

FOR
TEACHERS
OF TEENS
AGES 15-17

SENIOR HIGH BIBLE TEACHER

SUMMER QUARTER | JUNE | JULY | AUGUST 2023



Senior High Bible Teacher

SUMMER QUARTER

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Christ Proclaims the Kingdom

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The Weeks Ahead

What do you think of when you hear the word “kingdom”? Do you imagine a world of castles and long-ago times? Perhaps in your mind’s eye you envision knights in shining armor and damsels in distress! That is all very nice, but what does it have to do with us today?

In this quarter’s lessons, we are going to see how relevant a proper understanding of kingdom is, in particular God’s kingdom. This was, in fact, the central concern of Christ’s teaching. God’s kingdom is the realm of God’s rule, and His plan is to extend that rule. This should be a source of joy for believers because it involves the perfect expression of God’s holiness, love, and grace.

Our first unit this quarter helps us get a handle on this often-neglected topic of God’s kingdom. As we tackle the unit theme, “Understanding God’s Kingdom,” we learn first, through a study of the Beatitudes, that the standards of God’s kingdom turn the values of this fallen world on their head. We get a glimpse of how true joy and purpose are found as we conform our lives to God’s priorities.

In lessons 2 through 4, we focus on the truths that God’s kingdom is characterized by fidelity to the teachings of God’s moral law, that His kingdom powerfully triumphs over the forces of darkness, and that it will continually grow until that day when it is consummated at Christ’s second coming. We are not to think that the kingdom of God is something just for the distant future.

Having received a better understanding of the importance of God’s

kingdom, we move on in the second unit to learn how we are to respond to its reality. Perhaps the most vital response is prayer, and in lesson 5 we will consider the Lord’s Prayer and Jesus’ further encouragement for us to talk with the Father. In lesson 6, we are urged to respond to God’s kingdom invitation. Then, in lessons 7 and 8, we are confronted with the high stakes involved in our response to the call of God’s kingdom.

In order to heed God’s call into His kingdom, we need to be spiritually receptive to that call (lesson 9). Because of our sinfulness, we are dependent on God’s grace in this. And as He moves in our hearts, we are to respond to His forgiveness with a readiness to forgive others ourselves.

We conclude the quarter with a unit that further highlights the way in which we enter God’s kingdom. And the overwhelming theme is again God’s amazing grace. By studying the parables of the prodigal son and the laborers in the vineyard, our hearts are led to rejoice in how God loves us although we have done nothing to merit it.

We close the quarter with the illustration of God’s justifying a humble tax-collector over a self-righteous Pharisee. Yes, we enter God’s kingdom by grace alone.

As you contemplate this quarter’s lessons, pray that your class will come to a greater appreciation and love for God’s kingdom. We were put on this earth to glorify God and proclaim His kingdom throughout the world. Let us do this with grateful and joyful hearts.

—Stephen H. Barnhart.

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The Central Importance of God's Kingdom

STEPHEN H. BARNHART

When Jesus' disciples asked their Lord how they should pray, He responded by giving them a template of sorts that we refer to as the Lord's Prayer. The first priority in this prayer is that the Father be glorified. This is indeed the central purpose of all creation, including all the people who occupy it. The second thought of the Lord's Prayer is a petition for God's kingdom to come, which is explained as the extension of God's will throughout the earth (Luke 11:1-2).

In Matthew's account of the Lord's Prayer, this point is especially emphasized by the closing words of the prayer: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (6:13). So when Jesus presented His followers with a model prayer, it began and ended with reference to God's kingdom. The advancement of God's kingdom should head the list of our petitions, and the assurance of its certain victory is to be our greatest hope.

When we think of the teaching, life, and work of Christ, we often overlook just how central to His mission the kingdom of God was. We understandably tend to think most about His redeeming work on behalf of all those who trust in Him. And this was indeed the centerpiece of His ministry, as He sacrificed His life on behalf of sinners on the cross and then rose again the third day. But the ultimate purpose for everything Jesus did was to highlight God's glory and advance His kingdom.

The priority of the kingdom of God in

Jesus' ministry jumps out at us especially in the Gospel of Mark. Because it is the most concise of the Gospels, we tend to overlook its emphases at times. But in truth its relative brevity makes its themes stand out all the more once we recognize them.

When Jesus makes His entrance in Mark's Gospel, we read, "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (1:14-15).

This passage points to the centrality of God's kingdom to Jesus' mission. And it points as well to a firm connection between the kingdom and the good news of salvation that has been planned by God from the foundation of the world (cf. Eph. 1:4).

There has been a tendency among believers to think of God's kingdom solely in terms of the future. And indeed there is much to look forward to in the future, when the kingdom of God will become fully manifest at Christ's second coming. This will be the time of Christ's ultimate vindication and triumph as the King.

But we must remember that Christ is already sitting on the throne of David, as had been promised He would long ago (cf. II Sam. 7:12-17). When Peter preached on Pentecost, at the outset of the dramatic expansion of the church, he told his Jewish audience that Christ had ascended to be seat-

ed at the right hand of God, who had “made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36; cf. vss. 33-35).

It was the risen Christ who had prefaced His Great Commission to His followers with the declaration that “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). These are surely the words of One who is the great King.

We will study this quarter one of many passages of Scripture that point to how the kingdom was to grow over the centuries. In Matthew 13:24-31, Jesus described the scene of God’s kingdom as a field in which grow both good wheat and worthless tares. The tares are mixed in with the wheat, and the sorting out of this mixture awaits the time of harvest, the time when Christ returns.

One of the main points here is that God’s kingdom is growing even now. So we must not think of God’s kingdom as something that has nothing to do with us today.

Another important truth to realize is that there is a strong connection between the kingdom and Gentile believers, which includes everyone who believes in Christ who is not a Jew. God has marvelous kingdom plans for those Jews who come to trust in Christ, but in His great grace God has planned that all believers, Jew and Gentile alike, partake of kingdom blessings.

Jesus Himself makes this inclusion of the Gentiles clear. When a Roman centurion (a Gentile) demonstrated great faith concerning Jesus’ healing power and authority, the Lord “marvelled” (Matt. 8:10) and then declared, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (vss. 10-11).

What a wonderful truth that the kingdom is open to all who trust in Christ.

We must not think that God has cast off the Jewish people. What has happened is that He has graciously grafted Gentile believers into His kingdom, joining them to those who will trust in Christ among the Jewish people (the apostle Paul speaks of the bond between Jewish and Gentile believers in Romans 11:1-2 and 11-26 by using the imagery of an olive tree).

The New Testament elaborates further on the role Christians have in God’s kingdom. Peter addresses Gentile believers as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” and tells how they who were once “not a people” are now part of “the people of God” (I Pet. 2:9-10). And in Revelation 1, John writes of how Christ has cleansed us from our sins “and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (vs. 6; cf. vs. 5). We have the privilege of ruling with Christ.

We realize, of course, that we will not fully assume all the glories of ruling with Christ in His kingdom until that time when He comes again. In the meantime, in fact, believers will often experience hardships and suffering. But, as Paul wrote to Timothy, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with [Christ]” (II Tim. 2:12). The hardships that we experience are evidence that we belong to Christ, “that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God” (II Thess. 1:5; cf. vs. 4). It is for the kingdom that we suffer such tribulations.

Living in the service of God’s kingdom in the midst of a fallen world is not easy, but the rewards are great, both now and for eternity. It gives us a firm sense of purpose as we fulfill the kingdom tasks our loving Lord gives to us.

And it gives us a sure hope of one day witnessing the King’s ultimate triumph and enjoying life with Him in His kingdom forever.

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

MATT. 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10 Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

NOTES

Upside-Down Kingdom

Lesson Text: Matthew 5:1-16

Related Scriptures: Psalm 24:1-6; Isaiah 66:1-2;
Luke 6:20-26; Hebrews 11:36-38

TIME: A.D. 28

PLACE: mountain near Capernaum

GOLDEN TEXT—"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

Studying the Text

When we study the Sermon on the Mount, we must recognize that it was given to show the necessity of the new birth. It does not proclaim a way of righteousness apart from Christ; instead, it shows the impossibility of doing good or being happy without Christ.

When a person has come to Christ for salvation, he will find happiness—but not in the world's way. In fact, happiness in God's kingdom is upside-down from the way the world looks at things.

FULFILLMENT IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD—Matt. 5:1-6

The Sermon on the Mount was important for Jesus' disciples to hear. It is impossible for a person to please God unless he is part of the family of God. That was why Jesus taught these things to those who were already His followers.

The word "blessed" means "someone who is to be congratulated, someone whose place in life is an enviable one" (France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, InterVarsity). "The beatitudes thus outline the attitudes of the true disciple, the one who has accepted the demands of God's kingdom, in contrast with the attitudes of the 'man of the

world,'" emphasizing that "discipleship will not be in vain."

Each Beatitude implies the existence of a false way to fulfillment in contrast to the true way it states. A man who is not a true disciple of Christ will not desire to please God. He will thus not find true fulfillment, but a temporary and false counterfeit.

Fallen man says, "I will be happy if I make my own spiritual choices." Christ says that true happiness, or fulfillment, comes from being "poor in spirit" (vs. 3). A person who is poor in spirit is the opposite of one who is proud in spirit. A person with a humble spirit is willing to be governed by Christ and His Word. He is a person who realizes his own helplessness in spiritual matters and puts himself completely under the control of Jesus Christ. That person will be a part of Christ's kingdom because he has chosen to make Christ his King. His fulfillment will come because he has allowed Christ to control his spiritual choices.

Fallen man says, "I will be happy if I ignore my sin and thus escape from it." Jesus says happiness comes to those "that mourn" (vs. 4). He is not just talking about being sad. He is saying that those