

Dawning of the Kingdom of Heaven

The Priest-King's Ministry Begins

Matthew 4:12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,

¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--

¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.

²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

(Matthew 4:12-25)

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise *we are looking forward* to a new heaven and a new earth, the **home of righteousness**. So then, dear friends, since you are *looking forward* to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2 Pet 3:11-14).

With these words Peter sounds the alarm for Christians everywhere to maintain with diligence their persevering faith and pure lives in a world that is about to be destroyed by God. **The key here is the assumption that you are**, with Peter, **looking forward** to your heavenly home in the new heavens and new earth. **I wonder then, are you looking forward?** Or are you so entangled in the affairs of the kingdoms of this age - with its

politics, its wars, its lusts, its power, its money, its worries, its uncertainties, its fears of the future, its amusements, and its trivia - that you have little time to be concerned with the kingdom of God? If so my friend, then I am sounding the alarm to *you* today. Frankly, I don't really know any of us that are completely immune to this problem.

Enochopolis the Anti-Kingdom

The difficulty here is that most of us are not even aware when our affections are longing after something other than Christ. Like the frog in the kettle, we become numb to the heat. This is especially true in a comfortable rich culture like ours. This dangerous path has been trod plenty of times before. Let me remind you of the hopes and dreams of the children of *Cain*. You remember Cain, don't you? He was the perverse son of Adam who didn't think he was perverse at all. Cain offered his own sacrifice in sincerity but it was not accepted. In hatred, he then murdered his brother. As punishment, Cain was cursed to be a restless wanderer.

But Cain *amazingly* refused to serve his sentence. He settled down in the land of Nod and built a city where he would not have to wander anymore. Cain had a son named Enoch. When Cain's city was completed, he named and enshrined his son's name forever and the place became known as *Enochopolis*. The grandchildren of Cain became master culture bearers. **Jabal** was the first rancher. **Jubal** was the first musician. **Tubal-Cain** was the first blacksmith and weapon maker. And **Lamech** became the first totalitarian dictator in history.

The problem here is not that there was city planning or cultural advancement or monarchies. The problem was the foundation of this kingdom they were building. This was a kingdom built without God. I'm sure that religion was everywhere. But God could not be found. This is the Anti-Kingdom ruled by Antichrists.

The hopes and worship of these men were in themselves. Cain named the city after Enoch because his first love was *himself* and the greatness of his progeny. Lamech had no regard for God and his moral law and so he murdered a man for poking fun at him.

This is the story of the builders of the kingdom of earth, and when you get sucked into its philosophy or seduced by its charms, then beware of your own citizenship. The subtle allure of this kingdom is difficult to calculate, especially when you consider that the flesh naturally desires to reside within its magnificent walls. **This is why you must watch out and guard yourselves so diligently.**

You should know that we are all born into this kingdom. It is our birthright as fallen, sinful children of Adam. We are natural slaves to the kingdom of earth. But because we all live here from birth, its voice sounds to men like the voice of a one's own mother. **Beware her call because**

she is not the one who gave birth to you or who created you. She is a wicked step-mother and a usurper of the throne of God Almighty.

If God so desired, he could have left us all to die in this wretched kingdom, for that is what our sins deserve. But God in his grace and in his zeal for his own glory made a covenant with Adam that the day would come when another kingdom would be established as an everlasting alternative to the kingdom of earth. Here, *God* would call his children home to be with himself. And miraculously, through the great gift of faith they would heed his voice and come running thankfully home.

OT Saints Awaited

Since the days of Abel, this call has been heeded. But in OT times, this call was a bit more obscure than it is today. Anyone in OT days who believed in the *promise* of this future kingdom and trusted in the coming of the Glorious Monarch was liberated *immediately* from the imprisonment of

the kingdom of earth. But they remained homeless until Christ came.

This is the meaning of Hebrews 11. We read that by faith they **were looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (11:10)**. We read that by faith, **“They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth” (11:13)**. And again we read that, **“They were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (11:16)**. You might say their salvation was a sort of **promissory note** given to them by God that would be cashed in on the Day that the King would himself come to pay off the debts of those who were forgiven in those days.

NT Saints Revel in the Realized Kingdom

But now, the good news of the Gospel is that the Monarch *has arrived* and his kingdom is **at hand**.

The hopes and dreams of OT saints have become fulfillment and reality. Hebrews concludes Chapter 11 on this glorious and very important note, “*These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect*” (11:39-40).

The Kingdom is Near

This truth is proclaimed in **Matthew 4:12-25** that we will look at today. In **verse 17** we have an announcement made that would forever change the history of mankind. It reads, “*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*”

Frankly, most Christians haven’t the foggiest clue of the importance and significance of this verse. Do you realize that this is **the first message Jesus ever preached?** Do you realize it is **the most common message Jesus would preach during his ministry on earth?** If it is the first and the most

repeated message, then just how important do you think it is, friend? It is so important that you should spend your life trying to understand the significance, meaning, and culture of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus once put it this way, “**The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it**” (**Mat 13:45**). You ought to become more familiar with this kingdom than you are with the houses, trees, streets, and people in your own neighborhood.

John’s Announcement of the Kingdom

It is “at hand”

The first thing I want to do, then, is go back a chapter; because this is not the first time we have encountered “**kingdom of heaven**” language in this book. Just prior to **Jesus’** baptism, **John** had been preaching the exact same message, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.**” Spending time understanding what John said about the kingdom will be the same as learning what Jesus

meant here. Since John has a lot to say though, we'll start there.

The word order of the Greek is significant in John's proclamation. In Greek you can put a word in the front of a sentence to emphasize its importance. "*Great Tool in English that would be!*" The problem with doing that in English is that it makes you sound like *Yoda*.

At any rate, the Greek reads literally, "*Repent, come near for the kingdom of heaven.*" Do you hear the emphasis? Something unique in all the world is happening here. *I liken it to the view some people have of a heavenly Jerusalem with origins somewhere in the Orion nebula approaching earth at great speed only to suddenly have it come down in the clouds visibly for all to see.* That is what John is teaching you about the kingdom of heaven, except its arrival is spiritual. It is rapidly approaching. Very soon, Jesus will even say it is here!

Jesus uses the exact same words and word order in **4:17**, as he picks up where John left off. Matthew tells us that Jesus begins with this message at the start of his ministry because John has been put in prison (**4:12**) and the announcement of the gospel must continue to be proclaimed. This time however, one greater than John is doing to the preaching and teaching. It is very much like **Elisha** who, after the ascension of **Elijah** to heaven, takes up the mantle, returns to Israel, and begins to take up the ministry where the forerunner left off. This is partly the meaning of Matthew in recording for us that at this time, he returned from the desert beyond the Jordan and came to the land of Galilee (**4:13-16**). But there is more significance to the place of Jesus' first ministerial work than this, and I will tell you more about it in a moment.

How to Enter the Kingdom

In order to get at the significance of Jesus going to Galilee rather than some other place in Israel (which Matthew says fulfills prophecy), we

should delve deeper into John's explanation of *how* one enters in the kingdom. This will in turn tell us *who* is able to enter this kingdom and this will in turn help explain why Jesus goes to Galilee. So first we will look at the "how" (how one enters) and then we will see the "who" (who can enter).

The first and most obvious thing to notice about this kingdom is that **one does not enter it in the normal way**. You are not born into the kingdom of heaven. John makes this clear to the **Pharisees**. He tells them flat-out, "**Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'**" (**Mat 3:9**). This is very important. It means, do not think that the kingdom I am announcing and that you are coming to be baptized into is something you have the natural right to enter just because you are a Jew. While they may have been born *Israelites*, and were even participators of physical but temporary covenantal promises (**Rom 9:1-5**), **no one is born into the kingdom of heaven**.

By extension, the *ceremonies* of this kingdom do not belong to those who are naturally born either. This is different from the OT kingdom program, because the kingdom of heaven is *not* the kingdom of Israel. In Israel in order to receive circumcision or baptism the physical birthright was *everything*. But in the church, it is the *spiritual* birthright that is everything. Jesus said you must be “*born again*.” This is why the sacraments of the church belong to those that profess faith.¹ The church is not like national Israel in this regard. It is like *spiritual* Israel.² The church does not replace national Israel. It fulfills what Israel pointed to typologically. Because this is so important, and because John deals with it specifically, I will talk more about this in a moment.

Before I do, it is critical to understand that the church is also not the kingdom of heaven. The

¹Confession of faith is not identical to being elect though the hope is that one who professes is elect. Rather, it is the outward means by which men are to judge the genuineness of one's faith. We do not baptize infants for this reason. But as I have detailed elsewhere, we also do not baptize infants because baptism into the priesthood, from which Jesus' own baptism was, was not given to infants. The NT does not presuppose that infants are now given the rite that they were not privy to in the OT. Instead, it teaches us that even this rite belongs to those that profess faith in Christ. It is not a natural right of the Levite, because True Levites are spiritually born again into a holy royal priesthood of believers. ² This does not mean that the church is only spiritual. Rather, as the Confession teaches, the church exists and manifests itself visibly on earth even as it will in heaven. Today it does consist of a mixed bag. Tomorrow it will not. The sacraments are given to professing believers, many times this includes the reprobate. But tomorrow, only the elect will partake in the wedding supper of the Lamb.

confusion of this leads logically to such teachings as infant baptism. I am in agreement with the Continental Reformers and not the Westminster Divines that the church and the kingdom are not one and the same. WCF 25.2 says, “*The visible Church... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Herman Ridderbos on the other hand says,

The *ekklesia* [church] is a community of those who await the salvation of the *basileia* [kingdom]. Insofar as the kingdom is already a present reality, the church is also the place where the gifts and powers of the kingdom are granted and received. It is, further, the gathering of those who, as the instruments of the kingdom, are called upon to make profession of Jesus as the Christ, to obey his commandments, to perform the missionary task of the preaching of the gospel throughout the world. In every respect the church is surrounded and impelled by the

revelation, the progress, the future of the kingdom of God without, however, itself being the kingdom, and without ever being identified with it.”³

This is very important, especially for anyone who may be mistakenly trusting in temporary outward things to get them to heaven. How many people there are who say, “I am a Christian because I was born in a Christian family who took me to church.” How many others have thought, “I should baptize my infant as a sign of their kingdom participation.” And how many infants have said, “I am saved because I was baptized.” It is astounding to me that such thinking persists among those who can perfectly exegete John’s words towards the Pharisees.

Part of the problem stems from a confusion of two kingdoms. I’m not talking about the kingdom of earth so much as I am the kingdom of *Israel*. Israel in the OT was not identical with the city spirit of

³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: P & R Pub., 1962. p. 355-56).

Cain. But neither is it identical with heaven. Instead, it was a physical worldly place that typified or prefigured the coming heavenly reality. National Israel served an anticipatory function in redemptive history. It was a sign, but not the thing it signified. Israel was never supposed to be confused as if it *were* the kingdom of heaven. So very many people even today cannot get this straightened out in their minds. But the point of John's teaching is that now that the kingdom of *heaven* is at hand, the kingdom of Israel is finished serving its typifying redemptive purpose in history.

John makes this perfectly clear to the Pharisees in these words that many Evangelicals influenced by Dispensational teaching find hard to swallow. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (3:10).

What is this tree (singular)? It is the Pharisee. But what is the Pharisee? He is the national Jew who

thinks that just being a national Jew who follows the letter of the law is what gets him to heaven. A change of heart does not matter to the Pharisee. Much less does it matter to him if he comes to Christ. If you think that this teaching is dead and gone, think again. John Hagee, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in San Antonio, TX and TV preacher extraordinaire once said this, “The Jewish people have a relationship to God through the law as given through Moses. I believe that every Gentile person can only come to God through the cross of Christ. I believe that every Jewish person who lives in the light of the Torah...has a relationship with God and will come to redemption.” This is a dangerous teaching that says Christ is not necessary for salvation! It comes from a complete misunderstanding of God’s purposes in election to save the *remnant within Israel*, while preserving the nation itself to be a *reflection* of the kingdom of God.

The trees (plural) are therefore not only Pharisees, but all national Jews who think that salvation through Christ is irrelevant. Put in corporate terms, when he says that the ax is laid at the root of the tree, John is talking about the future that the function of national Israel will serve in redemptive history. It is about to be cut down at the root, and any tree within the kingdom of Israel that does not bear fruit will likewise be cut down and thrown into hell.

You see, friend, there can not be two kingdoms standing side by side together. National Israel is *not* the kingdom of heaven; otherwise the kingdom of heaven would have been at hand for a thousand years already! David, Solomon, Daniel and others would not have needed to look forward to anything, because they were already part of the kingdom of Israel. The same holds true for those in the NT era who believe that the Holy Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church, or their own particular congregation or denomination is the kingdom of heaven. You

must not trust in external kingdoms, but in Christ alone. Any single church may have its lampstand (the HS) removed from its midst.

Now we are ready to understand why Jesus went to Galilee. Remember, Matthew is a Jew who wrote his Gospel with Jewish readers in mind. Nevertheless, Matthew is not a Zionist! He says that Jesus' going to Galilee is fundamentally tied to OT prophecy. There is that key idea of fulfillment cropping up yet again in this book. Jesus fulfills all of the OT! This is why he moves to Capernaum (a little fishing village at the north end of the Sea of Galilee).

In this case it is the prophecy of **Isaiah 9:1-2** and the important words are that this is Galilee of the *Gentiles*. Jesus does not abandon Israel. His ministry is within her borders. But it is significant that he goes to the part of Israel with the greatest concentration of *Gentiles* anywhere in Israel. This is the beginning of the Prophetic fulfillments that Gentiles would be engrafted into the vine and so

together would come to make up “True Israel” which is first and foremost a *spiritual* entity. True Israel is not a State in the Middle East, but a kingdom of priests made up of people within all physical nations on earth – Jew and Gentile together. It is true that they exist together in the visible church, but the visible church is not the kingdom and so while you can have reprobate people in the visible church, I do not believe you can have them in the kingdom.

This Gentile focus is also part of the significance of the *last few* verses in **Matthew 4**. Notice the universal nature of Jesus’ ministry. His fame spread throughout **Syria** (**4:24**). And remember, in former days, this was the land that conquered Israel. This was Israel’s great enemy! How marvelous is the grace of God that extends the his very worst enemies. Then it is reported that soon, great crowds followed him from **Galilee** (**25**), from **Decapolis** (the region east of the Jordan), from **Jerusalem** and **Judea** (the lands far to the south), and even the area beyond the Jordan, presumably

stretching into actual Gentiles lands. You are not to miss this, because Matthew is making a big deal in this section of Scripture about the geographical ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming to be the light of the whole world!

The prophetic fulfillment is this: Isaiah and Matthew tell us, “The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and those dwelling in the region of the shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” What tremendous news this is? Such an announcement has never been heard before. All of the saints of old longed for its coming. A new day is dawning here. A new creation week is beginning.

Jesus has come. He was revealed in his baptism. He overcame in his temptation. Now his light-bearing ministry has begun. Messiah has arrived to shine his light into the hearts of all those darkened in their minds and on the cusp of death in their bodies and souls. Jesus has come to liberate slaves of the kingdom of earth whomever

they may be, Jew or Gentile, to bring them into the kingdom of heaven.

This is the single most important difference between the Old and New Testaments: We do not live any longer in times of shadows and promises. This is not predawn. The sun is not still below the horizon. The light has come and is now shining on the kingdoms of men. The Spirit has been sent to pour forth understanding and knowledge of God to “**the many**” that will be drawn to the light. **We do not put our hope entirely in the future,** because our hope is grounded **in the past**, in the work of Jesus Christ that was finished 2,000 years ago in the land of Israel. This is very different from the OT age. And so while we do look forward, we also look backward to the time when the kingdom of heaven first began to reign in the heart of man.

How does this reign begin in the heart of any man or women? It is through the act of repentance by faith which then produces fruit in keeping with

that repentance. John taught this and then Jesus after him. You need to be consciously aware that these two actions do not originate with men. Thus, John tells the Pharisees, “I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.” In other words, repenting of sin and bearing fruit in keeping with that repentance is the miraculous work of God that dead men and women and children are incapable of performing until they have been made alive through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit.

The calling of the disciples in **Matthew 4:18-22** teaches this explicitly. Jesus sees two brothers, **Simon** (that is Peter) and **Andrew**. They are casting their nets into the sea, because they are fishermen (and that’s what fisherman do). With the simple words “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” the brothers “**IMMEDIATELY**” leave their nets and follow Christ. Ever since I first began to understand the doctrines of grace, this passage has struck me as

an incredible proof of the truth of effectual calling. When the Spirit calls effectually, men answer!

The same thing is repeated in the calling of **James** and **John** his younger brother. Except this time, they leave their father, *their family*, behind to follow Christ. Is there any hint here of hesitation or of questioning? None at all. They immediately leave to follow Christ, turning from their old way of life, yes even their own father if need be, to trace a new path in the kingdom of heaven. Citizenship in the kingdom of heaven revokes our citizenship of earth.

But now know also that repentance and bearing fruit, while gifts of God, are things that we do! **God does not exercise them.** The person hearing the message of the gospel is not to be caught in some fearful frozen pose forever questioning their election never knowing if they are among the elect or not. After Jesus calls him, you don't see Peter sit and begin to ponder, "**I wonder if I'm elect?**"

only to keep on asking this question while he continues to fish for the rest of his life.

No, there is *action* that is given to all whom God grants faith. If you have been given the gift, then you repent and bear fruit. You turn and follow Christ. If you don't repent and bear fruit, then you have not been given faith and you simply have no reason to believe you are going to heaven. It is as simple as that. **Have you repented of your sins?** Do not hope for heaven until you have trusted in Christ, because it is a fool errand to hope for what one does not actually have. But if you believe in Jesus then believe me when I say you are welcome into his kingdom with open arms.

Matthew is writing his Gospel in a time of persecution late in the first century. He is purposefully contrasting the Pharisees and the disciples here to show you, his reader, which person you are to be like. **Which one are you like?** Heed the call of Christ and follow him. For John's

message and his explanation of the kingdom from him is not complete.

At the end of the message to the Pharisees he talks about the coming Messiah and he says, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (3:11-12). Baptism in water is not sufficient. You must be baptized with the *Holy Spirit*. In other words, you must be saved by Christ alone.

The kingdom that is here, friend, is a time of gathering for the harvest. Ridderbos says, “Christ (and the kingdom with him) first comes to gather together, and then afterwards, only after the gathering has been completed, does he make the definitive separation and reveal himself in his perfect glory.”⁴ Today is the time of gathering. Tomorrow the separation will begin. The false professors, those trusting in their own

⁴Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, p. 140.

righteousness, in their birthright, those playing the Christian game will not survive this separation. They will be thrown headfirst by the King of Glory himself into their fiery pits of hell. There is an urgency in this message then. You can sense it in John's voice. You can hear it again in Christ's. **Heed the calling of the word. Do not harden yourselves as our forefathers did in the desert.**

The Kingdom of Heaven

So far, I have only elaborated on how the kingdom may be entered. I have taken Jesus' words which are identical to John's and given you John's explanation. But **Matthew 4** adds to our understanding of the kingdom in some very specific ways. John tells you about repentance and fruit. He tells you that birthrights do not gain you entrance into the kingdom. He tells you that the time of Israel as a kingdom typifying the heavenly kingdom is coming to an end. And he tells you that the way into the kingdom, that is through Christ, is now here.

But this doesn't really tell you much about the kingdom itself. Since we are so fond of and accustomed to working with the ideas, cultural objects, methodologies and philosophies of the kingdoms of this world, it is imperative to understand the kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdoms of this world.

Here are some things we can glean from this text about the kingdom. **First**, the kingdom **comes in great power**. Notice the healings going on here, the miracles. Every disease and sickness is being healed by Christ as testimony that the kingdom has arrived. Powerful preaching is accompanying it, and this is no less a testimony to the arrival of the kingdom than are the miracles. These things are not duplicated in the kingdoms of men because the power of this kingdom is not found in the sword or in politics or magic.⁵ It is found in Christ and in the people he came to save and in the methods he uses to get them into the kingdom.

hin of Egypt trying to duplicate the miracles of God in the Exodus, only to fail.

Thus in the second place, the kingdom of heaven has **its own unique ruler**. This may seem obvious, but it is critical. John didn't perform the miracles, Jesus did. His miracle working kingdom preaching demonstrates that he is the King of the Kingdom. This king is ruling a righteous and holy kingdom. This is language that is rarely heard in American pulpits today. After all, we live in a democracy where each of us is our own little king. We would have Jesus to be our coach, our friend, or even our lover. But we don't think of him as our King.

In fact, some have unwittingly yet blindly taught that one can somehow have Jesus as Saviour but not as Lord. As if we puny little humans make Jesus Saviour *or* Lord. No, friend. Jesus *is* the Saviour and he *is* the King. We don't make him the Lord. And as Lord, he demands to be followed and worshipped by his citizens. Those who will not, will perish. That is the way of it.

Third, and this follows from the first two points, **the kingdom of heaven is made for the humble and lowly people of this earth.** This is not like the kingdoms of this earth. Even in America, we complain when the poor come over our borders to make a better life for themselves. But these are the kinds of people the Father has given to the Son. This is immediately seen in this passage in the kinds of people that are following Jesus around. Notice in **verse 24** all the **sick, the afflicted, those with diseases, with pains, those oppressed by demons, those with epilepsy, and those who are paralyzed.**

Is there a chance that we have somehow missed the boat on the physical emphasis Christ put on the kingdom? This is a problem in the American church. Indeed, it has been a problem throughout church history. Does it bother you that the emphasis in so much of American Christianity is on being huge? Huge buildings. Huge budgets. Lots and lots of people. Why, I recently heard of

one church recently that spent \$500,000 just on a *curtain* for their church stage.

But beloved, in all of our largeness I must ask, where are the poor, the destitute, the underprivileged, sick, the crazy people? I can tell you from first hand experience where they are and where they are not. They *are* in **institutions**. They *are* in **homeless shelters**. They *are* on the **streets**. But they are rarely to be found in the churches of Jesus Christ. This is a strange thing to me when I consider the ministry of Jesus, even from its inception as I read here in Matthew. These are the people that Christ says he *wants* in his kingdom. We hardly even think about them, except when they cause a traffic jam, thus making us late for work because they are begging for money. This ought strike a chord deep within us of our own failure to love those Christ loved. But it ought also to give us hope that those the church today refuses to even talk to are those that Christ wants in his kingdom. The gospel is the hope of the poor!

You see, from this text we understand that **the kingdom is for the suffering people of this earth**. It ought not to be the case that Christians ask why they have to suffer. This is a narcissistic question that has little grounding in Scripture. This is what we come to expect when we read the Word. God's people will suffering. Expect it. I submit that if we really understood the kingdom of heaven, we would wonder why we have so many rich people in our churches, we would begin to ask why everything is going so well for us! Perhaps, this might even cause us to wonder if God really loves us, because we aren't suffering! Though he did draw all types to himself, it was far and away the scum of the earth that followed our Lord. The kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdoms of the earth. It is subversive to everything the kingdoms of men hold dear.

Thus, fourth, this kingdom operates with **different methodology** than the kingdoms of earth. I want you to see how Jesus went about

getting the word out. It says he went **teaching**, **preaching**, and **healing**. This is a far cry from today's entertainment driven, acting based, smooth talking self-help junk that so many are being fed in the name of Christianity.

Teaching is the careful time consuming explanation of the kingdom. Teaching presupposes that truth can be understood and known. This is a far cry from what we find in our postmodern world where truth is relative and unknowable.

Preaching is especially remarkable to me. Even in Jesus' day, preaching was *not* the first choice of communication. It is always been true that acting is much more entertaining. You can keep at attention better if someone is telling jokes. It is way better - according to the spirit of our age - to use a video or show a Hollywood movie clip to gain an audience. Preaching is honestly just about the worst form of communication imaginable. But **Calvin**, commenting on **1 Corinthians 1:16-17**

says that God chose this method because it entirely in keeping with the foolish message that a man will die to save, suffer to redeem, and be mocked to release his poor struggling refugees. But this is the way the kingdom of heaven works, friend. It isn't like the kingdoms of earth. It works powerfully in the *spiritual realm* through a powerful king who uses what are to us odd methods to save his people.

Part of the greatness of the coming of Christ was the miracles that were evidences of the truthfulness of his message. They attested to his ministry. But while they were signs of his ministry, they themselves never made anyone believe in his message. Miracles can no more make a person believe in Christ than can Mel Gibson's Passion movie about Jesus. Thus, while many followed him for healing, many others left him when the suffering times and difficult words came.

In fact, *all* left him so that he was alone in the darkest night of his soul; when he was betrayed and left to die, forsaken by even his Father as he hung upon the cross outside Jerusalem. This is the moment when the covenant was sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ. And in great power, he was not left to decay in the grave. Instead, God raised him to new life and with this he became the first-fruit of the great harvest to come in the kingdom of heaven.

And with this, the kingdom came in great power. Ridderbos says, “The kingdom of heaven is not in the first place a spatial or stationary entity, which is descending from heaven; but rather the divine kingly rule of Christ actually and effectively starting its operation.”⁶ The good news is that Christ the King has come. “The gospel preached here is not merely a promise, nor does it consist solely in the fact that salvation has come nearer. Though still future as regards its perfect consummation, it has fundamentally become a

fact at the present moment.”⁷ He has begun to rule in the hearts of men. The age of men, however, is coming quickly to an end. Very soon, Jesus will return and will destroy this wicked world, making all things new. He will gather all men to himself. Then, he will sift the chaff from the wheat which will be forever burned in the fires of hell. **Trust in Christ beloved.** Believe that God raised him from the dead. If you trust, hold on with all your might. Hold on by knowing that he is holding onto you and will not let you fall out of his hand. Christ will lose none of those given to him by the Father. Look forward to your heavenly home and live today a life of faith in obedience to the commands of God. **“Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”**

May God call many to himself through the proclamation of his word.

May God bless the hearing of his word.