

Introduction: The kingdom of God is the central theme of the life and teaching of Jesus.

It was the theme of his first sermon,

"The time is fulfilled, and the

Kingdom of God is at hand;

repent, and believe in the gospel" Mk. 1:15.

Nearly all of his parables begin,

"The Kingdom of God is like..."

For Jesus the Kingdom was the most important thing in life.

It is the pearl of great price, so valuable that a merchant upon finding it will sell everything to buy it.

When in the home of Martha and Mary,

Jesus told them that Mary,

in taking time to find out about the Kingdom, had found the "one thing needful." (Luke 10:42)

He told all of his followers to seek FIRST the Kingdom.

It is hard for many modern people to appreciate fully this emphasis which Jesus placed upon the Kingdom.

There are so many other tempting purposes for life

beckoning for time and loyalty that we fail to

appreciate how Jesus placed this at the top of the scale of values as the "one thing needful."

Some years ago in New England, there was held a marathon race, which had a strange ending.

All had gone well for several miles,

but suddenly the runners came to an unmarked fork in the road.

Looking around in confusion,

they followed the advice of two small boys sitting on the fence who pointed off to the right.

After a while they discovered they were on a dead-end road, but by this time there was so much confusion

the officials decided to call off the race.

When they went back to the unmarked fork they found

that the two little boys had long since departed, but not before replacing the markers that would have

directed the runners to the opposite fork

and the open road.

Modern society is full of people sitting on the fence, trying to direct others down the wrong roads.

Jesus, on the other hand, made it perfectly clear that there is only one open road, one purpose for life. All others lead to a dead-end of despair.

I. WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

A. The rule of God.

B. The Kingdom of God & the Kingdom of heaven.

K of heaven mentioned 33 times in Matt; none in others

C. The supreme good

1. The overthrow of evil. Lk 11:20

2. Forgiveness. Lk. 1:77

3. God Himself. Mt. 5:8, 10

4. Eternal life.

a. Where the other evangelists use "the kingdom"

John uses the phrase "eternal life"

b. See Jn. 3:15; 4:36; 5:24, 39; 6:40, 54, 68;
10:28; 12:25; 17:2, 3.

5. God's gift. Lk. 12:32, *"the Father's good pleasure..."*

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD & THE KINGDOM OF MEN.

A. The kingdom of God is not only the gift of God,
but it is also a TASK for men.

B. Men are not to sit with folded hands,
waiting for the kingdom.

1. It demands eager desire, hunger & thirst
for righteousness, a determination like that
of men to take a city by storm.

2. The kingdom must stand first in men's desires;
it must be the only master of our life.

C. The Responsibility of the Nation

1. The responsibility of the Jewish nation

2. Not an outward rule, but the gift of God's truth,
the revelation of His will & purpose.

3. They had not lived up to their responsibility,
so the kingdom of God was to be taken from them
and given to others.

4. There is a sense, with us as with the Jews,
in which we have already been given responsibilities
of the kingdom of God.

a. He has given us his truth
and has revealed his will.

b. His rule is present where there is moral
responsibility in government, and
righteousness in business,
and good will among men.

c. But we in the USA & Western European Democracies
face the danger of failing in our responsibilities
in the 20th century just as the Jewish people
failed God in the day of their opportunity.

great leaders

5. The tragic assassinations of President Kennedy is an object lesson in the moral bankruptcy of our generation. This generation of the ~~mid~~ 20th century ~~created~~ the complex and confused forces that grew ~~the~~ ~~a~~ characters which could pull the trigger of ~~a~~ lethal weapons aimed at the heads of ~~such~~ capable and dedicated leaders like ~~John F. Kennedy~~. Perhaps part of our deep sorrow is because of our corporate guilt and failure to apply the ideals of the kingdom of God in this strife torn kingdom of men in which we live today.

6. If we fail here,
if his will is not done in our life,
if his kingdom is not furthered among the other nations by our devotion and service,
then it may become true of us as Jesus said to the Jews of his day,
"the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you,
and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

III. THE KINGDOM AS OUTWARD AND INWARD:

Is it purely spiritual, or is it also visible?

A. It is BOTH outward & inward.

1. Lk. 17:20, 21, "The kingdom of God is within you."

2. But it is outward also.

(a). The God of Jesus is God of ALL life.

(b). When Jesus lays down the rule of the kingdom life, he does not refer to prayer & meditation & Scripture reading, but he speaks of the love and service of men. Mk. 9:35; 10:42-45

(c) He teaches that the real way to serve God is to serve men.

3. The Righteousness of God's kingdom will begin within, but it must extend to every part of a man's life.

Mt. 7:15-23

B. It is a mistake to make the kingdom of God purely inward and individual, setting off a little section of the world and calling it spiritual, while the great activities & interests & problems of our social & national life are passively put aside as "secular."

C. ~~The~~ rule of God was to be moral & spiritual, but this spirit was to dominate all life.

IV. THE KINGDOM AS PRESENT OR FUTURE

A. There are sayings of Jesus which make it clear that the kingly rule of God is already present. Other sayings imply that it is a thing of the future.

B. Actually there is no essential contradiction between these two types of sayings in the teachings of Jesus.

1. Wherever and whenever an individual or group accepts Christ & lives in obedience to the will of God, then the kingdom is present.
2. Yet he obviously looked forward to some future consummation of that kingdom in connection with his second coming.
3. Jesus taught that the kingdom is both present and future because he believed that God, in his goodness, had already established his kingly rule and would in his own good time fully consummate it.
4. Jesus definitely believed that God would end ~~his~~ history & bring his kingly rule to a glorious consummation.

But he did not try to predict when the end would come.

On the contrary, he denied having any special knowledge of future events, and he counseled his followers to life in faithful & expectant watchfulness.

5. Emphasis upon the importance of the second coming & the end of the world should always be accompanied by a word of warning.

Many men in every age have been so fascinated by speculation over the end of history that they miss the main point.

The important thing is not history's end but present obedience to the kingly rule of God. It would be a tragedy to lose this pearl of great price in a maze of prophetic disputation.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE KINGDOM

CONCLUSION:

There is a famous old story of a blind man who lived at the top of a mountain.

Using his cane, he always made his way safely up the path when he returned home from a trip to the village.

But one day he almost lost his life when he dropped his cane and leaned over the edge of the path in a vain attempt to retrieve it.

His life was saved when he had presence of mind enough to stand up and lean back against the mountain, securely feeling his way along to his home on the summit.

It would be a tragedy to lose our lives vainly feeling around for the answers to prophetic speculation when all we have to do to find our way home is to lean back securely on the mountain of God's forgiving love.

Prophecy is important,

but it is only one part of the riches of Christ's teaching.

Acceptance NOW of the kingly rule of God is still the one thing needful.

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