

The King and The Kingdom Part 2

We continue our series this morning on the King and his kingdom. Last week we focused on King Jesus who has ascended to the throne and rules and reigns as Sovereign and Lord. This morning I want to begin looking at the nature of his kingdom. The New Testament opens with first John the Baptist and then Jesus preaching, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 3:2; 4:17.** What do we mean when we talk about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God? Is it a place? Are we like Indiana Jones in search of the lost kingdom of God? Is it heaven? Is it a spiritual realm that is in our heart? Is it the people of God? How do we get into his kingdom? Is it present now or is it a future age? All good questions and the answer may in some sense be “yes. All the above.”

Here is what I discovered when I started studying about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God (the terms seem to be used interchangeably, both talking about the same thing.) It is multi-layered. It is about heaven and about earth. It is both here, right now, in this present age, and it is not yet here, at least not here in fullness the way it will be in the age to come. Jesus is on the throne and he rules and reigns. His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven (his dominion) has been breaking in upon the kingdom of this world since his birth. Where Jesus’ throne and his authority is established, his kingdom is there and that means his power and life and miracles and healings and wonderful things can happen. Those wonderful things happen here and now because his kingdom is in our heart and in our midst, but... we are still living in a world where Satan sits enthroned in a lot of lives and in a lot of places. There is still sickness and disease, still injustice and violence, hatred and racism, life is still unfair and sin still brings heartache and death. The kingdom, the authority and influence of heaven is present here and now, but someday His Kingdom will come in complete power and Satan will be banished forever and Jesus will rule and reign, not just in our heart, not just over the church, but over everyone, everything, everywhere. Then death will be gone and sin will be gone and all the heartache gone and every injustice made right. Then what the prophet spoke of will happen, that the very order of things will be made right – we will study war no more, we will beat the swords into plowshares and the lion will lay down by the lamb and the light of his presence will shine everywhere and his glory will cover the earth and there will be peace. Then what John saw in Revelation will happen when the city of God comes down out of heaven and there will be a new heaven and a new earth and the old order of things will pass away. That’s the kingdom of heaven for sure, where he will

rule and reign forever, but right now, right here the kingdom of heaven is where his throne is and that is in us, in our heart and in our life. Jesus said “people won’t say ‘here it is or there it is’” referring to the kingdom of heaven, he said, **“Because the Kingdom of God is within you.”**
Luke 17:21 It’s all too wonderful and too mysterious and beyond me. But I’m convinced I want to be a part of that kingdom.

The more I studied and tried to find a way to explain the kingdom, the more I began to understand why Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven in parables! Parables are real stories Jesus told drawn from the everyday life of people in first century Palestine. They were simple stories that carried spiritual truths that people could relate to. There are several parables in Matthew 13 that Jesus told to help describe and explain about the kingdom of heaven.

The truth is, there is a king we talked about last week, Jesus, who wants to establish his kingdom in your heart and life. Simply put, the kingdom of heaven means the rule of God. The kingdom of God is the place where his throne is established, the place where he rules and reigns, where his authority is established and he wants to establish his authority, his rulership, in your life.

In case you don’t know it yet, I have to tell you, that’s a good thing because his kingdom isn’t like other kingdoms. His kingdom is a kingdom of light and truth rather than the darkness and deception that make up the kingdoms of this world. His is a kingdom of hope rather than despair, peace rather than fear and turmoil, confidence rather than shame, life rather than death.

King Jesus doesn’t come like some kings, with weapons drawn, an army to overpower you, forcing you to become a part of something against your will. It’s not like that. Jesus respects you and your free will. His kingdom is so unlike everything we know about earthly kingdoms. To help explain the kingdom, he starts with this story in Matthew 13. **“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying, ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.’”** Matthew 13:1-9

Often Jesus tells a story like this and we are kind of left to figure out the meaning on our own. But for this parable Jesus explains the meaning. He says, **“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.” Matthew 13:18-23**

Jesus is the sower. He is the one that comes sharing this good news, the message of the kingdom. Entrance to the kingdom and all the blessings of God and the blessings and life of the kingdom that he has for us, all of that is tied up in that seed the farmer is sowing. That means we need to receive it into our life so it will grow and produce that crop he talks about. If he is sowing and his message of the kingdom is the seed, then that means we must be the soil! He wants us to receive the seed of the kingdom but he won't force it on us. He is scattering the seed so that it covers everyone, every possibility, because you never know where that seed might find soil that is ready to receive it and begin to grow. Jesus described four kinds of soil. If we are the soil, that means we have some preparation to make, some choices to make. Let's look at the **Four kinds of soil.**

Beaten path. Some of the seed fell on a well beaten path. Some of us have just been walked over and worn down to the point we've become hardened. Too much life and drama, too much betrayal and deception. We are beaten down and then someone comes along sowing the seeds of the good news of heaven's kingdom, offering life, hope, salvation, peace and we think, "it won't work for me." We're afraid to let his word get into our heart, afraid to surrender to Jesus, afraid we might be disappointed again, betrayed again, so we allow the seed to lay there on that hard ground, that well beaten path. Jesus says the birds came and ate the seed but he explains that means the devil, "the evil one" he calls him, comes and snatches up the seed. The devil wants to interfere with any possibility of you and your life changing. He wants to rob you

of hope and keep you from receiving salvation and the gift of eternal life in Christ. He wants to keep you from entering into the life and blessings of the kingdom of heaven. What can you do? Stop being afraid of opening your heart to Jesus. It's time to get the soil ready and receive the good news. Break open that hard ground. Open up your life to Jesus and let him in!

Rocky soil. The second soil he mentions was rocky soil. There are a lot of rocks in Israel. Jesus was in Capernaum when he tells the story. Much of the farming he was talking about was on the hillsides surrounding the Sea of Galilee. Jesus says the seed falls on rocky soil where it is received with joy but that person never allows it to put down roots in his or her life. They never apply the word to allow it to make a difference, to produce fruit in their life.

“I go to church. I go to Carbondale. I like the music, I like Wednesday dinner, everyone is nice to me. That's my church.” You might even like some of the preaching. That's all good and I'm glad you like what's happening here, but that's not enough. You have to get the word of God, the seed of the life of the kingdom, you have to get that inside of you. You have to apply it to your life. It has to grow and produce fruit in your life. If it doesn't, when trouble comes, there'll be nothing to hold you. It will be too easy to give up, to fall away, to throw in the towel.

Listen, the devil has a hard time uprooting mature plants with deep roots. It's seed that is left exposed, unplanted, or planted but with shallow roots that the devil pulls up so easily. You need to get the seed of God's word, the life of the kingdom of God, you need to get that deep down inside of you. You see as the kingdom of God is established in your life, that means his throne, his authority, his rulership is established. Jesus rules and you are learning to surrender your life and your choices and desires to him. Obey the word of God, live in obedience to him and God's blessing will come to you. There will be a fruitfulness to your life. Prepare the soil of your heart and let the seed of God's word get planted deep down in your life, in that good soil so his kingdom will grow and expand in your life. Then live like a citizen of the kingdom of heaven because if you've given your life to Jesus and made him king, that's who you are!

Thorny ground. The next soil was covered with thorn bushes and though the seed found soil and started to grow, the thorns just overgrew them and choked the life out of the plants. Isn't it amazing how weeds and thorns can grow so much faster than the plants around them. They will just take over and choke out the good plants. Jesus said the thorns represented two things: the worries of life and the deceitfulness of riches.

He describes the person who receives the good news of Jesus and his kingdom and begins serving the Lord. The word of God grows in your life, but then you just get so busy, worried about being able to make it, worrying about the family, job, career, busy with ball games and music lessons, problems of all kinds, all of it together starts to choke God and his word out of your life. Before you know it, the life of the kingdom is just a fading memory. You regret losing that relationship you used to have with the Lord, but there just isn't time.

The second person is choked by the deceitfulness of wealth. It's almost like the first person struggles with the insecurity of life – "I don't think we can make it unless I work all the time and that means I don't have time for God or church or the kingdom." The second person is deceived by wealth into believing they don't need God. "I don't need church or Jesus. I've got money, power, prestige. I can do this on my own." Jesus says both of those attitudes will choke the life of God out of you. Don't be deceived. If there are thorns, pull them up by the roots! Prepare the soil of your heart to receive the word of God and don't let thorns cheat you out of what God has prepared for you in the kingdom of God.

Good soil. The last soil represented the person who heard the word and received it and understood it. That person heard it, received it, made room for it in their life and then applied it. They received the word and made Jesus the king of their life. They allowed Jesus to establish his throne, his authority, his rule and dominion, his kingdom in their life. And the result is an abundant harvest, a great crop of blessing. What's the crop anyway? A lot of things. The bible says the kingdom of heaven is, among other things, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. How about a crop of righteousness, peace and joy? Does that sound like something you need and want in your life? What would you give to live right, to know your sins are forgiven and your guilt is gone and you have a right standing, a righteous standing with God? What would you give if you could buy peace so the worry and despair and fear would be gone? What would you give to have joy in your life?

Jesus offers those things and more. They come with the kingdom. In fact, Jesus says, referring to physical and material things, "**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.**" **Matthew 6:33** Does that sound like something you want to be part of? His kingdom? How do I join that kingdom? What did Jesus say? His first sermon. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." The kingdom is right here. Repent. That means turn around and go the other direction. Stop going the direction you've

been going, toward hell and destruction and turn toward Jesus. Get the soil ready in your life. Get it ready to receive the seed of God's word, the seed of that good news, the seed of his forgiveness and life and peace. Open your heart to him and ask him to forgive you of your sin and ask him to come into your heart and life and establish his kingdom, his rule in your life. Then make a daily effort to live in obedience to Jesus the king. Live as a citizen of his kingdom.

I invite you to open your heart to Jesus today. Open up that hard ground. Get the rocks out of the way so you can put down deep roots of obedience to the Lord. Don't let the cares and worries or the deceitfulness of riches keep you from surrendering your life to Jesus. Don't let thorns crowd Jesus out of your life. Are you ready to open your heart to Jesus?

"Jesus, I believe in you. I believe you died on the cross for me and you rose again. I ask you to come into my heart. Forgive me. By your grace take away my sin and give me a new life. Give me that right standing so I know my sins are forgiven. Give me peace and the joy that comes with knowing you. I want to live in your kingdom. I want you to be the king of my heart and the king of my life. I give myself to you. I surrender my life to you. Thank you for saving me and giving me a new life. In Jesus name. Amen." Welcome to the kingdom!