

The Kingdom of God Part I

a sermon in the series
Sermon on the Mount

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Last week I showed you a connection between verses 30 and 33. We examined verse 30 and the emphasis of weak faith when Jesus said, “O you of little faith?” Today I want to focus our attention on verse 33 and this command to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Jesus is continuing in verse 33 what He’s done in this sermon so far. He hasn’t changed gears; He’s reemphasizing the same point verse after verse. He is showing us what true faith in Him looks like. He is distinguishing a true believer, a subject of His kingdom, from those who are very religious but still lost. He’s separating true righteousness from a form of righteousness that leaves the person empty of God. He now continues in verse 33 and states a true Christian is one who seeks the Kingdom. Every desire, decision, and every affection of a Christian’s heart finds its way to this ultimate end—the glory of God and His kingdom. Could this one statement be the summary of your entire life: “All that I am, all that I want to be is in pursuit of this grand kingdom of which I’ve been so mercifully allowed to enter in, and I want my life to be used by this King in the advancement of His Empire and rule”?

First we must define what it is Jesus means when He says “The kingdom of God.”

I. The Definition of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus uses the term *kingdom of God* to mean different things. I want to sift through some of the meanings of this term and see if we can affix a definition to what Jesus means in our text today.

I. Being Converted

In Mark 10:15 Jesus says, “Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” Jesus means the kingdom is something to be entered in by faith as a little child. That’s conversion. Verse 23 of the same chapter of Mark says, “Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, ‘How hard is it for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!’” Here He is talking about a rich young man who went away sorrowfully because He had many riches and possessions and didn’t want to give them up to follow Jesus. Therefore entering

the kingdom in this instance is synonymous for believing upon Christ and being saved.

2. A Physical Place

Luke 13:29 says, “They will come from the east and the west, from the north and south, and sit down in the Kingdom of God.” This is a real place Jesus is talking about, not a metaphor. He’s talking about Gentiles and Jews coming together at one place in time in history, the kingdom of God where they will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and will fellowship with the saints of God forever.

3. A Spiritual Place

In Luke 17:20-21 we read, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The Kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” It’s a spiritual realm inhabiting the hearts of men believing in the King of the kingdom. The Jews were looking for a Messiah to overthrow the Roman occupation of their land, set them free, and set up His messianic kingdom. Jesus says that’s all good and well, and will happen eventually, but here and now the kingdom has come as a spiritual realm and it inhabits people. Are you a part of the Kingdom or, better yet, has the kingdom invaded your life?

4. It is a Kingdom already Come

It’s a spiritual realm that came when Jesus Christ came into this world, according to Luke 10:11, “The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, the kingdom of God has come near you.” It came when Christ came in His first advent in Bethlehem.

5. It is a Kingdom Yet to Come

Jesus said to the disciples in Luke 22:18, “For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom comes.” He is not going to drink of the fruit of the vine until He sits down with all of the redeemed at His Father’s table in the kingdom. The kingdom has come; the kingdom has yet to come. Which is it? It’s both. This is the way Jesus talks concerning the kingdom. It has come in one aspect and in another it is yet to come.

6. Another Term For Heaven

Mark 9:47, “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, and be cast into hell fire.” Jesus is referring to heaven here. Get violently aggressive with your sins and cut off those things, which offend you, cut off your sins, don’t give provision to the flesh. For it’s better to enter into heaven having suffered loss than to enter into hell having enjoyed everything.

There are many more ways in which the kingdom of God is used in the Bible, but there is one more I think very important that might summarize and give us a definition of all these I've given you.

7. The Rule and Reign of God Manifested

In Matthew 12:28 Jesus was being criticized for casting out demons. He was accused of doing it by the power of Satan. But Jesus said in response, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." In other words, *the kingdom is where I exert My power, the power of the Holy Spirit, and I bring deliverance*. There is the rule and the reign of the kingdom of God, and I think that is exactly how we ought to define it.

Let me give you this definition: **the kingdom of God is the rule and the reign of Jesus Christ manifested**. That's all it is, and that fits every definition we've looked at so far. He rules in heaven and His rule and reign intersects this present world; He cast out devils, He healed the blind, He delivered the sick, and raised the dead. All of that was an expression of the King establishing His rule and reign in those lives.

In Luke 9:27-31 we see this beautifully. In verse 27 Jesus is making a prediction or prophecy. He says, "I tell you truly, there are some standing here," talking to the twelve, "who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." The prophecy was some wouldn't die until they saw the kingdom. In one sense of the word all twelve had seen the kingdom because they saw the King, and where the King is there is the kingdom. But Jesus is talking more specifically; He's referring to the display of His power and glory. Look at the next verse, "It came to pass, about eight days after these sayings," Luke is connecting the prophecy with what is about to happen, "that He took Peter, John, and James and went up into the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked to Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." That's the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Matthew records this event and says, "... there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Here it was. Jesus Christ, Son of God, in His glory with a brilliance greater than the noonday sun so that Peter, James, and John physically shook with the power manifested in that vision of Christ. When Jesus says "Seek first the kingdom of God", what He's saying is to seek the rule, reign, and manifestation of the King's power. In fact, you can summarize it this way—pursue the King.

II. The Pursuit of the King

"Seek first the kingdom of God." If we believe the kingdom of God is the King in His glory, manifesting His power, then we ought to seek the rule, the reign, and the authority of the King. There are four ways you do that.

1. You Seek the Rule of Christ and His Reign in Your Own Life.

It begins with you. Is He the King of your life? We have problems with the word king because we don't know anything like it. Even if you refer to Great Britain, the monarchy there is more or less a figurative monarchy. It doesn't have the power referred to in this word king. Jesus is a king who is an absolute ruler with all power to exercise His authority over all things. Therefore, you seek the Kingdom of God by seeking His leadership, His rule, His dominion in your life, and you bring your life under the authority of Jesus Christ. You humble yourself and submit yourself to Him so that you do not wake up in the morning and wonder what you'd like to do today. Subjects in a kingdom who have a king do not say such blasphemous words.

Maybe a better way to understand this is master/slave. The concept is the king rules and His word is final, it is His will which the subjects of the kingdom fulfill. If seeking the Kingdom of God means to seek the rule and reign of Christ that must translate that I am living in obedience to Jesus. That has to become my reality. We need to stop right here and ask ourselves, is every area of my life, every segment, and every compartment under the Kingly rule and reign of Jesus Christ? The way you seek the kingdom is to bring every area into submission under the King. If this morning there are things in your life that have not been submitted to His authority, it is your obligation to seek Him by bringing it all under His feet and saying "Yes, Lord, not my will but Thy will be done." Then get up and do it.

2. You Seek the Rule and Reign of Christ Instead of the Rule of This World.

The world sets itself up as an authority opposing the authority of Christ. If you don't believe that, just take a strong look at your heart's attraction to the things of this world and tell me if the world is not at times like a magnet pulling you and exerting influence over you. To seek the kingdom of God is to seek His rule and reign instead of the world's. It is to abdicate from the world and say, "You have no authority over me; I'm now a subject of the King of kings and the Lord of lords." I will humble myself and will not follow the system of this world. I'll walk counter to the authority of this world. That doesn't mean we're not to obey the laws of the land or place ourselves under civil authority. The Bible commands we obey the authorities of the land. As long as the civil authority does not contradict the authority of the King or kingdom you must obey. But if it does, then you cannot obey; at that point you have a duty to a higher authority.

That's why the Apostle Paul says in Romans 14:17, "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The Kingdom of God is not like the world and its authority. The world comes to you with attractions, enticements, allurements and it appeals to the physical senses—what you can taste, see, smell, hear, and touch. It addresses the pride of life, the lusts of the flesh and the eyes and tries gain supremacy through the physical senses. Paul says that's not the way of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God at this present moment is a spiritual kingdom that satisfies far deeper than a physical level. You can have the nicest clothes, most beautiful jewelry, attractive looks, a nice home, all the toys, the computers and gadgets, and electronics and there will be some sense of satisfaction, but it is all superficial,

it doesn't last. However, the kingdom of God goes much deeper, to the very core of a man or woman. You can feed your body drugs, but God will feed the soul and the body will be content.

Paul says the kingdom of God is "righteous and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit." If your heart is disturbed and unsettled, then you're in the wrong kingdom or you're not submitting to your King. It's just that simple. Many of us have confessed of recent days, "My joy has seemed to have sprouted wings and flown away... my peace seems to have evaporated." It's because you're not seeking the Kingdom of God. You're not pursuing the King; you're not seeking His rule and reign of your life. You've brought your life under another authority, maybe it wasn't purposeful, it was just a gradual thing that has happened, but it's happened nonetheless. Seek the King, reject the false authority, and the peace and joy of God will return.

3. You Seek the Rule and reign of Christ in This World.

You seek the Kingdom of God by seeking its establishment here on this earth. As subjects of the king we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. It is our calling, our holy privilege, to represent Him. It is our responsibility to go forth as His representatives establishing His rule and reign wherever we go. It's not a geo-political kingdom we are trying to establish as some in the dominion movement assert. No, it is a spiritual kingdom that dwells within the hearts of men. Therefore as a witness of Jesus Christ it is my duty and awesome joy to share the Gospel. To share the good news of the King and see the Spirit of God through my weak representation establish His rule and reign in the heart of another sinner.

4. You Seek the Rule and Reign of Christ by Seeking His Rule and Reign in the New World to Come.

"Thy Kingdom come." Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of His kingdom. We seek the kingdom of God by praying and believing that one day this kingdom is going to invade earth. The new heaven and new earth will come into existence, and the New Jerusalem will come down. Christ the King with all of His saints will rule and reign forever and ever. You can't seek the kingdom of God without having that longing in your soul. These are just four of the ways in which you seek the rule and reign of Christ.

III. The Evidence of the Rule and Reign of Christ in You

The question I now want to address is there any way you can tell if you are seeking first the kingdom of God? Is there any test that you are doing the four things we have just outlined? Yes, and it's based upon I Corinthians 4:20, "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power." The evidence that Jesus is King and His authority is being honored is that the power of God is manifested, and not just people saying He's Lord and King. The saddest thing happening in Christian circles around the world is that we have reduced Christianity to confessionalism only. If you can agree with certain, simple facts about Christianity then you are a Christian. Millions of people believing to be in the kingdom of God are doubly secure in the kingdom of darkness as a result.

You are not saved because you believe you are a sinner and that Jesus died on the cross. You are not a subject of the King because you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart. That is not to say He didn't come into your heart when you asked Him, but the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. The power of the King must be exercised for His authority to be recognized. When the King exercises His power, then His authority is in place and His rule will commence, because you don't get into the kingdom by saying magic words. You don't get into the kingdom by knowing certain facts; you get into the kingdom because the King has invaded and conquered you. The evidence that the King is in authority is His power is manifested.

The Apostle Paul said the same to the Thessalonians, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). There it is. Paul knew the people at Thessalonica were Christians not because they repeated what He said, but because the King's power had been unleashed in their hearts and they were changed. I have no hope for people who pray prayers or sign decision cards or who make statements of faith and affirm they believe those things. My hope is an omnipotent Savior to change the sinner's heart. What we need is the King to show up with His power and authority and bind the strong man and take him captive so that He might come in and renew and transform.

Wherever the King is, His power will be manifested. It is the power of a new life, the power to walk holy before the Lord, which means the power to triumph over sin and this world. If the King is in residence in your soul, then you have a power from heaven that is not of this world, and you can live holy unto the Lord. Sin does not have to defeat you. Temptations may entice, but you don't have to follow because the King's power is sufficient. You have the power to say no. Do you, or do you say no to the King?

If you refuse the power of the King, His power is not limited, but will manifest itself as conviction, chastisement, and correction. Where the presence of God is there is His power also. This is what churches are lacking.

I'm thankful for the reformed movement. I'm glad there has been a resurgence of the truth of God's word. I'm glad men have come back to the altar of truth and have bowed the knees and said this is the truth of God and I'll give my life for it. Some do. Many pastors have gone into churches that were so dead and false and have given tears, time, and energy only to be slain on the altar of compromise because churches would not follow. So, please don't misunderstand what I'm about to say. As much as I love the doctrines of grace and the reformed movement, that movement has some grave problems, namely, that if a man can understand the doctrine, believe the doctrine, and holds to that doctrine, we equate that as being in the Kingdom. This is necessary but to stop here is tragic. Sadly, many reformed churches do. In consequence, the power of the king is absolutely nonexistent. I care what you believe about sin, judgment, grace, righteousness, and conversion, but if God is not present, then people will not come under conviction, and if they're not convicted, then the Spirit of the King is not at work. I speak to this church as much as I do to any other. We need the power of God in this church.

The kingdom of God is not in word, but the demonstration of the Spirit of God where men are set free from their sins and from the bondage of the devil. Homes are changed, relationships are set right, people are transformed, and the glory of God is manifested in the power of Jesus Christ to save to the uttermost. Who am I to say that God has saved me if He's not saving me to the uttermost? Who am I, even as a pastor, to go back to December 1, 1986 and say "He saved me then!" if I'm not getting victory over sins now?

I'm not preaching perfectionism, but quite the opposite: I'm not perfect yet. But wherever my Savior is, His power is given to overcome temptation so that one might live holy unto the Lord. And if that's not happening in me, how can I say the King is in residence here? How can I say I've pledged allegiance to Him? Let me make it even simpler—if you are a believer of the Lord Jesus Christ you cannot play with your sin without the power of God being grieved. I confess to this church today, it doesn't take gross sins to quench the Holy Spirit's power in your life; all it takes is falling into the routine of daily life.

The evidence of the King is the power of the King manifested. Has He manifested His power in your life? I'm not asking you to go back to a time and a place, and say, "Yeah, He saved me then." I'm not asking you if you have been saved, but are you being saved? Is the King's power real to you today? If not, then I have this to ask: Have you truly been born again, have you truly met the Master? Have you met the One who can change your life and turn your world upside down and leave you so different?

If you have, my next question would be, what happened? To whom else have you sworn allegiance to? That is the only other explanation. Either you're not saved or you have sworn allegiance to another. Renounce all authorities except Jesus Christ and say to Him this very hour, *Lord, I want to seek You first above all things. I don't care if anything is added unto me, it's You that I want, and I don't want to have You in name only. I don't want to be just a confessional Christian, I want to be a Christian in experience and in power. I need Your power, Lord, to live this Christian life. I need You, the King; I need Your rule and reign in me. I ask for You to forgive me for my disobedience and unsubmitive spirit. I want to once again take up the sword You gave me and pick up the shield of faith that fell from my hand. I want to once again stand clothed in Your armor and do battle for You, my King and my Lord.*

If you seek God like that today, you'll know if you've met Him or not. The power of God will be released and sin's hold will be loosened. It's amazing, the moment Jesus Christ comes in, the things that have you spellbound and the things that once allured you have no attraction any longer.

Next time, we'll talk about how we get a hunger for this and what He means *by all things added unto us*. As I conclude, I speak to the person here who is not a Christian. I know you may have a lot of ideas about Christianity, some of them I would say are probably correct. But there is enough falsehood in your heart to keep you out of the kingdom today. I've told you the truth, I may have not said it as eloquently as others could and I have felt the opposition of hell itself as I've spoken to you, but I believe one thing—greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world. My King is able to conquer your heart, devils, demons, and sins. Would you believe that

fact with me? That's all He asks. That you'd swear allegiance to Him in faith, believing He is who He says He is and that He will do all He said He would to those who would come in repentance and faith.

The day will come, it's hastening, in which the King will stand in His Father's Kingdom and will be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess Him as Lord. You will be made to submit and confess, but that day you will do so without the power of the Holy Spirit to transform you. The love of God is so sweet that He has held that day off just for you. You're not dead yet, are you? He hasn't returned yet, has He? One of the reasons the Bible says He hasn't returned is that He isn't willing that any should perish. So here is the love of God opening the gates to His kingdom and all you need to do is kiss the Son. Bow to Him and say, *I give You my life in allegiance and obedience, I am Your subject, You've purchased me with a price I could never pay, the blood of the Lamb of God, and I bequeath You my own soul and eternity.* He will transform you. The Spirit of God will make a new person out of you and you will not be the same, even if you tried. May God bring the power of the Kingdom and the rule of Christ here this day to be Lord over all! Amen.