

# The Traveling Pulpit

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## The Kingdom of God/The Kingdom of Heaven

“For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Rom. 14:17

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” I Cor. 15:50

“And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matt. 3:2

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Matt. 7:21

## Introduction

A kingdom is a sphere of power or domain or in other words a place over which someone rules. Any kingdom will consist of a king, his realm, its citizens, and the law that regulates their lives. This is also true of God's kingdom. God's kingdom consists of God's rule over God's people in God's place. God has established His Ruler, King Jesus, and His Spirit gives life to His people through His Word. God's people are presently sojourners and pilgrims', traveling through the wilderness to God's appointed place, the Land of Promise, the city with foundations, the New Jerusalem, the new heaven and the new earth. The kingdom belongs to the Lord, and He will rule over His people in His place according to His Word.

God is the ultimate Ruler over ALL things, but in His sovereignty, He allows or permits Satan a certain degree of rule over his kingdom of “darkness.” Therefore, we discover that there is a “kingdom” of Light over which Satan has no authority and there

is an evil “kingdom” of Darkness over which God allows Satan to currently rule (Eph. 2:2). Being the sinners that we are, we’re all born into the kingdom of Darkness and can only be “translated or transferred” into the “kingdom” of God’s “dear Son”, the Lord Jesus Christ and have “forgiveness of sins” through the “redemption” of His shed “blood” on the cross (Col. 1:13-14). Because of man’s sin and the hold of Satan on the sinner, drastic measures had to be taken in order to rescue man from the “kingdom” of Darkness and deliver him into the “kingdom” of Light (1Jh. 1:5-7).

God is sovereign over the universe (Ps. 47:8; 93:1, Rev. 19:6), but when we refer to the “kingdom of God,” it is a term that more precisely refers to the visible, universal submission to His reign. We know that Adam’s sin led the human race into rebellion against God (Gen. 3). The Old Testament prophets predicted a day when all creation would recognize God’s authority and bow the knee to the appointed king (Dan. 7:13–14, Mica 4:1–7). There is coming a day when all people will acknowledge God’s reign (Ps. 2, Phil. 2:9–11). The kingdom of God is the omnipotent rule and sovereign reign of Almighty God over all things, the inauguration of which came with the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ Jesus and the fullness of which is yet to come.

## **IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE?**

To begin with let me say that there is basically no difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of God is what the Old Testament prophets awaited, but that time of waiting was over with the coming of Christ to redeem a people unto Himself. The gospel writers in the books of Mark and Luke refer to the “kingdom of God”, as does the apostle Paul, whereas the phrase, “kingdom of heaven” is found in the gospel of Matthew. Scripture proclaims only one gospel of the kingdom from Genesis through Revelation. The “gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 4:23, 9:35, 24:14, Mk. 1:14) is essentially the gospel message of saving grace and how sinful fallen man can be restored through faith in Jesus Christ to what he lost in the garden of Eden. If heaven is going to be one’s eternal home, then the redeemed sinner must hold citizenship in the kingdom of God. God’s Kingdom has been inaugurated in the present and will be consummated in the future. Those who trust Him by faith today will experience a foretaste of kingdom blessings now and it’s fullness in the age to come (Isa. 25:1-9, Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:16-17, Gal. 3:1-8). To be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven is to hold citizenship in the present and future kingdom of God.

The subject of God’s kingdom runs throughout Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. A picture was painted of this kingdom in the Old Testament by the establishment of kings ruling over the nation of Israel through which Jesus Christ would come. He was born, humanly speaking, into the “house and lineage of David” (Lk. 2:4), Israel’s greatest earthly king. His rule fulfills the messianic reign predicted by the Old Testament prophets (Is. 9:6-7). Scripture tells us that God’s kingdom is an “everlasting kingdom” (Ps. 145:13, Dan. 4:3, 7:27, Lk. 1:33, II Pet. 1:11). This indicates how the

kingdom of God was in the mind of the Almighty when he laid the “foundation” blocks of creation and planned for the redemption of a people unto Himself to comprise His kingdom (Matt. 25:34, Eph. 1:4, I Pet. 1:20).

The kingdom of God is realized wherever the Lordship of Jesus Christ is acknowledged. Jesus is enthroned in heaven as Sovereign Ruler over all His creation (Matt. 28:18, Col. 1:13). He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14, 19:16). However, sin is still rampant in this world, but those who are “in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17) recognize Him as the Ruler and Master of their lives because they are under the authority of His kingdom rule. We could say in the great scope of things, that God’s kingdom is still in its begging stages because it’s fullness remains in the future. Yes, God’s kingdom is current, but in another sense its completion is yet to come (Lk. 11:20, 16:16, 17:21, 22:16,18,29,30). To be a part of God’s kingdom today is to know His mercy (Matt. 3:1-12) and saving grace. Today, “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23, 24:14, Acts 20:25) is the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be a “born again” (Jh. 3:3) believer is to be in the kingdom of God and under the ruling authority of Jesus Christ. The full and final realization of God’s kingdom will be when Christ returns in judgment.

### **A MATTER OF ESCHATOLOGY?**

Scripture sometimes describes the kingdom of God without using the word kingdom. Let’s remember that a kingdom consists of a king, his sphere over which he rules the citizens who live within that area, and the law that regulates their lives. In short, God’s kingdom is God’s rule over His people in His place according to His commands. At various times ever since the Garden of Eden, God has used human agents through whom He has chosen to work in His kingdom on earth.

Today, He continues to exercise His authority through His Word in and through the church, which is the current expression of His kingdom on earth. When Christ returns, He will rule the New Jerusalem from the throne room of the Lamb. The kingdom of God always has and always will belong to the Lord. We must never forget that God’s kingdom on earth is a spiritual kingdom. When the Jews expected Jesus to deliver them from Roman oppression and establish an earthly kingdom, He said that His “kingdom” was “not of this world” (Jh. 18:36). He did not come to deliver from Roman oppression, but spiritual oppression. Jesus did not come to establish an earthly kingdom. Some believe that Jesus will rule and reign upon this earth in a millennial kingdom, but that is hard to reconcile with the words of Jesus, “my kingdom is not of this world.” When He said that, he was speaking in the physically political sense. He does have a kingdom and it is a spiritual kingdom. He did not deny that He had a kingdom, but simply said that it was not “of this world.” The kingdoms of this world come and go, but God’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that has “no end” (Lk. 1:33). His rule today is by the indwelling Holy Spirit within the hearts of “his people” (Matt. 1:21).

As I have already stated, there is actually no difference between the two phrases, Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven. Some people may try and differentiate based on an eschatological (study of last days) view of Scripture; however, an honest examination does not permit such an interpretation. Jesus came to establish the kingdom predicted by the prophets, but the nation of Israel rejected Him. He was arrested and when Pilate asked the Jews if they wanted their king to be crucified, they cried, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). When He was nailed to the cross, an inscription was placed over His head which said, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Lk. 23:38). There are some that teach that Jesus failed at that time to set up an earthly kingdom for Israel, but would accomplish it at some point and time in the future.

Let us understand that Jesus did not fail to establish His kingdom! In fact, He accomplished His mission. It was early into the earthly ministry of Jesus that He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). What "time" was He talking about? Daniel had predicted four empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then, "in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom" (Dan. 2:44). This reference is to the days of the Roman kings and is referring to a spiritual kingdom that would arrive before the fall of the Roman Empire. Prophecy preachers of today tell us that "these kings" refers to ten kingdoms of a Roman Empire to be revived in the last times. But, Jesus said that the "time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand." Furthermore, Jesus went even further and stated that, "there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). Therefore, from what Jesus is saying it appears that His kingdom arrived in the first century. Now, just what kind of kingdom was Jesus talking about? Would it be a physical or spiritual kingdom? I believe that Jesus made it as clear as could be when He told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews" (Jh. 18:36).

Jesus did not draft soldiers to bear arms and fight men (Matt. 26:51), but He called and made disciples to be "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). He did not declare physical war against anyone; however, He did spend his earthly ministry going about doing good, healing the sick, and teaching the Truth. The earthly ministry of Jesus was in fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets had predicted. This long awaited Messiah came to establish His spiritual kingdom and was done so at God's appointed time. The early believers were a part of this kingdom, just like the Old Testament believers before them and all New Testament believers after Him. Paul declared that God "has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). John wrote to the saints and said, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom..." (Rev. 1:9). The promised kingdom of heaven did come and was established with the first coming of Christ. It is here now and will be completed when He comes the second time. All of God's redeemed people are a part of this blessed kingdom. It's wonderful to be a part of it today, but the best is yet to come.

## CLOSING

The Kingdom of God is the place where the Lord's will is done with joy and where His people enjoy His blessing. Sin in the Garden of Eden introduced a division between the created order and the heavenly kingdom, but God did not leave man without hope. Instead, He promised the restoration of His kingdom with the coming of Christ and the defeat of Satan (Gen. 3:15). Preaching the "gospel of the kingdom" revealed that the kingdom's arrival would mean eternal life for all the citizens in that kingdom and ultimately the renewal of all creation (Isa. 25:1-9). The only way to be a righteous citizen in God's kingdom is through faith in God's promises, including foremost, faith alone in Christ for salvation. Therefore, we learn that the kingdom of God is both a present and future reality, guaranteeing all who repent and trust Christ the privilege of being declared righteous and someday enjoy the benefits in the future consummation (Mk. 4:30-32, Jh. 3:16). Jesus will return, exercise everlasting dominion, and wear many crowns (Dan. 7:14, Rev. 19:12).

It's been said that the story of Scripture is the story of God's kingdom. The Lord's chosen King is the promised Messiah from the pages of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many Christians incorrectly believe that the kingdom of God has nothing to do with the present, something that comes only at the end of time with great natural disasters. The return of Christ may possibly involve these phenomena; however, His Second Coming is the consummation of His present reign which He inaugurated during His first advent (Mark 1:14–15). As Scripture teaches (Luke 13:18–21), this kingdom may start out small, but will grow to completion. As Christians, we need to see ourselves as heralds of this kingdom (Acts 1:6–11). In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to bear witness of our King to the world (Matt. 28:18–20) and in so doing this kingdom will increase in size. Jesus taught us to pray for God's kingdom to come (Matt. 6:9–13). It is easy for us to turn in a grocery list of requests for health, safety, and other provisions. But, we should not fail to pray for a lost world that needs to submit to God in obedience to His authority.



## A Ministry Update

Have you ever heard the expression, “I’ve got a lot of irons in the fire?” It simply refers to having a lot of things going on, a busy schedule, or staying busy. Sometimes, people say the same thing when they comment, “I’ve got a full plate!” Well, we’ve all heard that “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” Since my retirement from the pastorate over three and a half years ago, I can honestly say that these years have been the fastest of my life. They have gone by in the “blink of an eye.” It’s been a joy to be able to work without being under “pressure”; however, sometimes I feel myself trying to do too much too soon. The older I grow, the longer it seems to take to do what I want to do. I’ve said all of that to say that I began a new booklet on “Godly Servants”, the first of this year, but then put it aside to pursue a fresh study in the Book of Romans as well as preparing to teach the Book of Galatians over radio. I’ve always wanted to do a new study in the Book of Revelation, especially since I departed from the dispensational view of eschatology. Currently, I don’t know when I’ll complete my booklet and just how long it will take me to finish my study in Romans. Only the Lord knows when I’ll ever get around to the Book of Revelation, but I still hunger for the Word of God. I only wish that I knew forty three years ago, what I know today. God has been so gracious and long-suffering to teach me. All of this is part of what we call, sanctification, growing in the grace and knowledge of God’s Word. No one will ever know all there is to know about Holy Scripture, but we can rejoice in what God does reveal to us. I trust that these quarterly Bible studies in “The Traveling Pulpit” will help in your spiritual growth. No one, regardless of how long we have studied the Bible can be a spiritual “know it all.” May God keep us teachable, humble, and willing to learn divine Truth as only the Holy Spirit can reveal it to our hearts ( Matt. 11:15, Jh. 14:26).

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM

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