
THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVEN

“Jesus answered: ‘My kingdom is no part of this world. If my kingdom were part of this world, my attendants would have fought that I should not be delivered up to the Jews. But, as it is, my kingdom is not from this source.’” – *John 18:36*

Jesus gave this answer to Pontius Pilate as an explanation of why the Kingdom Jesus spoke of was no threat to the Roman kingdom. This answer also provides us with a great starting point from which to unfold the true nature of the Kingdom of the Heavens. For sometimes, the easiest ways to comprehend a thing is to spend time contemplating its antithesis. The antithesis of the Kingdom of the Heavens is the Kingdom of the Earth, also referred to as the Kingdom of Man or the Kingdom of the World.

The Kingdom of Man is the world of mankind, including all of its material creatures and creations, all of its knowledge and philosophies, and all of its earthly attitudes and desires. It came into existence with the creation of the first man. All of us begin life and live within this kingdom. We learn to engage our environment on terms that ensure the greatest likelihood of **physical** survival and potential for happiness. We learn that in the Kingdom of Man, we must have food, water and shelter and we develop various ways of meeting these needs – in both lawful and unlawful ways.

In the Kingdom of Man, we accept the reality that the physical body will wear out and expire. And according to our earthly knowledge and philosophies, death is the end of the ride. However, in conflict with what we learn through our earthly sciences, we seem to have an inherent desire for immortality. Death, to a normal functioning mind, always comes too soon. In answer to this inexplicable desire, we create various methods for achieving “substituted” immortality through our children and through different forms of memorialization – genealogies, honors, awards, and memorial tombs. And in spite of all the medical advances in our Kingdom, life under this Kingdom unfaillingly comes to an end.

While we must develop some type of civilization during our earthly sojourn, we live under this ever-present reality of our personal extinction. Thus, the “rules of engagement” always give priority to self-preservation. “Do unto others before they do unto you.” It is as Paul said, “all creation keeps on groaning together and being in pain together.” (*Romans 8:22*)

This is the reality most of mankind lives under. But let us now contrast the Kingdom of Man with the Kingdom of the Heavens.

The Kingdom of the Heavens is the spiritual world in which the Father and his Christ reside, along with all superhuman creatures and creations, all higher knowledge and truth, and all superlative attitudes and desires. The Kingdom of the Heavens was not “established” with the

advent of the Christ on earth. Since it is the world of the Father, it came into existence in the “beginning” when the “Word was:”

“In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. This one was in [the] beginning with God. All things came into existence through him, and apart from him not even one thing came into existence.” – *John 1:1-3*

We do not begin life within the Kingdom of the Heavens, but we are ever invited to enter. And when we do, we learn to engage our environment on terms that ensure the greatest likelihood of **eternal** survival and potential for happiness. We learn that to enter the Kingdom of the Heavens, we must have two things: (1) faith sincerity – freedom from prejudice and preconception, an open-mind and a teachable spirit like an unspoiled child:

“Truly I say to you, Unless you turn around and become as young children, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.” – *Matthew 18:3*

and (2) truth hunger – the thirst for righteousness, and the acquirement of the motive to be like God and to find God:

“Nevertheless, the hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth, for, indeed, the Father is looking for suchlike ones to worship him. God is a Spirit, and those worshiping him must worship with spirit and truth.” – *John 4:23-24*

“Happy are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, since they will be filled.” – *Matthew 5:6*

And we learn ways to meet those needs through the life example and teaching of Jesus and the spirit of truth:

“Jesus said to him: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” – *John 14:6*

“However, when that one arrives, the spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things coming.” – *John 16:13-14*

In the Kingdom of the Heavens, we accept the reality that while the physical body will wear out and expire, we will be given a spiritual body that will live on. We know that death is **not** the end of the ride and that our inherent desire for **actual** immortality will be fulfilled:

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised up in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised up in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised up in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised up a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual one.” – *1 Corinthians 15:42-44*

In the Kingdom of the Heavens, we learn new “rules of engagement” that give priority to love of God and love of your fellowman. We are taught:

“‘You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this, ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’” – *Matthew 22:37-39*

“Also, just as you want men to do to you, do the same way to them.” – *Luke 6:31*

“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.” – *John 13:35*

By contemplating this contrast, we gain a better appreciation of what the Kingdom of the Heavens truly is. In its most overarching context, the word “Kingdom” as it relates to God is more synonymous with the word “realm” than with the word “government.” However, it indeed does govern our behavior because the laws of the Kingdom of the Heavens are written, not on tablets or law books, but in our hearts, as prophesied by Jeremiah:

“‘For this is the covenant that I shall conclude with the house of Israel after those days,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it. And I will become their God, and they themselves will become my people.’” – *Jeremiah 31:33*

We might liken entrance into the Kingdom of the Heavens to acceptance into a fraternity or an association, like an attorney who passes the State Bar or a doctor who acquires his medical license. From that point on, they are a part of their unique community and are subject to higher standards of behavior.

In the Kingdom of the Heavens, we relate to God as a loving Father. Thus, all those who enter become known as sons of God and consequently brothers to each other. We then have a personal experience of realizing higher qualities of spiritual living, *while on earth*, that are progressively translated to new and higher levels of divine certainty and eternal security.

The Kingdom of the Heavens has a dual nature. It is both a present reality and a future goal. We comprehend the Kingdom of the Heavens is a present reality by Jesus' words that "the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." (*Matthew 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:11*)

"The kingdom of God is not coming with striking observableness, neither will people be saying, 'See here!' or, 'There!' For, look! the kingdom of God is in your midst." – *Luke 17:20-21*

It is already here! You can enter it now. For those who elect to enter the Kingdom of the Heavens now, we gain profound peace of mind.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor governments nor things now here nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creation will be able to separate us from God's love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." – *Romans 8:38-39*

But it is also a future goal in the sense that, within the Kingdom, we can more fully perfect God's love and expand its influence. As a result, we experience the natural and inevitable outgrowth of the fruitage of the spirit – "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control." (*Galatians 5:2-23*)

This is the Kingdom to which we are to be ambassadors. We can see how we are citizens of this heavenly Kingdom, but also temporary residents in the Kingdom of Man, entreating our fellows to also enter the Kingdom and "Become reconciled to God." (*2 Corinthians 5:20*)

Knowing that the Kingdom of the Heavens is spiritual and not from any earthly source (*John 18:36*), we then ask: What is its relation to the physical congregation, the church? We will discuss this aspect of the Kingdom in a future article.

We welcome your comments.

"Elia Luchnia"