

**Sermon Notes**  
**“The Kingdom”**

Material for this message was drawn from a series of sermons by Dr. Calvin Wittman (2009)

**Focal Scripture Reference: Matthew 20:20-28**

We continue our doctrinal study with the topic of the Kingdom of God.

In **Matthew 4:17** the Bible says that Jesus began to preach, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

Search the gospels and you will find Jesus repeatedly teaching about the Kingdom of God. Since “the Kingdom” was of such importance to Jesus, it should be important to us as well. As we consider the Kingdom of God, I want us to focus on three specific areas:

- 1) The theological scope of the Kingdom of God;
- 2) The applicable principles of the Kingdom of God; and
- 3) How and what the Kingdom of God should mean to each of us who claim to know Jesus as Lord.

**1. Theological Scope of the Kingdom of God**

Article 9 of the Baptist Faith and Message says this about the Kingdom of God:

“The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.”

When the bible talks about the Kingdom of God, it speaks about this kingdom in a several ways. (The Kingdom speaks of ...) One way is within the context of the general sovereignty that God has over the entire universe. Throughout scripture, God is portrayed as a reigning monarch, as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

**1 Timothy 1:17** says **“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

A second way in which the phrase "the Kingdom of God" is used is to describe the rule and reign that Jesus has in the hearts and lives of those who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior.

Additionally, the scripture also presents the Kingdom of God both as being a present reality and something that will come to fruition at an appointed time in the future. Today Jesus reigns and rules in the hearts of those who love Him, and someday, all people everywhere will acknowledge His Lordship.

However, many people live their lives today as though they were in control of their own destiny, they live as though there is no God to whom they must ultimately answer, and they go throughout the course of their lives without a thought of the eternal reality they will ultimately face.

The Bible clearly tells us that someday the clouds will roll back, and with the voice of the arch angel and the trumpet of God, Jesus will appear, and like it or not, every defiant knee will bow and every rebellious tongue will confess what we already know to be true, that Jesus is Lord of all. That is the future reality of the Kingdom of God. Until that day, the kingdom of God exists within the hearts and lives of those who love Him.

## **2. Applicable Principles of the Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God in its present application, speaks to Jesus Christ being the absolute Lord over all our lives. This is what the Sermon on the Mount addresses and this is what many of the parables our Lord taught illustrated, that He is to be Lord of our lives. But knowing that He is to be Lord in our lives and allowing Him to reign are two entirely different things.

Turn to **Matthew 20:20-28**.

In these scriptures, we will examine a familiar exchange between Jesus and two of His disciples and we will draw from this text several applicable principles of God's present Kingdom that are instructive for us as we seek to walk under the Lordship of Jesus in our daily lives.

As Jesus responds to His disciples' request, He gives us great insight into a life that is truly lived under the Lordship of heaven; He shows us what Kingdom citizens should really look like.

Read along in your Bibles in **Matthew chapter 20** beginning in **verse 20**:

**<sup>20</sup>Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. <sup>21</sup>"What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." <sup>22</sup>"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but**

**to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”**

**<sup>24</sup>When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.**

**<sup>25</sup>Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup>Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—<sup>28</sup>just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

To put this scripture properly in context, we need to remember that in the two verses that precede our focal text, Jesus had just told His disciples that He was going to be betrayed, and that He would be mocked, flogged and crucified.

However, instead of contemplating what Jesus had just told them about His impending death, two of the disciples had their position within The Kingdom at the forefront of their minds.

Now remember, back in **Matthew chapter 19**, Jesus told the disciples that in His Kingdom, each of them would sit on a throne and would judge the twelve tribes of Israel – but this was apparently not good enough for James and John. They wanted a better, higher position ... a position of greater honor. They wanted the choice positions within the new kingdom of Jesus. As we consider this dialogue, we are able to draw several important principles from it.

### **A. The Kingdom of God is about Glorifying God**

It is not about advancing the ambitions of men. In verse 22, Jesus says, "You don't know what you're asking." In other words, the kingdom of God is not what you think it is. Jesus would make it clear that His kingdom was not like that of the Gentiles. The kingdom of which He spoke was all about bringing people out of spiritual bondage and into spiritual freedom and life, not about amassing earthly power and wealth.

But the disciples were looking at the kingdom of God, just as they looked at the kingdoms of men. They were ambitious and their ambition showed in their request. Things haven't changed much in two thousand years. Many people today continue to seek to use the Kingdom of Heaven to further their own earthly empires.

Instead of truly seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness many see the church as just another business, just another gathering of people where the ambitious get ahead and the less ambitious are left behind. This was not what Jesus said His kingdom was going to be. This is not what His kingdom was about then and it is not what His kingdom is about now.

Make no mistake about it, just as Jesus evaluated the motivation of the request made by the mother of James and John, He evaluates the requests we make of Him today. Jesus looks past the words we say and into our hearts to see whom we are trying to glorify and whose kingdom we are seeking to advance.

### **B. Life within the Kingdom of God is Lived under God's Authority**

It is interesting to recognize that Jesus did not simply come out and tell the disciples "no" to their request. In fact, after He tells them that they don't know what they are asking, He goes on to tell them that what they have asked of Him is not even His to give but rather belongs to the Father, Who will give it to those for whom He has prepared it. Jesus was again communicating that He was not here to do what He wanted, but to be obedient to the Father.

In **John 6:38** Jesus tells us that He did not come to do His own will but the will of His Father who sent Him. Jesus clearly lived His life under the absolute authority of the Father. In turn, we are to live our lives under the Lordship, authority, and Kingship of Jesus. How often do we want to accomplish our own agenda, like James and John, rather than truly being open to the leadership and influence of God's direction in our lives?

Living under authority means the choices in our lives are laid at His feet and left to His discretion. It means we go where He tells us, when He tells us and to stay if He tells us to stay. It means we give no thought about any glory for ourselves, whether we get the credit, or whether or not we ever get what we want. Our only goal, as was the goal of Jesus, should be to do the will of the Father.

### **C. Life in the Kingdom of God is Upside Down from Life in the Kingdoms of Men**

Again, examine the New Testament and you find Jesus preaching this same message: The first shall be last and the last shall be first. And, those who seek to save their lives will lose it and those who lose their life for the sake of the Kingdom will save it. Life within the kingdom of God is upside down from that of the kingdoms of this world.

We have been called to be different from the world. We have been charged with the responsibility of showing the world around us the difference Jesus can make in our lives. Where the world hates, we are commanded to love. We are to turn the other cheek.

God's Word says it is the meek who inherit the earth, that you are blessed when others persecute you and say all manner of evil against you because of Jesus. You see, our problem is that we want to inherit the kingdom of God but we don't want to

have to suffer in order to do it. We need to remember that the way to greatness in the kingdom of God is through humility in the eyes of man.

A British pastor, Michael Green, says this, "Jesus contrasts greatness in the eyes of the world with greatness in the kingdom of God. Greatness in the world is determined by status, in the kingdom of God, by function. In the world, greatness is shown by ruling, in the kingdom of God, by serving. In the world's eyes, the great are those who can order others about; in the kingdom of God they are those who endure hard times and injustice without complaining. How slow the church has been to learn the lesson!"

#### **D. Greatness in God's Kingdom Belongs to the Servants**

It does not belong to those who want to be served. If Jesus came to serve and not to be served, how much more should we as His servants desire to serve instead of being served? In the kingdoms of men, people are measured by their status, not with respect to their service.

But Jesus says that in His kingdom, regardless of what we may think, those who are truly the greatest are those who are the servants, not those who are being served. God does not measure things as man measures them. God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts.

#### **The Kingdom of God and My Life**

If you are a Christian, you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God. All that Jesus has to say about the kingdom applies to you, whether you realize it or not. In his book entitled, *That Incredible Christian*, A.W. Tozer provides seven marks that characterized the spiritual life of a Christian. We should each listen and see how we measure up.

First, a true Kingdom Citizen desires to be holy rather than happy. In other words, true contentment comes from being right with God. Second, a Christian desires to see God honored through his or her life, even if it means suffering temporary dishonor or loss. Third, a true Believer wants to carry his or her cross — Our cross is not forced upon us, it is not a burden we grudgingly bear, it is something we willingly take up as we follow Christ. It is the instrument that will bring about death to self. Carrying our cross means to be attached to the Person of Christ, committed to His Lordship and obedient to His commands. A kingdom citizen is also one who sees everything in this life and the life to come from God's point of view. The fifth mark of a Christian is that he or she would rather die right than live wrong. Believers want most of all to be right in God's eyes, even if that puts them at odds with those around them.

The sixth mark of a Kingdom Citizen is that he or she desires to see others advance even at their own expense. As servants, they realize that all glory belongs to God and it is His to give to whom He will; it is not ours to seek or gain. Finally, the seventh mark of a true Christian is this: He or she makes decisions based on eternity, instead of basing them on the temporary reality we know as earthly life.

All of these characteristics are evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual. They demonstrate that Jesus is in control of your life. Where are you in relation to God's Kingdom? Are you serving in The Kingdom as you should be? Are you even a citizen of The Kingdom? The Kingdom is coming and yet, it is also already here. Are you a part of it?