen through the lens of the Kingdom, we understand that all who are in heaven are obviously under the authority and will of God. And so, the Kingdom of God is firmly established there. Jesus' prayer is that God's will that man's salvation through Christ also be established here on earth.

Therefore, when someone asks when or how was God's Kingdom established here on earth? The reply, according to Scripture, should be the following: the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of Christ was established when the gospel began to be preached and people responded to it in faithful obedience. That's when the Kingdom was established. That's when the doors were opened. That's when people started coming in.

To be more specific, the Kingdom was established when Christ defeated sin and death with His resurrection, to accomplish the first part of God's will, and that was to provide redemption for man's sins through the sacrifice of His son, and the doors to the Kingdom were flung open as the Apostles were first to enter in, and then on Pentecost Sunday they began to preach the gospel to invite everyone who believed to also enter into the Kingdom of God. A familiar passage, but an important one.

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children

and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;
- Acts 2:36-44

As Jesus said to Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world." But as we have learned, it is very much in this world, and embodied by those who have been added to it through faith in Jesus Christ expressed in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM

So far we've seen how and when the Kingdom was established. One other thing we need to examine: how the Kingdom grows because Jesus often spoke of its growth and development. Here is a summary of the two ways He referred to this phenomenon:

1. As it related to an individual

The Kingdom of God is within you, He said. He used the example of a seed or leaven, referring to agents that worked on the inside of a person to cause growth. These agents were figures representing God's Word given through the Holy Spirit and recorded by the Apostles. The Kingdom, that is, the ability to do God's will and become like Christ, the Kingdom grows within the

individual as he internalizes and submits to the direction of God's Word. How do I grow in Christ? I obey His word.

The growth of the Kingdom within becomes evident externally, as the Kingdom dweller produces spiritual fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, holiness, service, etc. (Galatians 5:22). Paul calls it fruit of the Spirit, but we could just as easily call it fruit of the Kingdom, or the Kingdom within the believer. Therefore, when you see these things developed in one's life, in the name of Christ, you are seeing the Kingdom that is not of this world, living within the believer who is in this world.

2. The kingdom in a collective sense

Jesus, the Apostles, and other New Testament writers used different words when referring to the Kingdom collectively. In other words, many people in whom the Kingdom was present used terms like the church, the Saints, the household of God etc. This collective Kingdom grows in numbers and spiritual influence on the world as it spreads the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom. And so, this Kingdom of God on earth is made up of individuals who have and continue to respond to God in Christ. Individually they are called Christians, saints, disciples, believers, to name a few. Collectively they're referred to as the church, or the body of Christ, among other things. If you've obeyed God's will and believe in obeying Christ, the Kingdom in the form of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are in you, as an individual. The Kingdom is in you. And, at the same time, you as an individual become part of the Kingdom of God, comprised of all those who have been saved both in heaven and on earth.

The Glorification of the Kingdom

The Apostles had a hard time understanding the nature of the Kingdom, to the extent where they never even asked the obvious question: what is the purpose of the Kingdom? Why was it

formed? What is it all leading to? And so, in this study I've been talking about the Kingdom of heaven on earth, but I haven't really discussed the Kingdom of heaven in heaven. An important point to remember in all of this is, if we are the part of the kingdom here on earth, it means that we will also participate in the Kingdom of heaven that is in heaven. Praise God for that!

The Kingdom here on earth is the Kingdom, however it is not yet glorified, it is not yet exalted as the heavenly Kingdom. This is the end game of Christianity. The Kingdom of heaven in heaven is already glorified, and those who are part of it have things that we don't have yet, things that Paul mentions in I Corinthians 15, where he describes the features of the glorified body which are also the features of the glorified kingdom. For example,

- incorruptibility – no sin or weakness
- supernatural power – no subject to time or natural laws
- eternal existence – no death
- spiritual glory – spiritual gifts perfected to the point where they are a source of light that emanates from within us

The glorified state will enable us to become like Christ in power, as well as like Christ in personality and righteousness. This is the reward. Don't we get it? God sent Christ to show us what was waiting for us. The endgame is that you and I become exactly like Him. When preachers say, "Keep your eye on the cross or keep your eye on Jesus", they are saying, keep your eye on the One that you will become like, because this focus will guide your steps. The glorified state is what we are moving towards. The exalted position in the Godhead is our final destination.

The return of Jesus at the end of the world will signal the joining together of the Kingdom of God on earth with the Kingdom of God in heaven, and together with the angels and Jesus Himself, all

will be united within the Godhead, to exist in this way for eternity (I Thessalonians 4:16-17; I Corinthians 15:23-34).

SUMMARY

The Kingdom of God here on earth: Daniel predicted it, Jesus proclaimed and died for it, the Apostles opened its doors with their preaching, people have entered in through faith expressed in obedience, and we all await the return of Jesus for its glorification and its final eternal exaltation.

In the meantime, I want to remind you of one thing:

We are the Kingdom in this world. Not Muslims or Hindus or various sects claiming Christ. Let this be a comfort when feeling weak or dry or outnumbered. Let this be a comfort to the church, when it seems that we're not making progress or we're going backwards and seem to have many problems. Remember that despite these things we may be reduced, discouraged and unsure, but we cannot be defeated (Matthew 16:18).

And so, I pray that God blesses you as you build up the Kingdom of Christ and wait patiently for His return. Remember also that You Are the Kingdom! Let that direct the way that you live and let that be the substance of your strength and hope.

Finally, if you have not entered the Kingdom by confessing Christ and expressing your faith in Him through repentance and baptism, the opportunity to step in is always before you. On the other hand, if for some reason you've left the Kingdom because of unfaithfulness or continued willful sin, be restored through a prayer of repentance to secure your rightful place in God's glorious Kingdom.

2.

Living in the Kingdom

MATTHEW 5:1-7:29

In the previous chapter, we reviewed the history, the prophecy and the fulfillment of God's promise to establish His Kingdom here on earth. We looked at the various ways that the Kingdom was described and some of its unique features. I finished up by listing the eventual outcome of the Kingdom when Jesus returns. It is no surprise then to know that the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of Christ was a major topic in Jesus' teaching.

We see an example of this emphasis on the Kingdom in Matthew chapters 5-7 where the Lord's "Sermon" deals primarily with how one is to live and conduct himself as a member of this Kingdom. Let's read Matthew 5:1-2 to begin our study of this section of Matthew and what it teaches us about life in the Kingdom.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,
- Matthew 5:1-2

The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of topics that Jesus addressed at this occasion and partially mentioned by other gospel writers (Luke 6:17). The setting is a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. I've been to that particular place when I traveled to Israel several years back and there was a chapel there and you can see the hillside where this took place. It is very unique because that topography doesn't exist in other parts of the lake. This was near the town of Capernaum where both Jesus and Peter lived as adults. Matthew says that after Jesus finished this sermon or this teaching, He came down and after healing several people from the crowd He went into Peter's home and even healed Peter's mother-in-law who was suffering from a high fever (Matthew 8:14-17).

The Sermon on the Mount deals with five major subjects:

1. The Beatitudes - 5:1-16
2. The Law - 5:17-48
3. Relationship with God - 6:1-34
4. Relationship with Others - 7:1-12
5. The Way of Life - 7:13-29

In this section I'd like to comment on these five.

BEATITUDES - 5:1-16

The word Beatitude does not appear in the New Testament as such. It is the word Beatitudo, a Latin translation for the word blessed which means happy, joyful or blessed. There are a nine of these and all of them begin and are structured in the same way. They make a promise, they deal with spiritual things and they're a direction for people in the Kingdom. One needs to remember the idea that the Beatitudes and what is written here in the Sermon on the Mount are directed towards people who are in the Kingdom, not people who are outside of it for whom these things make no sense. The teachings about our conduct, attitude and relationships in the Sermon on the Mount don't make sense to people who are not Christians. They can understand what is being taught but the content is impractical to them in context because they are not members of the Kingdom.

The approach that Jesus used in the Beatitudes was a style that the Jewish rabbis had when introducing their lessons with a question or a paradox.

Beatitudes were contradictions that challenged the preconceived notions of life and philosophy. For example:

- The spiritually poor will obtain the riches in heaven
- The mourners would be comforted
- The gentle will gain the earth (not the warrior)
- Those thirsty for righteousness will be satisfied

In the Beatitudes, Jesus gives insight into the spiritual reality that operates in the Kingdom of Heaven. These are spiritual principles by which we, in the Kingdom, live by.

For example, those who bear persecution in the name of Christ, do rejoice. This is not the usual reaction of those who are

persecuted, they usually react with fear, anger or a desire for revenge. But in the Kingdom, the spiritual laws work in such a way that those who suffer for Christ actually rejoice in their sufferings.

Disciples in the Kingdom, influenced by these principles, are distinct like salt as a flavor or light to the eye. The distinctiveness of the disciples, characterized by the principles set forth in the Beatitudes, is what makes them stand apart from others and what characterizes the Kingdom as the saltiness of salt or the brightness of light. This distinctiveness ultimately perceived in good lives and good works, is not only indicative of the Kingdom, but also reveals the true nature of God to fallen man. In the Beatitudes, we see man as he is in the regenerated state and not as he was in the state of lawlessness without Christ. This is the practical out working of an individual who is born again in Jesus Christ.

THE LAW - 5:17-48

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.
- Matthew 5:20

The key verse in the discourse on the Law is this verse and it reveals that the higher righteousness of the disciples is the quality that distinguishes them and makes them useful in the Kingdom. In Matthew 5:17-48 Jesus makes a series of comparisons putting forth what the people had been taught about the Law by their teachers and then comparing these teachings with the essence or the spirit of the Law given by the

One who originally gave the Law to Moses, Jesus Himself (I Corinthians 10:4).

Jesus comments on five areas of teaching in the Law of Moses that they had received from their teachers and he compares each of these with the true essence of what that teaching actually meant according to the One who gave the Law.

1. Murder

²¹ "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- Matthew 5:21-22

Jesus pegs the crime at the beginning of anger and resentment towards others and that the keeping of the Law meant a conscious effort at reconciliation and not just avoiding the extreme which would be murder.

2. Adultery

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; ²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Matthew 5:27-28

They had been taught to manipulate the Law in order to justify their adultery with easy divorce. They thought, "As long as I give my wife a bill of divorce, I've not broken God's Law when I've divorced her." Jesus again situates the true sin as impurity of the heart and the keeping of the Law as an effort to control one's mind and body, not the manipulation of the Law. He's explaining where the true sin was and what keeping the Law here really meant (sexual purity, fidelity).

3. Vows

³³ "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,
- Matthew 5:33-34

The Jews at that time had learned a complex manner of making selective vows which they felt they could break when it was convenient. Jesus reveals that vows are not necessary when one has an honest heart which was what the Law essentially required.

4. Justice

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.
- Matthew 5:38-39

Their system at the time relied on the Law as a tool for restitution and very often as a cover for revenge. Jesus taught them that the higher principle of the Law was mercy and not simply exacting justice or revenge.

5. Nationalism

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
- Matthew 5:43-44

They would use the Law to build a wall around themselves and keep others out, all done as a way of isolating themselves. Jesus showed them that one purpose of the Law was to reveal God's goodness to men, that to be like God meant to have justice and especially mercy towards strangers and those who were dispossessed.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD - 6:1-34

In this passage Jesus teaches them how to have a proper relationship with God in heaven.

1. Practice goodness towards God with a view of pleasing Him, not men. - vs. 1-4
2. Pray to God in order to communicate with Him and not simply to impress others with your piety. - vs. 5-18
3. Trust in God to provide for all of your physical and spiritual needs. - vs 19-34

Jesus encourages his audience to understand the nature of the Kingdom (Beatitudes); the quality of life that they should strive

for as salt and light of the earth (which is the essence of the Law); and guides them into practical ways to have a meaningful relationship with God.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS - 7:1-12

The elements of a proper relationship with God are followed by the key idea in having a blessed relationship with people in the Kingdom.

In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

- Matthew 7:12

Upon this principle is based all of the teaching in the Law and the Prophets on how we must treat one another in order to bless ourselves and to please God.

THE WAY OF LIFE - 7:13-29

Having set forth the parameters of the Kingdom and its inner workings here on earth, Jesus explains the way to enter into a relationship with the Father in the Kingdom of Heaven.

1. Enter by the narrow gate of Christ. Later on at His crucifixion, the disciples will understand just how narrow and difficult this gate really is. Jesus is the only gate that one can enter through and faith in Him is the only way to enter in.
2. Beware of false prophets who produced neither the teachings nor the fruit of the Kingdom of Christ. That's

how you know them, they have neither the fruit nor the teachings. The true prophets have the fruit and the teachings. So we have to judge Christianity or any other religion by its fruit.

3. Don't just hear the words of Christ, act upon them in order to enter into the Kingdom. Many are called but few are chosen. Many heard all of what He said that day in the Sermon on the Mount and they were amazed at his teaching, but only a few entered through the narrow gate of faith in Him and received the cross that He called on His disciples to carry.

3.

Farming in the Kingdom of God

I CORINTHIANS 3:1-9

Like Jesus, Paul used many illustrations to explain the inner workings of God's Kingdom and the spiritual world. In I Corinthians 3, he begins by comparing working in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth (which is the church) to working on a farm. I think the reason he does this is to help us understand in a practical way what our ministries in the church actually mean in relation to the "big picture."

- It's easy to become frustrated and discouraged if we don't see how/what we are doing in a specific area fits into the whole.
- This is why smart companies give employees orientation training in the goals and overall operation of their business, so that the individual can see the place and importance that his/her contribution makes to the final product.

Paul is doing this in I Corinthians 3 by explaining the overall cycle that must take place in the normal development of a church. In doing so, he was hoping to dispel feelings of pride or despair felt by various individuals because they happened to be at some high or low point in the normal cycle of church growth.

He chooses the "farming" illustration to explain this because his readers would easily understand this imagery, since farming was the oldest of cycles known to man. With the "farm" model, he explains the natural evolution of growth in the church and how each believer is an important part for that growth to happen.

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?

⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

- I Corinthians 3:1-9

He begins by rebuking his readers for their immature attitude. He compares them to spiritual babies who are not ready to begin eating a regular diet of spiritual food. The reason for this rebuke is that they are jealous of one another and are dividing into groups. Paul says that in doing this they are worse than "spiritual babes," they are "mere men" or unspiritual men, men without God's Spirit. The reason for their jealousy and division was that they were aligning themselves with different church leaders and claiming their work and their success as their own.

In response to their partisanship, Paul explains the true role of these people as equal servants in a cycle of growth begun and maintained by God. In explaining the tasks of he and Apollos (a great orator and preacher of the time), Paul establishes a model for all future workers to refer to when comparing what they are doing to the overall work and growth of the church.

In verse 5, he says that all workers, regardless of their task or where they are in the cycle, are all equal because all are working toward the same end — producing faith in Jesus Christ in the hearts of others. And, no worker can boast since the opportunity to serve, the tools to serve with (and later on he will say, even the results), all of these are provided by God. No servant therefore can boast because all begin with nothing and are completely supplied for the task by God. By implication, Paul is telling his readers that if he and Apollos cannot boast, then neither can their so-called followers boast.

In verse 6, he applies the cycle found in farming and gardening to the cycle of growth we experience in God's Kingdom here on earth — the church. He mentions 3 phases in that cycle, and the fact that each one represents a place and type of work we find ourselves in as Christians serving in the church of our Lord.

1. Planting

There is no crop without first the seeds being sown into the earth. In the church, sowing of seed or planting is essentially spreading the gospel to all nations. Jesus alluded to this in the parable of the sower and the seed (Mark 4:1-14). As a matter of fact, he even says in verse 14, "The sower sows the word" by way of explaining the parable to His disciples. The Lord also made this to be His basic command as the first task of the Apostles after his resurrection. Mark 16:15 says "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." You begin or restart with seeding, and there are many ways to do this "seeding".

- Missionaries who go into foreign countries.
- Advertising, Radio, T.V., the Internet and VBS.
- Visitation Programs.
- Personal studies

Every effort to bring the gospel to those who haven't heard it before is part of the planting effort.

Planting is hard work; it's an uphill type of work. You need great faith, must be able to work with little encouragement, and must be ready not to receive much credit for what you've done. It's usually a lonely kind of work because you labor with hope and a vision that only a few people can see.

Abraham, Noah, and the Apostle Paul were seed planters and set the example for modern-day seed sowers in every congregation. People who had a vision back in the 40's and 50's to plant churches in our present location. People we don't even know who are gone now. Of course, the reward for visionaries is a faith that is rock solid as a result of the vision they have received in serving the Kingdom.

In the end, the planters, the sowers, the visionaries feel close to God and are continually and easily filled with awe and praise as we see in Paul's writings where he spontaneously breaks out in praise and joy — even in the most difficult of circumstances. This is the true spirit of planters and seed sowers.

2. Watering

Paul claims that Apollos was a waterer, a nourisher, a builder-upper. This is usually the longest stage in both the cycle of farming and church growth. The seed is planted with hard work to break up the soil and remove the debris. Then the farmer waits patiently for the rain to nourish the seed and the earth. For the church, this watering stage involves:

- Organizing, ministering to others, persevering in a task.
- Teaching the Bible year in and year out.
- Building buildings, training teachers, helping ministers to mature.
- Strengthening families, developing leaders, as well as establishing good community relationships.

Planting is hard; watering is tedious. It's slow, grinding, sometimes repetitive and monotonous. It's discouraging at times because it is often a case of one step forward and two steps back. There are many late nights, large responsibilities, sacrifices, and not much gratitude from your students at the time. People like Solomon who consolidated his father David's gains and later spent decades building an elaborate temple. This sometimes shames us because we want construction in a month or a year!

- Barnabas, the early mentor of Paul and later Mark, were waterers.

- The Apostle John, who did not have to move around much for his ministry, remained a long time in teaching and building the church in Ephesus and Asia Minor is another example of one who worked at his task as a waterer for decades.

We have these kinds of servants today, for example:

- Elders who serve with their wives and keep a steady hand for years.
- Deacons who work hard with little recognition.
- Teachers and ministers who are there day in and day out — to the point that we take them for granted; they are always there when we need them.
- Those brothers and sisters who are responsible for a thousand acts of kindness — visiting the sick, preparing food, serving in childcare; they are the quiet waters that continually nourish this church.

I have not mentioned all who deserve to be mentioned, only a few to help you understand the kind of person and the kind of work "watering" is. The reward for waterers is that their work etches into their character over time and you begin to see the true workings of hope, strength, and the most precious of virtues — Godly humility in them. Waterers feel close to God's people and know His ways intimately. This gives them great confidence for the future and a hope that cannot be shaken. You are judged and compared to others who come before you and, as leaders, have to cope with new problems that have not been faced before.

People like Joshua who took over from Moses and settled a land already subdued by others was one who worked a harvest period. And Peter, along with the other Apostles, enjoyed a great harvest from Jesus' ministry but had the task of leading the early church through the first difficult years of its existence. Today

your present elders, deacons, and ministers are very much into this phase as they strive to find the direction and new goals to reach based on the achievements of past generations. Of course, there is a reward for harvesters too.

- Their task is a joyful one.
- They have many resources to work with.
- They have the blessing of seeing God's power at work.
- Harvesters get an early taste of heaven and experience the pleasure of having a thankful heart.

3. Harvesting

The third phase in the cycle is harvesting. Jesus promised that those who are faithful to sow seed and work the soil will have a harvest of some kind — sometimes 30, 60, 100. The work of harvesting includes:

- Baptizing souls who are coming to Christ (especially in developing nations).
- Managing the growth caused by years of work by others (i.e. operating Christian schools, writing books, organizing great demonstrations of praise and worship).
- Planning for the next plateau of growth in large congregations.
- Funding other good works to glorify God and edify the church.

Harvesting has its own unique set of challenges. However, you are the steward of the hard work of others, and receive little credit for what you accomplish.

SUMMARY

Now that we've had a "birds-eye" view of this model of growth, let's draw a few practical lessons for our own situation here today as we follow in Jesus' footsteps in doing the work of the kingdom as planters, waterers, and harvesters.

Lesson #1 – Church Work/Growth is Cyclical

No one person or one congregation is exclusively in one place. We go from one stage to another in our personal ministries as well as the development of a congregation. Knowing this helps us not become too proud or too discouraged or get into a rut. Because it is a cycle, we should always be prepared for change and learn to be flexible in order to accommodate the various phases in the life of a congregation.

Lesson #2 – Know Where You Are in the Cycle

A church with empty pews shouldn't waste its time on a building program. A church with crowded classrooms needs both a building program and a teacher training program. Wise leaders learn to discern where the congregation is in its cycle and plan for the next phase. This breeds confidence in the leadership and clear direction for the congregation.

Lesson #3 – Jesus is the Lord of Every Harvest

Paul says it this way:

⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's

field, God's building.
- I Corinthians 3:7-9

He reminds us that no matter where we are in the cycle, and what task has been assigned to us, the Lord is the one who will cause the seed to grow - verse 7. Then Paul reassures them that each point in the cycle and each task performed is the same in God's eyes. Seed planters have no greater glory than waterers or harvesters — they are all equal tasks in God's eyes. He will reward based on how you worked, not what you worked at (i.e. if you served well keeping the nursery, you will be rewarded; if you neglected your responsibility as an elder you will receive your due).

Finally, in verse 9, Paul explains that while you are busy working at your ministry, whatever that is and at whatever point in the cycle, God is busy working on you. Your theatre of operation is this world and the task is to fill it with the knowledge of Christ. His theatre of operations is your heart and His task is to fill it with the love of Christ through the Holy Spirit. You see, as you work for Him in this world, He is at work to prepare you for the world to come — this is also part of the cycle.

INVITATION

Where are you at in the cycle of your life? In the endless cycle of sin and shame and failure?

Why not break out of this rut and come to Christ today so that He might set you free from guilt and fear and begin the cycle of love and joy and anticipation of heaven rather than the dread of condemnation? If you want to be free, come to Jesus now by repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him, and being buried in the water of baptism to wash away the old cycle of sin and death and begin the new cycle of peace and joy.

4.

The Power of Proclamation

Kingdom Victory

MATTHEW 28:1-20

Each of the four men who recorded the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ had his own perspective and objective in mind when assembling his eyewitness account of the life, death, burial, resurrection and the ascent of Jesus to heaven. For example, John's Gospel is the most philosophical of the four, using imagery (i.e. Jesus is the light) to convey the concept that Jesus was the embodiment of truth.

Mark presents Jesus as the powerful Son of God, devoting much of his account to describing eighteen of the thirty-five miracles recorded, the most of any of the Gospel writers.

Luke is interested in showing Jesus, the Son of God, as fully human. He did this by grounding his gospel record in precise history and the social and religious customs of the Jewish nation.

Matthew's unique perspective is to prove that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah according to the Scriptures. He does this in two ways:

1. By proof-texting much of Jesus' life and ministry to the passages in Scripture that described and foretold what the Messiah would say and do when He would appear. This is why there are 68 Old Testament references in Matthew which he states in making his point about Jesus. That's why when you're reading Matthew, he is always connecting Jesus to the Old Testament prophets with the phrases, 'as it was said', or 'as it was foretold'. Matthew is always making sure that everything he writes about Jesus is supported with a text from the Old Testament.
2. Matthew is the only writer to specifically describe Jesus as a royal figure, the promised King from David's lineage. The true King of the heavenly Kingdom.

For this reason, any work seeking to develop the biblical theme of the Kingdom of Heaven, which I have tried to do in this study, and anyone trying to teach on this particular topic or various facets of this theme, needs to examine Matthew's account, since his gospel is completely immersed in the imagery of the King and His kingdom.

The title of this chapter, therefore, is Kingdom Victory: The Power of Proclamation. As the title suggests there are two things to consider:

1. The victory
2. The proclamation

Matthew addresses both of these. So let's go to his gospel and first examine the events that occurred during Jesus' final hours leading up to His death and subsequent victorious resurrection three days later. Now many writers and commentators have referred to the last hours of Jesus' life, including His torture and crucifixion as the "passion". And so, like the other three gospel writers, Matthew devotes the final portion of his written record to the passion and resurrection of Jesus but also adds the commission to the Apostles as well. To begin with, the passion is divided into three sections.

First of all, you have the final hours with the Apostles. The time with the Apostles included several scenes, the first of which is the anointing. A woman anoints Jesus' head with costly perfume. This was both a gesture of honor and respect, as well a prefigurement of His death, as His body was being prepared for the grave. The anointing occurred as Jesus ate with the disciples at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. This act moved Judas to make an arrangement with the Jewish leaders to find a place and a time convenient for them to arrest the Lord.

The second scene is the Last Supper. The period of the year was the Passover, when thousands of Jews from all over the world converged on Jerusalem to celebrate this religious event. They would sacrifice a lamb and would gather to eat the Passover meal in remembrance of the time that they were liberated from Egyptian slavery many years before. Jesus, a devout Jew, gathered His Apostles, and together they shared the Passover meal, as the Jewish people had done for centuries. Near the end of the meal, however, He instituted a new meal of sorts. From that day forward, He told His disciples, they would share the Lord's Supper of bread and wine to commemorate His death on the cross, to save them from the condemnation due to all men and women because of sin. There was to be no more sacrificing of the lamb, because He was the final sacrifice for sin. He was the Lamb of God. There was to be no more bitter herbs to eat as a

reminder of the bitter experience of slavery. From now on the unleavened bread would represent His pure body offered on the cross. And the fruit of the vine or the wine would represent His blood shed for sin. And the entire experience would now commemorate their freedom from sin, to a promise of an eternal home in heaven with God.

The next scene was played out in the garden of Gethsemane. This place was a garden located outside the city walls of Jerusalem. At this place Jesus struggled in prayer with His humanity, which recoiled at the thought of what He would have to face, this being a normal reaction for the human part of His nature. Any normal human being would feel this way. In the end, the Apostles are with Him, but not much help, because they are weary with sorrow and sleep. The final scene shows the Lord coming to grips with the horror before Him. And as He does, Judas, the traitor, arrives to betray Him into the hands of the Jewish authorities. At this point the Apostles scatter, just as Jesus said that they would. Now what's interesting about these events is that each one contains a prophetic element about the death to come. For example, the anointing prefigured His burial; the supper, His remembrance; the garden, a preview of suffering and surrender. Note that in each instance the Lord was preparing Himself and especially His Apostles for the death He would endure in only a few hours.

The second part of the passion scenario are the trials (Matthew 26). We don't have time to read all of these, but I think this is familiar material to most of us. Jesus had several trials or hearings which were organized in unlawful ways. For example, they were done at night. The law said you couldn't have a capital offense trial at night. They were done without all of the leaders present, and there was no 24-hour period of reflection which was required between trials that sought the death penalty. The law said if you had a trial and a person was condemned to death, you had to wait an entire day between pronouncing the sentence

and confirming that the sentence would be death. It was a kind of a cooling-off period which was ignored in the haste to execute Jesus. Of course, the purpose of the trials was not to determine truth or justice. No, these were show trials that were conducted to provide a reason or a charge by which Jesus could be executed. Matthew describes two scenes.

The first was a hearing before Annas the former High Priest who quickly passed Jesus on to the current High Priest, Caiaphas. Here He was mocked and baited by those assembled. They had no charge, as one witness after another contradicted himself. Finally, out of exasperation, Caiaphas asks Jesus directly if He thinks He is the Messiah. Jesus, being true to Himself, does not deny the claim, and in so doing gives Caiaphas the charge (blasphemy - claiming to be God) he so desperately is looking for. Under Jewish law blasphemy was punishable by death, but while they were under Roman rule the Jews did not have the civil or legal authority to carry out the death penalty. This could only be decreed by a Roman court, and carried out by Roman law. The next important trial, therefore, was the trial before Pilate, the Roman governor.

The Jews now bring Jesus before Pilate, hoping to persuade him to carry out the death penalty that they have levied on Jesus. Pilate, in examining Jesus, finds nothing under Roman law to justify the execution of this man. On the contrary, the more he speaks with Jesus, the more he wants to release Him. Even Pilate's wife appeals to him to let the Jewish prisoner go, having had a dream about Him.

Pilate even tries to exchange Jesus for a notorious murderer, but to no avail. The Jews are adamant. Finally, when he sees that the Jewish leaders are fomenting a riot over the issue, he relents and permits the execution to go forward; the release of one innocent Jew was not worth the trouble that a riot would cause on his governing record.

In both trials no proof or credible charge was made, no guilt was found, no crime was committed, and no justice was meted out. Jesus was falsely accused, illegally tried, improperly sentenced, and brutally executed for being who He really was. There's the irony. They killed Him because of who He was. So anytime we feel unjustly treated or under-appreciated or falsely accused, compare your experience to what they did to the One who was completely innocent and without sin in order to get a proper perspective.

The third section of the passion describes the crucifixion and the burial. Again, Matthew 27:32-66 describes the passion in the third section of this narrative, by relating the events of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. The method of execution, Roman crucifixion, was merciless, excruciating, and deadly; so much so that a Roman citizen was not allowed to be put to death in this way. It was reserved for the worst criminals, slaves and foreigners. Matthew does not provide much detail about the crucifixion itself, but rather spends more time describing the reaction of the people who were present at the cross. For example, he describes the soldiers as they gambled for His clothing, and the crowd who mocked His helpless person on the cross. He describes the Jewish leaders who taunted Jesus and also the criminals crucified with Him who insulted Him, one of whom later repented.

Matthew also describes the unusual things that took place once Jesus actually died: the veil of the Temple was torn in two, the earth shook, some were raised from the dead who had been disciples and believers, one of the centurions who had participated in the crucifixion was converted on the spot, and Jesus' female disciples gathered together to witness His final moments. All these things described by Matthew.

And with this scene unfolding, Matthew also describes the fact that above His head on the cross was a sign that read 'This is

Jesus, King of the Jews'. Now, the Romans had it put there to annoy and humiliate the Jews. The Jews had objected and wanted Pilate to write 'He said, I am The King of the Jews'. John tells us this in John 19:21, thus putting the humiliation on Jesus and not themselves, but Pilate was adamant and the sign remained as it was originally written. Now despite the lies and disbelief, what was written above the head of the Lord as a form of mockery was, in the end, the exact truth of the matter. He was the King of the Jews. The Jews, in collaboration with the Roman authorities, had executed their own Messiah, and to make matters even worse, had done it through the hands of pagans.

In the third section Matthew describes the crucifixion, and then the burial. Matthew goes on to describe the scene as Joseph of Arimathea and Mary Magdalene prepare the body for burial. There were others who participated, but Matthew mentions only these two. He also describes how the Jews, knowing of Jesus' prophecies concerning His resurrection, go to Pilate to make sure that the tomb was properly guarded. He permits them to double the garden and to put a seal on the stone, so there would be no tampering, no switching of bodies - parading some live look-alike to fake a kind of resurrection. This is the final scene leading up to the glorious event where Jesus will provide insurmountable proof to confirm His claim. And here is the proof text for this study - to provide and confirm the claim that He is the King of the Kingdom of God in heaven, as well as the King of the Kingdom of God here on earth. Who else could be the king of the Kingdom of God on earth, but the One resurrected from the dead? So let's read Matthew's account of the King's victory, because this is now leading to the main thought that I'd like to share.

THE RESURRECTION – 28:1-15

¹ Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.

It was early Sunday morning as several of His female disciples came with the hope of finishing the burial procedure left undone because Jesus' death occurred too near the Sabbath day.

² And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. ³ And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

Matthew describes what happened before the women had arrived that morning. The angel's presence had caused an earthquake when He rolled the stone away. The angel appeared as a man (they always do in the Bible). Matthew describes the angel in terms of bright light (common for spiritual beings to be described this way; i.e. Jesus at transfiguration). The guards fainted (they were afraid and unworthy to see the sight of the risen Christ).

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. ⁷ Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the

dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

The angel instructs the women as to what has happened and what they should do.

⁸ And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."

On their way to do this, Jesus appears to them and they worship Him as the King.

He also repeats the instructions of the angel (who originally received them from the Lord).

¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.

Matthew describes the scene where the Jewish leaders construct a story to explain the disappearance of the body and the amazing experience of the soldiers. It is interesting to note that Matthew

credits this story as something that was still being spread by the Jews as a way to discredit the resurrection; even some thirty years later when Matthew was writing and circulating this gospel.

But Jesus has risen and the tide of human history will now change forever. A new King is crowned to rule over the Kingdom that God has established on the earth in place of the evil ruler that held the power of death over the people.

One royal duty remains for the King to carry out.

THE COMMISSION – 28:16-20

Jesus' position as the Savior/King has been established fulfilling all of the prophecies about Him. The prophets said that the Messiah and true King of God's people would provide proof of His identity by resurrecting from the dead. Many prophets and leaders did miracles, raised the dead and won great victories, but only the Messiah/King would die for the people and resurrect three days later. This was the final proof of His identity as King/Savior "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

Now that this fact has been established, there remains one last act for the King to do. He now gives His Apostles a commission and the authority to proclaim the King's message throughout the world. The commission and message are the following:

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that

I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

THE POWER OF PROCLAMATION

In reviewing the details of the Lord's suffering, death and resurrection from Matthew's gospel I have, in my own way through this book, made a proclamation of the King's victory through His glorious resurrection. Sometimes we say, well you've got to preach the gospel. If you're wondering what that is like, in the time you've been reading this chapter, you have also been reading my own preaching of the gospel: the life, the ministry, the crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven of the Lord is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. That's the gospel!

The title of this chapter is, "The Power of Proclamation". And so, one might ask, well, where is the power? I've heard the proclamation, based on Matthew's witness, but how is this proclamation powerful? Is the power based on the eloquence of the speaker? Is the power in the amount of detail? Is the power the type of presentation, using images, song, drama or emotion? Is that the power?

No, the power of the proclamation is not found in the speaker or the style, but in the content of the proclamation itself. We proclaim that Jesus, King of the Kingdom, has achieved the victory over man's greatest enemy, which is death. And this victory has been witnessed by hundreds of people, then recorded and preserved in the Bible. Like previous believers before us we have been given the task to proclaim this good news to our generation today. We're responsible for today. We're responsible for this place. We're not responsible for New York or Tulsa or Rio de Janeiro but we are, however, responsible for our community, our town and neighbors. We're responsible for these.

There is, therefore, power in the proclamation of Jesus' victory, because the resurrection is the answer to every doubt and fear, failure and disbelief in this fallen world. We, the believers, are responsible for making that proclamation to the people around us. On October 1st, 2017 a man in Las Vegas shot and killed dozens of people, and he did it on purpose. He planned it carefully. He organized his resources and then went about killing as many innocents as he could, and he managed to kill 59 people and injured over 500 spectators attending a concert before killing himself. The worst single shooter, mass murder in American history. I hate when they say that - the worst. It's like this man won the title for the worst murderer, and it seems to appeal to the mind of these people who are deranged - thinking, wow, fifty-nine! Maybe I can kill sixty if I get a bigger gun, and I'll add bombs or something.

The media loves to splash this in front of the nation. Immediately after the incident, politicians and lobby groups began debating gun control laws and people started to raise funds for the wounded and there were endless articles about how to prevent these type of things: more counseling, better screening, more security at concerts. All the talk about how to prevent needless killing and death, but nobody bothered to bring up the idea that death was not the issue. You know why? Because everybody dies at some time or other, and in some way or another. It's sad, but it's true.

The issue here was not death. The issue was judgment. What happens after we die? This person sent 59 people to judgment, whether they were ready or not, they were going to judgment. They had no time to prepare. They had no time to think. They had no time to review. They had no time to repent of wrongdoing in their own lives. They were at a concert listening to music, the last thing on their mind was judgment.

We know that there will be a judgment, the Hebrew writer tells us, "It is given to man to die once, then comes the judgement" (Hebrews 9:27). We are aware of the fact that death comes to every one of us albeit in different ways: You die once from cancer, getting hit by a car, old age, arthritis, or you die from a gunshot wound. It is given to man to die once. Sometimes the young die, sometimes the old, sometimes folks die suddenly and at times death only comes after years of suffering, but one thing is sure, you die some way or another... and then comes the judgment. We now have confirmation of this with Jesus' resurrection, which among other things, affirms as true all that is written in the Bible. The risen Christ declares that there will be a judgment, and this truth cuts through all the tears and sorrow and clattering media noise surrounding this horrific event, and it speaks to the people involved in the following ways:

- To the families of those killed the gospel says, if your loved one was in Christ, you may be sorrowful and in pain now, but you have hope because Jesus' resurrection guarantees their resurrection and yours as well, when the time comes.
- To those wounded and witnesses scarred for life. I mean, 500 people were wounded by bullets or being trampled in the frenzy caused by the shooter but what about the people who witnessed the carnage? You can never unsee an innocent person being murdered. And you certainly can never unsee 50 innocent people being murdered in front of your eyes. You cannot unsee that. Your life has changed forever. And so, to the wounded, and to the witnesses the gospel says, you have a chance to reflect on your life - what is true, what is not true. You have been spared and you can still contemplate the resurrection and what it means for you, and what it means for your future. That's the message of the gospel to the wounded in life.

- To the shooter's family, who reported that he had no religious affiliations. He was not a man of faith. His passion was gambling, not God. He now becomes an example of how wicked a person can become without Christ in his life and more importantly why Jesus died on the cross to begin with. He may have escaped justice here on this earth in taking his own life but Jesus' resurrection guarantees that he will face God's justice when all men will be resurrected to be judged for their deeds done in the body. Paul says in Romans,

On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

- Romans 2:16

The proclamation of Christ has the power not only for the good news that it announces but also for the answers it provides for those who are hurt and sorrowful and frightened, as well as the warning of judgment to come for disbelievers and mockers and the wicked in this world. And believe me, there are wicked people in this world. Parents and grandparents, you do well to protect your children. There are bad people in the world who consciously want to harm us. This shooting is the reason we need to proclaim the gospel and keep doing so until Jesus returns. Let the politicians worry about who has and who hasn't got any guns, that's not our job. Our job is to proclaim the gospel.

If you want to gauge how powerful the proclamation of the gospel is, try to imagine a world without that proclamation. We get a glimpse of a world without the proclamation of a powerful message from God, where only a few people held fast to a promise of salvation far into the future. For example, during the pre-diluvian era of Noah, where the Bible describes a society whose every thought was constantly evil. Can you imagine living in a society where every thought of every person was evil? At

least in this nation there are many, many believers, thousands, millions of believers. And yet, Noah was in a minority, an extreme minority. He did not have a message of great hope or joy. He had a message of salvation, but no one listened to him.

The other was the King's dream interpreted by Daniel, who declared that the entire world would be ruled by pagan empires for over 600 years into the future. We are amazed at Daniel's ability as a prophet to interpret a dream about matters well into the future. More specifically the rise and fall of four world empires, one after another, but do we think for a moment that each of these nations would become pagan empires? He was telling the world that you better get ready because for the next six centuries pagan empires are going to rule. The proclamation of a risen Christ will not fix a broken world, this is the promise of ideologues and politicians. The proclamation's purpose is to call people out of the kingdom of darkness and into the Kingdom of Light, (Colossians 1:13), a declaration that brought hope to countless generations before and after us as well.

The world is on fire and it'll be destroyed along with everything and everyone whose life is bound to it. Peter says, concerning those who have been saved, that they have escaped the corruption that is in world by lust (II Peter:1-4). And note that on Pentecost Sunday, after he had finished proclaiming the good news of Jesus' resurrection, Luke records Peter's ongoing message, "With many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation,'" (Acts 2:40).

The Kingdom's victory is not that somehow we have won over the world or we've repaired what is broken and bent. The victory is that those who were dead in sin, now can be made alive in Christ, and will be resurrected to eternal life when He returns. That's the Good News. The message is powerful, if we would only proclaim it. The number one reason why churches are small and

remain small, is not because they are in small towns or they don't have a full-time preacher or their building is not suitable, these are symptoms, not causes.

The cause for non or very limited growth anywhere is that Christians are not proclaiming. Proclamation is the most powerful tool we have for growing churches anywhere in the world. Find a medium that you have access to and start proclaiming the Good News.

The first question to ask ourselves when considering the growth of the church is, "How are we proclaiming Christ to our community?" Are we being trained for evangelism? Do we regularly communicate with our community in some way, sharing the gospel with them; Inviting them to our congregation to hear God's word being spoken; using radio spots, cable TV, websites, life, class or gospel meetings? The more the victory is proclaimed outside of the church building, the more people will eventually end up on the inside of the church building. Simple as that. No 20-step plan. Simply train and encourage each individual member of the congregation to accept that they, in their own way, are responsible for proclaiming the Good News to their mothers, to their brothers, to their neighbors, to their family and to their children.

The more we proclaim the Good News on the outside, the more our congregations will be filled with people who have heard the Good News and responded to it on the inside of the building. It sounds simple. It's not always simple to do, but really that's the action plan. Those are the marching orders. Again, nothing new. I think I'm preaching to the choir here, but something that we always need to keep in our minds and in our hearts. And so, as I finish, I exhort us to try to proclaim the Good News in some way to someone else. This is the action plan. So I pray that God blesses all of us as we renew our efforts to proclaim the victory of Christ to our community and to our nation.

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