

Defining the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 13:11

INTRODUCTION:

- A. In our introductory lesson, we observed that the general "theme" of Jesus' parables was "the kingdom of heaven"
1. Many of the parables start with "**The kingdom of heaven is like...**" - **Mt 13:24,31,33,44,45,47**
 2. In explaining why He spoke in parables, Jesus said this in **Matthew 13:11** - He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."
- B. We also noted that "the kingdom of heaven" was the theme of...
1. Jesus' itinerant ministry - **Mt 4:17,23**
 2. His sermon on the mount - **Mt 5:3,10,19-20; 6:10,33; 7:21**
- C. Because "the kingdom of heaven" is such a prominent subject in the parables of Jesus (as well as His overall preaching)...
1. I thought it might serve a good purpose to preface our study of the parables with a careful look at what "the kingdom of heaven" means
 2. With a proper definition of "the kingdom of heaven" fresh in our minds, we are more likely to benefit from our Lord's teaching on this wonderful subject!

[Let's begin our effort to define "**the kingdom of heaven**" by comparing it with "**the kingdom of God**"...]

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN vs. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

1. Some try to make a distinction (e.g. Scofield Reference Bible)
2. But a quick comparison of the gospels indicate that the terms refer to the same thing
 - a. Cf. **Mt 4:17** with **Mk 1:14-15**
 - b. Cf. **Mt 5:3** with **Lk 6:20**
 - c. Cf. **Mt 13:31** with **Mk 4:30-31**

B. WHY THE DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS?

1. We find that Matthew used the expression "**kingdom of heaven**" almost exclusively, while the other gospel writers used the

phrase "**kingdom of God**"

2. It may be that since Matthew wrote his gospel to the Jews, he chose to use the phrase "kingdom of heaven"...
 - a. Because of the Jews' reluctance to use the name of God (out of reverence)
 - b. Because of the Jews' misconception of the coming kingdom
 - 1) Many anticipated a physical kingdom
 - 2) The expression "heaven" (literally, "heavens") would emphasize a spiritual kingdom

[So our first observation is that any effort to distinguish between the "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" is really without warrant.

Let's now consider what Jesus meant when He spoke of the "kingdom of heaven" ...]

IT INVOLVES FOUR INTER-RELATED CONCEPTS

A. THE REIGN OF GOD...

1. The term "kingdom" as used by the Jews often stressed the abstract idea of "reign" or "dominion", not some geographical area surrounded by physical boundaries
 - a. Possibly used this way by Jesus in **Lk 17:21**
 - b. It is used this way by Jesus in **Mt 6:10** ("**Thy kingdom come; thy WILL be done**")
2. Thus, the "kingdom of heaven" (or "kingdom of God") is wherever the REIGN or DOMINION of God (who is in heaven) is manifested
 - a. In one sense, the kingdom of God has always existed - **Ps 47:2; 103:19**
 - b. But in a special way was the rule or reign of God to be manifested with the coming of Christ
 1. As foretold in the time of Daniel (ca. 500 B.C.) - **Daniel 2:44-45**
 2. As proclaimed by John the Baptist - **Mt 3:1-3**
 3. As preached by Jesus - **Mt 4:17; Mk 1:14-15**
3. Indeed, it is in the Person of Jesus Christ that the "reign of God" is being expressly manifest today - cf. **1 Co 15:23-26; Ep 1:20-22; 1 Pe 3:22; Re 1:5**

B. SPIRITUAL IN NATURE...

1. The kingdom (or reign of God) would not be found in the form of a physical kingdom - **Jn 18:36**
2. It would manifest itself in spiritual ways - **Ro 14:17**

C. VISIBLY MANIFESTED TODAY IN THE LORD'S CHURCH...

1. What is the Lord's church?
 - a. It is a community of souls
 - b. In whose hearts God is recognized as Sovereign
 - Thus the church can properly be referred to as the kingdom of God today
2. That the terms "**church**" and "**kingdom**" can be used interchangeably, consider:
 - a. How "church" and "kingdom" were used by Jesus - **Mt 16:18**
 - b. Comments made to those who were in the church - **Co 1:13; 1 Th 2:12**
 - c. The description of those in the churches of Asia - **Re 1:4, 6,9**

D. BOTH PRESENT AND FUTURE...

1. The "kingdom of heaven" has a future element as well as a present one
2. Its **future aspect** is spoken of by:
 - a. Jesus in **Mt 25:34**
 - b. Paul in **1 Co 15:50; 2 Ti 4:18**
 - c. Peter in **2 Pe 1:10-11**
3. Peter described the coming of its future state in **2 Pe 3:10-13**
 - Therefore the kingdom of heaven involves the "**new heavens and new earth**"

[These four concepts or elements must be kept in mind whenever we think of the "kingdom of heaven". Failure to remember all four can easily lead to misconceptions about the nature of the kingdom.

In an effort to clarify this subject even further, consider...]

A SUMMARY DEFINITION OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**A. IN THE "PRESENT" SENSE...**

1. It is found wherever the SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD is accepted in the hearts of men
2. It is a SPIRITUAL KINGDOM, for God rules in the hearts of men
3. Its outward manifestation today is the LORD'S CHURCH
4. The kingdom was "INAUGURATED" on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 - cf. **Ac 2:36**

B. IN THE "FUTURE" SENSE...

1. The kingdom will be "CULMINATED" with the coming of the Lord
 - a. When Jesus "delivers the kingdom to God the Father" - **1 Co 15:24**

- b. "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." - **Matthew 13:43**
- 2. It will be that "NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH" described by Peter and John
 - a. "In which righteousness dwells" - 2 Peter 3:13 - Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
 - b. In which "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God." - **Revelation 21:3**
- 3. It will be experienced only by those in the church who are submitting to God's will
 - a. Those who do "the will of My Father in heaven" - **Mt 7:21-23**
 - b. Those who are "diligent to be found by Him in peace" - **2 Pet 3:13-15a**

CONCLUSION

- A. As we get into the parables of Jesus, we will find many references to the "kingdom of heaven"
 - 1. Sometimes it appears Jesus refers to the "**present**" aspect of the kingdom
 - 2. But then, at other times He has reference to the "**future**" aspect of the kingdom
- B. Hopefully, this effort to define "**the kingdom of heaven**" will help us appreciate more what Jesus has to say concerning "**the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**"!
- C. One principle concerning entering kingdom that was a mystery to Nicodemus at first was the need to be born again (**Jn 3:3-4**). But then Jesus explained that the new birth was one of water and the Spirit (**Jn 3:5**).
 - 1. Is that still a mystery to you?
 - a. **Acts 2:38** – "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'".
 - b. **Titus 3:5** – "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."
- D. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**