

THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

Message 3

Scripture: John 3:1-8

INTRODUCTIONS: We are planning to look at a number of the latter parables as given in the Gospel of Matthew. For many years I have pondered these parables but I have never seemed to have had the freedom to give the time to them I would like to, but now I sense that freedom. I have looked forward to spending a lot of time on these because over the years I have gathered bits and pieces of data here and there and now, I want to seek to put that all together.

I felt it would be helpful if I took time to introduce this subject to us and in the first message we looked at figures of speech and their purpose. In the second message we looked especially at parables as a figure of speech and I gave a number of rules for interpreting parables.

Also, in the last message I outlined what one might call the prophetic parables of Jesus. I might call them the early parables; the Church parables and the latter parables. The early parables indicate a change is coming. Then, in Matthew 13 and related passages in Mark and Luke Jesus gives twelve parables that spell out the principles in operation during the Church Age and the tribulation time. In the latter parables, the main concerns are that Israel will reject Christ. Then, the Church age is skipped, other than warnings to be ready for the Parousia, or the appearing of Christ. This involves the rapture and the second coming.

But this morning I want to deal with another introductory subject before we get into the parables themselves. Turn to Matthew 20 (read verse 1). Here is one of the latter parables, and we are told that it relates to the kingdom of heaven. Now, there are two closely related phrases and they are the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. We will talk about that later. The phrase, kingdom of God occurs 69 times in the NT and 54 of those are in the Gospels. The phrase, kingdom of heaven occurs 32 times and all of them are in the Gospel of Matthew.

The question as to what the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is, has received a lot of study over the years. Those who have studied this to any depth or have read the various views will know somewhat of the complexity of this subject. What is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven or are they both the

same or do they refer to different things? Such are the questions.

I want to give here, my opinion, and you need to remember it is only that. But I trust I have some right to address this question after pondering it for over 40 years.

C. TO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

1. Is our topic relevant for today?

So, to introduce our subject of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, let me ask you this question: Is the subject of the kingdom of God or of heaven a relevant topic for today? I mean, what does it have to do with our church, our town, our country, or even my own life? Well, let me ask, is the Bible irrelevant anywhere? But, we ask, of what value is it to study this question, or even the parables that are in view in this series? Does it weigh in on present day concerns at all? Well, let me say this: If it was ever relevant, it is relevant today. Our understanding of this subject has very far reaching ramifications, right at our present time.

Most of you are familiar with prophecy and the major views. Let me briefly give those here. If you wish more on this subject, you might listen to our series on prophecy, or the series called 'Pilgrim's Progress: The Journey of the Church Age Believer.'

There are three main views of prophecy and most of you are well familiar with those. Let me just show you those. **Slide 1:** Here is a view of premillennialism. There is the OT time. When Christ came, we entered the NT time and the Church age. After this comes the tribulation, and then the 1000 year reign of Christ. After this we enter eternity.

Slide 2: Amillennialism says there will be no reign of Christ on earth. When Christ comes that is the end of this world. **Slide 3:** Postmillennialism gives basically the same picture as amillennialism, but it says that we will make this world better and better until Christians bring about a long time of peace. After this Christ will come.

Now, why did I show you those? J. Dwight Pentecost's book, "Things To Come" was copyrighted in 1958 and is one of the most comprehensive works on prophecy ever done. On page 386 he writes, "Postmillennialism is no longer an issue in theology."

He was not a prophet. Today, postmillennialism has put on new clothes and many people don't recognize it, but it is, I believe, more popular among professing evangelicals than premillennialism. And I want to show you what it is.

Our subject this morning is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Now take a look at our next slide (**SLIDE 4:**). Note the Church age and that it slides into paradise on earth. Christ comes after we turn this world into paradise. So, let me alert you to a very present day theological issue. It is with regard to the prevalent view of the kingdom of God that today is called kingdom now theology.

So let me give you a brief history of thought with regard to the return of Christ. In Christian history there have been three major views of prophecy or eschatology as it relates to the return of Christ and we have seen those. The first view held historically was premillennialism, which says Christ will return before the millennium. It has three major branches of thought; pre, mid, and post tribulationism. Premillennialism dates back to the apostles, and was taught by the early church fathers. Then there is amillennialism, and it says there will be no millennium, no literal reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years. It came into existence in the teaching of Augustine of Hippo, who was born in 354 AD. Then there is postmillennialism. It is uncertain when this view developed but it is held that Daniel Whitby, who lived from 1638-1725 first developed it systematically, though roots of this teaching were around earlier (Thomas Ice, www.raptureready.com).

I cannot go into detail this morning on postmillennialism, except to say that when J. Dwight Pentecost said it is no longer an issue in theology today, he had no idea of what was coming.

Here is what Thomas Ice says about Postmillennialism:

- (SLIDE 5:) First, postmillennialism "understands the Messianic kingdom to have been founded upon the earth during the earthly ministry and through the redemptive labors of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . the Church becomes the transformed Israel."
- (SLIDE 6:) Second, "the fundamental nature of that kingdom is essentially redemptive and spiritual . . . Christ rules His kingdom spiritually in and through His people in the world (representation), as well as by His universal providence."
- (SLIDE 7:) Third, Christ's "kingdom will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history. This will occur as more and more people are converted to Christ."
- (SLIDE 8:) Fourth, "postmillennialism, thus, expects the gradual, developmental expansion of the kingdom of Christ in time and on earth... **Christ's personal presence on earth is not needed for the expansion of His kingdom.**"
- (SLIDE 9:) Fifth, "postmillennialism confidently anticipates a time in earth history (continuous with the present) in which the very gospel already operative in the world will have won the victory throughout the earth in fulfillment of the Great Commission. . . . During that time the overwhelming majority of men and nations will be Christianized, righteousness will abound, wars will cease, and prosperity and safety will flourish."
- (SLIDE 10:) Sixth, there are "two types of postmillennialism today: pietistic and theonomic postmillennialism. . . . Pietistic postmillennialism.. denies that the postmillennial advance of the kingdom involves the total transformation of culture through the application of biblical law. Theonomic postmillennialism affirms this."
- (SLIDE 11:) Seventh, "possibly 'we can look forward to a great 'golden age' of spiritual prosperity continuing for centuries, or even for millenniums...' After this... earth history will be drawn to a close by the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ (accompanied by a literal resurrection and a general judgment) to introduce His . . . consummative and eternal form of the kingdom."

J. Alva MacLain, in a very thorough book on the kingdom of God gives 8 major views of what the kingdom of God

is. The seventh view that McClain gives is the liberal social-Kingdom idea. He writes, "According to this emphasis, the Kingdom of God is the progressive social organization and improvement of mankind, in which society rather than the individual is given first place. The main task of the Church is, therefore, to establish a Christian Social Order which in turn will actually make 'bad men do good things.' As a modern movement this notion began with the cult of 'Christian Socialism' under the leadership of J. F. D. Moarice and Charles Kingsley" (pg. 11) end quote. Now you can tell that that is nothing but postmillennialism. You see, all of this has to do with what one believes the kingdom of God is.

But listen now to a quote from a Lighthouse Trails article by Jan Markel. It says, "One of the fastest-growing false teachings in the church today is called by various names: Kingdom Now, Dominion Theology, Reconstructionism, and the Restoration Movement. It is also known as "liberation theology." It is an effort to use the church to make the world perfect for our Lord's return. It is embraced and taught in part or whole by the National and World Council of Churches, Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Earl Paulk, Bob Weiner, John Wimber, James Robison (who is called "the President's pastor"). There are many other names that are focusing on the Leftist social gospel in hopes that this will clean up the world and make it perfect for Christ's return. No more disease, war, poverty, AIDS, global warming, etc. Jesus will return when the church is unified, vibrant, forceful, spotless, and wrinkle-free. This is delusional and keeping people out of Heaven"

(<http://www.lighthouse Trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=3295>)

Let me give you the main points of Kingdom now theology from the dominion-theology.blogspot.ca. **(Slide 12)** 1 God gave Adam dominion over the earth. **(Slide 13)** 2 Satan usurped man's dominion over the earth through the fall of Adam. **(Slide 14)** 3 Jesus defeated Satan and took dominion back in his victory on the cross. **(Slide 15)** 4 Jesus then gave that dominion back to believers. **(Slide 16)** 5 The Church must gain control of the earth's governmental and social institutions, and establish the kingdom on earth. **(Slide 17)** 6 Then, and only then, can Jesus come. <http://dominion-theology.blogspot.ca/>

Now that is nothing but postmillennialism. And you see that according to that, Jesus cannot come today. And all of these views are based on their understanding of what this phrase, 'kingdom of God' or 'kingdom of heaven' means. Now let me ask you, does our subject directly affect where we are today? This is a very widely held view and it is fast growing and if it can, it will kill true eschatology until hardly anyone expects Christ to return anywhere in the foreseeable future. And what will that do to the Church?

And when you adopt the view of kingdom now theology we will change from expecting Christ at any moment, to not expecting Him for possibly thousands of years. And when one adopts that view of eschatology or prophecy, a major change takes place in one's whole outlook on the Bible and on life.

2. Are the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven the same kingdom?

Let me now ask a 2,000 year old question: Are the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven the same? I don't want to spend time here but to simply say that a comparison of Matthew 11:11 with Luke 7:28; and Matthew 19:14 with Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16 will show that in the same instance where Matthew uses the phrase 'kingdom of heaven', the others use the phrase, 'kingdom of God'. This shows they refer to the same thing. The question might now come, why these two different phrases? Once more, let me just answer very briefly. It is called the kingdom of God because God rules this kingdom. And second, it is the kingdom of heaven because it is ruled by God from heaven. I might add some thoughts to that in later messages.

3. What is the kingdom of heaven/God?

Our next question then is, just what is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven?

a. The various views

J. Alva McClain has written an entire book on the kingdom of God. It is a book much endorsed by the producers of the 'Israel My Glory' magazine. The copyright date is 1959, and it truly is a great

book. McClain gives 8 different views as to what the kingdom of God is.

(Slide 18) There is the national kingdom idea. The Jews say the kingdom of God, that is us. We are the kingdom of God. **(Slide 19)** Another view is that the kingdom of God is the millennium. **(Slide 20)** Third, the kingdom of God is heaven. **(Slide 21)** Fourth, the kingdom of God is the Church. **(Slide 22)** Fifth is the spiritual kingdom idea. It is within believers. **(Slide 23)** Sixth is the moral kingdom idea. It is the reign of the moral law over the hearts of men. **(Slide 24)** Seventh is the liberal social kingdom idea. This is postmillennialism. The Church will establish the kingdom on earth and we may live like that for thousands of years before Christ comes. This is very fast becoming the most popular view among professing evangelicals. **(Slide 25)** The eighth view MacLain covers he called the modern eschatological kingdom idea. It is not worth spending words on.

But, those eight views can possibly be boiled down to three main views. MacLain quotes Archibald Robertson who has said this, "The Kingdom of God has, in the course of Christian History, received three principle interpretations. **(Slide 26)** It has been identified firstly with the perfect reign of God in heaven after the Last Judgement. **(Slide 27)** Secondly it has been identified with a visible reign of Christ on earth between the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. **(Slide 28)** Thirdly, it has been identified with the Visible Church on earth between the first and the second coming of Christ."

(Slide 29) So the question is, is it here, after the final judgment? **(Slide 30)** Or is it here, during the millennium? **(Slide 31)** Or is it here, during the Church age?

b. My personal view

Now I want to give my personal view of what I think the phrases 'kingdom of God' or 'kingdom of heaven' refer to. I am going to spell it out in brief, and then give details as long as I have time for.

(Slide 32) First, I believe it covers the time from when the Church was born until the end of the millennium. As I see it, the kingdom of God must be seen from two different views. There is first, what I call 'The Intended Kingdom' **(Slide 33)**. In the OT, this kingdom was promised again and again. Let us look at it.

You will remember from Daniel 2, that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and it greatly troubled him and he demanded that his magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and Chaldeans tell him both what the dream was and what it meant. You will remember that he would have had them all killed because they could not tell him either the dream or its meaning, but Daniel came along and did both.

You may remember that it was a vision of a statue with a head of gold, its chest and arms were of silver, its belly and thighs were of bronze, and its legs were of iron and its feet partly of iron and of clay. But then a rock fell from heaven and hit the statue on the feet and the whole thing crumbled. And that rock was the fifth kingdom. And that fifth kingdom, is, I believe, this kingdom of God. It will be ruled by Christ, and refers to the millennium.

Turn to Isaiah, 2 (read 1-4). Here again, is the kingdom intended. It is the millennial reign of Christ. Then look at Isaiah 11 (read 1-10). This is the kingdom and the OT is full of information on this kingdom. It is the kingdom the Jews expected.

Now turn to Matthew 3 (read 1-2). Now look at 4:17 (read). This is the kingdom intended in the OT.

Now I have shown you numerous times what happened. You know that the Jews rejected Christ, and that changed things. This kingdom was postponed and we have this **(Slide 34)**. A time period entered, still referred to as the kingdom of God or of heaven, but it is a totally different kind of kingdom.

Now let me show you the difference between the intended kingdom and the interim kingdom. I agree with the writers who say that a kingdom may be

viewed from 3 different aspects (**Slide 35**). There is the ruler (**Slide 36**). Let me make a comment here. I didn't know if I should include this but in talking to one of our online folk, I became sure I should. She said she had been thinking on the parables and the kingdom of God and she read a verse, and if she hadn't known she was reading in the Bible she would have thought she was reading some New Age material. Go to Luke 17:21 (read). It says, "...nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Now numerous of your Bible notes will tell you that it can be translated, 'the kingdom of God is among you'. I pondered that over 40 years ago and never forgot Dr. J. Otis Yoder's comment back then. He asked, "How was it among them? Well, the King was there!" Here is the kingdom of God viewed from the aspect of the ruler. Then there is the actual reign itself (**Slide 37**). Then there are those who are ruled over (**Slide 38**).

In the intended kingdom, the millennium, God is the ruler; the reign itself is taking place on earth through Jesus Christ. He is literally on earth and ruling the whole earth from Jerusalem. In the interim kingdom, the one we are in today, God is ruling from heaven through Jesus Christ, who is in heaven, over His people, all those who are truly Christians.

Now, let me try to draw a picture in your minds of the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world in the interim kingdom. Picture in your mind a map of the world, with all the different countries in different colors and all the borders between the countries. Now recognize that in each of those countries there is a ruler, an area and with the people reigned over, and the reign itself. There are 195 or 196 countries in the world today. By the way, we have had at least one message go into 153 of those countries.

Now take out all the borders of those countries in your mind. And then when you have all those borders out, make little dots representing Christians

wherever they might be found on earth. Some countries will have a lot more than others, but there is hardly a country that does not have some Christians in it. And now that you have all the borders out, and all the dots in, there is the kingdom of God in the world today. This is the interim kingdom.

Now, back to Luke 17:21, and the kingdom of God being among them. It could be said today, "The kingdom of God is among you." How so? Well, those ruled over are among you. That is the kingdom of God today. All those who are truly born again are part of that kingdom no matter what nationality or color they are.

Now this part of the rule of the interim kingdom lasts from when the Church was born until the end of the tribulation. It is after that that Jesus Christ literally and visibly returns to earth to rule in the intended kingdom, the millennium.

At the outset of this message we had John 3:1-8 read for us. You will be well familiar with those verses. And Jesus said to Nicodemus, who came to Him by night, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus said in another place, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it." There is only one gate and there is only one way.

IF THERE IS TIME: I put in my notes that if I had time, I would give you a brief overview of the parables of Matthew 13, those that relate to the Church age.

The first parable of the Church age is found in Matthew 13:3-9 we have the parable of the sower and the seed. The kingdom principle is that of evangelism. In the millennial kingdom there will be no evangelism because they all know the Lord.

A parable Mark gives that Matthew does not give is found in Mark 4:26-29. It is the parable of the man who sowed seed in his field and then he goes about his other business. This parable gives the

principle of automation. When we are faithful to God in spreading His Word, He will do the work in the hearts of the people through that word.

Matthew 13:24-30, parable number 3, is the parable of a man sowed seed in his field and the devil came along and over-sowed the field with tares. This parable gives us the principle of impersonation. The devil is ever about it, and we see it all about us.

Parable number four, found in Matthew 13:31-32 is the parable of the mustard seed which becomes a good sized tree. This parable gives the principle of the phenomenal expansion of the kingdom of God. The expansion is from smallest to largest.

Matthew 13:33, parable number five, is the parable of leaven, or yeast put into bread dough and it spreads through the whole loaf. It gives the principle of permeation. That is what leaven does. That is how God's kingdom works today.

Matthew 13:44, parable number 6 gives the parable of the treasure hidden in a field. It gives us the principle of appropriation. To appropriate something is to make it one's own. Here is a person who has discovered the great richness of the kingdom, and he does anything to appropriate it.

In Matthew 13:45-46 we have parable number seven, the parable the pearl of great price. It gives us the principle of evaluation. The merchant considers the value of the pearls, and he will pay a very high price for one of great value.

CONCL: So, we have spent three messages to introduce to us the latter parables of Jesus. This morning we have considered the phrases, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. We are going to consider those that relate to the kingdom of God as given in the book of Matthew.

In my view, we have to look at the kingdom of God from two viewpoints. There is the intended kingdom, the millennial reign of Christ. God will be ruling the world through Jesus Christ with Christ Himself present on earth. He will rule from Jerusalem and He will rule the whole world.

Then there is the interim kingdom, or as J. Alva MacLain calls it, the interregnum kingdom. Here God rules over the believers who are on earth wherever they may be and He is ruling through Christ, while Christ is still in heaven. This then, is my view of the kingdom of God or of heaven.