

The Kingdom of Heaven

By Mark Mayberry

6/21/2015

INTRODUCTION

Some individuals discount Jesus' teaching on the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage, as discussed in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, by asserting that Matthew is not a part of the New Testament, but should be considered part of the Law of Moses.

In this lesson, we focus upon the expression, "the kingdom of heaven," which occurs exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew.

Our focus is two-fold: (1) Does Matthew's Gospel look backwards or forwards? (2) What can we learn about the Kingdom of Heaven?

Definition of the Word

The Greek word *basileia*, derived from *basileuō* [to be king, reign] refers to "kingdom, sovereignty, royal power" [Thomas 932]. In the NASB, it is rendered "kingdom" (159x), "kingdoms" (3x), and "reigns" (1x)."

BDAG say this word, a term relating to royal administration, refers to "(1) the act of ruling; (a) generally, *kingship, royal power, royal rule*; (b) especially of God's rule, *the royal reign of God* (usually rendered 'kingdom of God,' and often understood as royal realm but with dilution of the primary component of reigning activity), a chiefly eschatological concept, beginning to appear in the prophets, elaborated in apocalyptic passages and taught by Jesus. The expressions vary; β. τοῦ θεοῦ [kingdom of God] and τῶν οὐρανῶν [of heaven] have essentially the same meaning, since Israelites used οὐρανός [heaven] as well as other circumlocutions for θεός [God]; (2) territory ruled by a king, *kingdom*."

Variations include "the kingdom of heaven," "the kingdom of God," "the kingdom of their Father," "His Kingdom" (i.e., Christ), "the coming kingdom of our father David," and "the kingdom of the Lord."

Occurrences of the Phrase

The expression "kingdom of heaven" occurs 32x in 31 NT verses (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19 [2x], 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:12, 14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1). Additionally, it is also found in a variant reading of John 3:5.

Matthew 3:2 (NASB95) — 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 4:17 (NASB95) — 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 5:3 (NASB95) — 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10 (NASB95) — 10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:19 (NASB95) — 19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20 (NASB95) — 20 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 7:21 (NASB95) — 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Matthew 8:11 (NASB95) — 11 “I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;

Matthew 10:7 (NASB95) — 7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Matthew 11:11 (NASB95) — 11 “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:12 (NASB95) — 12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

Matthew 13:11 (NASB95) — 11 Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

Matthew 13:24 (NASB95) — 24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

Matthew 13:31 (NASB95) — 31 He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;

Matthew 13:33 (NASB95) — 33 He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

Matthew 13:44 (NASB95) — 44 “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:45 (NASB95) — 45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,

Matthew 13:47 (NASB95) — 47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind;

Matthew 13:52 (NASB95) — 52 And Jesus said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

Matthew 16:19 (NASB95) — 19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:1 (NASB95) — 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Matthew 18:3 (NASB95) — 3 and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4 (NASB95) — 4 “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:23 (NASB95) — 23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

Matthew 19:12 (NASB95) — 12 “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

Matthew 19:14 (NASB95) — 14 But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:23 (NASB95) — 23 And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 20:1 (NASB95) — 1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

Matthew 22:2 (NASB95) — 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

Matthew 23:13 (NASB95) — 13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Matthew 25:1 (NASB95) — 1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

*John 3:5 (NASB95) — 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into **the kingdom of God**.*

Let us consider these verses, categorizing them according to usage, and making relevant application to our faith and practice.

THE KINGDOM WAS PENDING

During the days depicted in the four gospels, the kingdom of God was pending. John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1-2). Jesus began His Galilean ministry in the same manner: leaving Nazareth and settling in Capernaum, He began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:12-17, esp. vs. 17). As the twelve apostles were sent forth on the limited commission, going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, they preached the same message (Matt. 10:5-7).

*Matthew 3:1-2 (NASB95) — 1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 “Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand.”*

*Matthew 4:12-17 (NASB95) — 12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned.” 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand.”*

Matthew 10:5-7 (NASB95) — 5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but

rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

THE KINGDOM IS SPIRITUAL

The nation of Israel was a physical kingdom, possessing a king (The Lord God), a territory (the land of Canaan), a constitution (the Law of Moses), and a citizenry (the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel) (Exod. 19:5-6).

Exodus 19:5-6 (NASB95) — 5 ‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

Blessings or cursing, prosperity or poverty, success or failure would be determined by Israel’s obedience to God, or lack thereof. This principle was applicable to the nation as a whole (Deut. 28), and also to her rulers (Deut. 17:18-20; 1 Sam. 13:13-14; 1 Kings 9:1-9).

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 (NASB95) — 18 “Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 “It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

1 Samuel 13:13-14 (NASB95) — 13 Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 “But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

1 Kings 9:1-9 (NASB95) — 1 Now it came about when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord, and the king’s house, and all that Solomon desired to do, 2 that the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 The Lord said to him, “I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 4 “As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, 5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’ 6 “But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My

commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 7 then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 8 “And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?’ 9 “And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the Lord has brought all this adversity on them.’ ”

Coming to the New Testament, the concept of the kingdom of God/Christ/heaven is distinctly spiritual in nature (Luke 17:20-21; John 6:15; 18:33-37).

*Luke 17:20-21 (NASB95) — 20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when **the kingdom of God** was coming, He answered them and said, “**The kingdom of God** is not coming with signs to be observed; 21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, **the kingdom of God** is in your midst.”*

John 6:15 (NASB95) — 15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

John 18:33-37 (NASB95) — 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” 35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

In fact, the kingdom and the church are one and the same. After Peter made the good confession (“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”), Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt. 16:13-19, esp. vs. 18-19).

Matthew 16:13-19 (NASB95) — 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I

will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

While these terms have distinctive shades of meaning (i.e., the church is the “called out” body of believers while the kingdom denotes the rule of God), both refer to the same realm, but from differing standpoints, and thus are essentially synonymous (Col. 1:13-18; 4:10-16; Eph. 5:5, 22-27).

Colossians 1:13-18 (NASB95) — 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ... 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

*Colossians 4:10-16 (NASB95) — 10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas’s cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for **the kingdom of God** who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. ... 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and **the church** that is in her house. 16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in **the church** of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.*

*Ephesians 5:5 (NASB95) — 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in **the kingdom of Christ** and God.*

*Ephesians 5:22-27 (NASB95) — 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of **the church**, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as **the church** is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved **the church** and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself **the church** in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*

THE KINGDOM REQUIRES PROPER ATTITUDE

In the Beatitudes, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). The Greek word translated “poor” refers to one who crouches and cowers, hence, someone “beggarly, disadvantaged, dependent upon divine resources.”

*Matthew 5:3 (NASB95) — 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**.*

We must also manifest a willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ: *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10-12, esp. vs. 10).*

*Matthew 5:10-12 (NASB95) — 10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Citizenship in the kingdom calls for humility, a defining characteristic of little children (Matt. 18:1-4; 19:13-15).

*Matthew 18:1-4 (NASB95) — 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in **the kingdom of heaven**?” 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter **the kingdom of heaven**. 4 “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in **the kingdom of heaven**.*

*Matthew 19:13-15 (NASB95) — 13 Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for **the kingdom of heaven** belongs to such as these.” 15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.*

Citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires a respect for authority, as witnessed in the centurion at Capernaum (Matthew 8:5-13, esp. vs. 10-11).

*Matthew 8:5-13 (NASB95) — 5 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, 6 and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented.” 7 Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” 8 But the centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 “For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” 10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 “I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in **the kingdom of heaven**; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed that very moment.*

Citizenship in the kingdom of heaven entails trusting, not in riches, but in God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy (Matt. 19:23-26; cf. 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

*Matthew 19:23-26 (NASB95) — 23 And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter **the kingdom of heaven**. 24 “Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter **the kingdom of God**.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NASB95) — 17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

THE KINGDOM REQUIRES PROPER APPLICATION

Jesus spoke in parables for the dual purpose of both hiding and revealing the truth. Faithful disciples will take heed how they hear (Matt. 13:10-17).

*Matthew 13:10-17 (NASB95) — 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11 Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of **the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it has not been granted. 12 “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 15 For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.’ 16 “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 “For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

Our spiritual understanding of Christianity is aided by Jesus’ many parables of comparison (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47; 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:1).

*Matthew 13:24 (NASB95) — 24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “**The kingdom of heaven** may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.*

*Matthew 13:31 (NASB95) — 31 He presented another parable to them, saying, “**The kingdom of heaven** is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;*

*Matthew 13:33 (NASB95) — 33 He spoke another parable to them, “**The kingdom of heaven** is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”*

*Matthew 13:44 (NASB95) — 44 “**The kingdom of heaven** is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

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*Matthew 22:2 (NASB95) — 2 “**The kingdom of heaven** may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.*

*Matthew 25:1 (NASB95) — 1 “Then **the kingdom of heaven** will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*

Citizenship in the kingdom of heaven involves walking in the Old Paths while making relevant application to the present day: “*Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old*” (Matt. 13:52).

*Matthew 13:52 (NASB95) — 52 And Jesus said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of **the kingdom of heaven** is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”*

Rising above the flawed and failed example of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:19-20; 23:13, 15), let us manifest a spirit of willing obedience: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter*” (Matt. 7:21-23).

*Matthew 5:19-20 (NASB95) — 19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in **the kingdom of heaven**; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in **the kingdom of heaven**. 20 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter **the kingdom of heaven**.*

*Matthew 23:13, 15 (NASB95) — 13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off **the kingdom of heaven** from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. ... 15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*

*Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB95) — 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter **the kingdom of heaven**, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*

THE KINGDOM WAS MARKED BY A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

As we noted last Sunday morning, in a lesson entitled “The Lord and the Law,” Jesus lived and died while the Law of Moses was in force (Gal. 4:4-5). Yet, He brought blessings that were not fully realized under the Law (John 1: 14-18, esp. vs. 17).

Galatians 4:4-5 (NASB95) — 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

John 1:14-18 (NASB95) — 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ ” 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

First, Jesus fulfilled the Law, not only the Messianic prophecies, but also its demands regarding obedience, and was thus qualified to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Next, He explained the Law, setting aside misconceptions and offering clarification regarding its demands. Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ also replaced the Law, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, setting forth the standards that would govern the Christian era, bringing in a new and better covenant (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:16-21).

Matthew 4:23 (NASB95) — 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

Matthew 9:35 (NASB95) — 35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

This same message would later be preached to the Gentiles (Matt. 24:9-14, esp. vs. 14; Mark 13:9-13, esp. vs. 10). Indeed, the gospel is for all (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:16-17).

Luke 4:16-21 (NASB95) — 16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, 19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” 20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Matthew 24:9-14 (NASB95) — 9 “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 “At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. 13 “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. 14 “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Mark 13:9-13 (NASB95) — 9 “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. 10 “The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 “When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 “You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

Mark 16:15-16 (NASB95) — 15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

Romans 1:16-17 (NASB95) — 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

Note the distinction in status between John the Baptist, who lived and died under the Law of Moses, and other disciples, who would live to see the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (Matt. 11:7-15; 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).

*Matthew 11:7-15 (NASB95) — 7 As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 “But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ palaces! 9 “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 “This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ 11 “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in **the kingdom of heaven** is greater than he. 12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now **the kingdom of heaven** suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. 13 “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 “And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15 “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

Matthew 16:28 (NASB95) — 28 “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

*Mark 9:1 (NASB95) — 1 And Jesus was saying to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see **the kingdom of God** after it has come with power.”*

*Luke 9:27 (NASB95) — 27 “But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see **the kingdom of God.**”*

Luke’s account is similar but distinct: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it” (Luke 16:14-17, esp. vs. 16).

*Luke 16:14-17 (NASB95) — 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. 15 And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. 16 “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time **the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached**, and everyone is forcing his way into it. 17 “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.*

The words of Jesus, recorded by Matthew, are applicable to the New Testament pattern of church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17).

Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB95) — 15 “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 “But if he does not listen to

*you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to **the church**; and if he refuses to listen even to **the church**, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

The words of Jesus, recorded in the synoptic gospels, are applicable to the observance of the Lord's Supper, clearly a part of worship in the Christian era (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Matthew 26:26-29 (NASB95) — 26 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

*Mark 14:22-25 (NASB95) — 22 While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." 23 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in **the kingdom of God**."*

*Luke 22:14-20 (NASB95) — 14 When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15 And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in **the kingdom of God**." 17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until **the kingdom of God** comes." 19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.*

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NASB95) — 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Finally, the words of Jesus, recorded by Matthew, are applicable to the present law that governs marriage, divorce and remarriage (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12, esp. vs. 12).

Matthew 5:31-32 (NASB95) — 31 “It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

*Matthew 19:3-12 (NASB95) — 3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” 4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” 7 They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” 8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” 10 The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” 11 But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and **there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.** He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”*

The Greek word *parektos*, translated “except” in Matthew 5:32, means “in addition, except” [Thomas 3924]. BDAG say it “(1) pertains to being different and in addition to something else, with focus on being external, *besides, outside*; (2) pertaining to something left out of other considerations, *apart from, except for*” (Matt. 5:32; 19:9 [variant reading]; Acts 26:29; cf. Luke 13:1-5).

*2 Corinthians 11:28 (NASB95) — 28 Apart from such ***external** things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.*

*Matthew 5:32 (NASB95) — 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, ***except** for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

*Matthew 19:9 (NASB95) — 9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, ***except** for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”*

*Acts 26:29 (NASB95) — 29 And Paul said, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, ***except** for these chains.”*

Luke 13:1-5 (NASB95) — 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than

all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 “Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus employs the formula, “You have heard that it was said (or alternatively, *that the ancients were told*)... *but I say unto you...*” Quoting a prohibition or principle contained in the Mosaic Code, Jesus proceeded to give His own inspired admonitions on the subject. In this manner, Jesus Christ was not simply explaining the Law of Moses, but expressing distinctive teaching on the subjects of murder (Matt. 5:21; Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17), adultery (Matt. 5:27; Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18), lying (Matt. 5:33; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23), vengeance (Matt. 5:38; Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deu. 19:21), and also love vs. hatred (Matt. 5:43; Lev. 19:18; Deut. 23:3-4).

Matthew 5:21 (NASB95) — 21 “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’

Exodus 20:13 (NASB95) — 13 “You shall not murder.

Deuteronomy 5:17 (NASB95) — 17 ‘You shall not murder.

Matthew 5:27 (NASB95) — 27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’;

Exodus 20:14 (NASB95) — 14 “You shall not commit adultery.

Deuteronomy 5:18 (NASB95) — 18 ‘You shall not commit adultery.

Matthew 5:33 (NASB95) — 33 “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’

Leviticus 19:12 (NASB95) — 12 ‘You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.

Numbers 30:2 (NASB95) — 2 “If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 (NASB95) — 21 “When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you. 22 “However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. 23 “You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised.

Matthew 5:38 (NASB95) — 38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’

Exodus 21:24 (NASB95) — 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

Leviticus 24:20 (NASB95) — 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.

Deuteronomy 19:21 (NASB95) — 21 “Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Matthew 5:43 (NASB95) — 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

Leviticus 19:18 (NASB95) — 18 ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

Deuteronomy 23:3-4 (NASB95) — 3 “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

Addressing questions about marriage raised by the Corinthians, Paul refers to the earthly teaching of Christ as authoritative, stressing the general rule that marriage is for life, without pausing to consider the exception clause allowing for divorce and subsequent remarriage in cases of sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:10-16).

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 (NASB95) — 10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. 15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

CONCLUSION

Some individuals over-emphasize the words of Jesus, mistakenly believing that they are more sacred than that of Peter or Paul. However, faithful disciples recognize that the apostles and prophets were guided by the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, their message is inspired, and thus authoritative.

Other individuals under-emphasize the words of Jesus, mistakenly believing that He only offered instructing and clarification regarding the Law of Moses. Since the law of Moses has been taken out of the way and nailed to the cross, they say the teaching of Jesus, as recorded in the gospels, are not relevant to the present Christian dispensation. However, faithful disciples understand that Jesus came preaching and teaching the gospel.

"I say unto you" occurs 53x in the Gospel of Matthew, 18x in Mark, 30x in Luke, and 27x in John's Gospel. Jesus Christ is the speaker in almost all of these passages. Who is bold enough or sufficiently foolish enough to say, "The words of Jesus, as recorded by Matthew, (or perhaps, the other gospels also), are not pertinent to our lives!"

It is folly to say that the gospels are not applicable to Christians. Atheists and unbelievers reject teachings of Jesus Christ. Misguided disciples who make such assertions put themselves in the same camp. Both renounce His message as irrelevant and effectively remove Him from His throne. Who can believe it?