

## THE KIND OF KINGDOM GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. By presenting Jesus as the humble babe of Bethlehem, adored by foreigners and rejected by His own people, then rescued by fleeing into a foreign country, Matthew pictures the hard reality of a Kingdom of God whose true value can be appreciated only through the eyes of faith and by the spiritual long view of things. Those who dreamed of a triumphalistic Messianic Kingdom must see the lowliness and suffering of Him of whom Matthew must speak (Matt. 2).
2. Matthew alone quotes Jesus' justification for His own immersion by John the Baptist (3:15). Jesus' Messiahship is founded on the principle that "We must do everything God says to, whether we understand it perfectly or not, whether we agree that it applies to us or not, whether it is popular or not, whether our best friends think we should or not,—just because God said to do it!" This is a Kingdom that collides with all notions of a Messianic utopia where we all get to do what WE want to.
3. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is the first concrete answer Matthew includes to the question: "What does it mean to fulfil all righteousness? What does it mean to submit ourselves to the Kingdom of God, i.e. to His plans and will?" If this Sermon is a manifesto of the Kingdom, and if Jesus Himself is the realization of all that God intended in the Old Testament Law (5:17-20), and if His Word is that which God now substitutes for that Law (5:21-48), then THE KINGDOM IS JESUS HIMSELF present among men. He is the new Law. Consequently, the Church is none other than the totality of those who follow HIM toward that fulfilment of God's plan that Jesus has reached. The promise of obtaining the Kingdom is directed to those aware of their spiritual poverty (5:3), the persecuted for doing God's will (5:10), and those whose obedience to God's will exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).
4. The continued presence of threatened judgment upon the believer stands out in stark contrast with pre-Christian Jewish views of the Messianic Kingdom, according to which, in the days of the Messiah, the people of God would be miraculously and instantly purified. (Cf. 5:19a, 20, 22, 26, 29, 30; 6:1, 14, 15; 7:2, 13, 14, 19, 21-23, 26, 27).
5. If the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is to be sought first, above and beyond all human necessities (6:33), then it is not a

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- Kingdom that eliminates the struggles involved in our human existence, but rather becomes the goal of our efforts despite the continued existence of these "normal necessities" (6:24-34). The Kingdom must be understood as a present reality, present IN the humdrum of our existential world, not merely an eschatological release from that reality. The purpose of this insertion of the Kingdom INTO the sinful world is to be light to illuminate its darkness, salt to save it from its corruption (5:13-16).
6. The non-nationalistic, non-racial character of the Kingdom is underlined in the account of the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5-13). The specifically racial and nationalistic claims of the Jews received a serious blow dealt by Jesus' comments on the exceptional faith of the Roman.
  7. The Kingdom's standard of judgment is not based upon precise performance of rituals, but upon the real sincerity of one's motives for all that he does (5:8, 11, 19, 20, 22, 28, 32, 37, 44-47; 6:1ff., 24; 7:12, 18-20, 23).
  8. God's Kingdom is His mastery over human uncleanness and disease (8:1-4, 14-17). It means His personal entrance into our human misery and bearing it Himself (8:17 = Isaiah 53:4).
  9. God's rule must be considered as absolute, more demanding than the highest human need or responsibilities (8:18-22).
  10. God's Kingdom includes His control over the elements of the natural world (8:23-27).
  11. God's Kingdom is manifest in His total mastery over Satan's kingdom (8:28—9:1).
  12. God's Kingdom is evident in His right to forgive man's sin (9:2-8).
  13. The Kingdom of God is not a sect of purists ("the pure; the true Church"), but a movement that is genuinely open to all without distinction. If Matthew the publican can belong to it, ANYONE can (9:9-13)!
  14. The Kingdom is not triumphalistic, does not force men to believe or be righteous, but it proceeds because of its missionary spirit. Its missionaries, because they labor where frictions among men are the bitterest, where selfishness explodes in all its forms, must expect persecutions and death (10:16ff.). Even though God is present and judging His people, He may not intervene to halt those who kill them (10:28). Jesus' disciples are to be identified with Him in suffering and service (10:16-40).
  15. The unification of all men in the Kingdom of God can only come

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about by the elimination of all false unities, even those founded upon blood relationships (10:34-39).

16. The Kingdom of God, in its earthly manifestation, can suffer opposition and violent attempts to force it to be something other than what it was designed to be (11:12). This is in perfect harmony with the absolute freedom of the human will to accept its teachings or not (11:14).
17. God's government of heaven and earth includes His gracious will to hide significant truth from those who pride themselves as being "the wise and understanding," while revealing the truth to humble, sincere disciples, "the babes" (11:25-30).
18. The rule of God over His people lifts them over the highest institutions of the Mosaic Law, the Sabbath and the Temple (12:1-14). "The Son of man is lord of the sabbath."
19. The operational power of the Spirit of God working in Jesus of Nazareth is positive proof that the Kingdom of God has come and that Satan is really defeated and plundered (12:22-29)!
20. Something greater than the wisdom of Solomon and the testimony of Jonah is involved in Jesus' representation of God's Kingdom (12:38-43).
21. The Kingdom of God is not founded upon fleshly ties, not even to the Messiah Himself, much less to Abraham, but upon doing what the Father in heaven wills (12:46-50).
22. Jesus presented the "secrets of the Kingdom of heaven" to everyone listening, but in parabolic form so as to distinguish between listeners. Those who trusted Jesus enough to come to Him for explanations, received more information about the nature, progress and destiny of the Kingdom of God, because they gained the explanations of the unforgettable parables they already possessed. Those who did not care enough for truth, or did not trust Jesus to know what He was about, not only did not gain this vital information, but also lost the value of the parables they had heard (13:10-17, 34, 35). Thus, the Church is made up of those who desire to trust and learn from Jesus even those truths of the Kingdom that are unclear, unpalatable, or seem wrong.
23. The kind of Kingdom God has in mind has the following characteristics:
  - a. The effectiveness of God's rule in individual lives depends directly upon each one's personal openness to truth and his willingness to let God rule (13:1-9, 18-23). If so, the Kingdom

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- is not a materialistic regime that conquers by force of arms, but by the painfully slow process of planting truth in men's hearts, which are of widely varied character.
- b. The temporary presence of evil in the Kingdom of God is not His fault, because He is not the source of evil. Rather, He has inaugurated a process whereby final judgment will reveal the truly righteous and segregate the wicked. The "righteous," the congregation of the Messiah, really are the citizens of His Kingdom (13:24-30, 36-43). The continued presence of evil in the world is clear proof of man's moral freedom to decide his own fate (13:47-50). The Kingdom is the work of a God who knows the time of its maturing and of the final day.
  - c. Despite its microscopic beginnings, the Kingdom of God will grow and become a mighty empire, because of its internal life and extensive expansion (13:31, 32).
  - d. The Kingdom will grow quietly in the world, without great noise and commotion, but its progress will not be hindered until its intensive, transforming power influences all it touches (13:33).
  - e. Whether discovered accidentally or sought deliberately, the Kingdom of God, when discovered and appreciated at its true value, is worth all it costs (13:44-46).
  - f. The theologian who is a disciple of the Kingdom is a wealthy man who can bless his guests with treasured truth, the best of the old and the finest of the new (13:52).
24. It is not a kingdom in which external purity and ceremony has any real importance, but where the real purity of one's heart, as this is manifested in his spirit of obedience to whatever God requires, is everything (15:1-20).
  25. It is a Kingdom whose King, the Son of David, has time to bless even CANAANITES, despite the limitations of His personal mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:21-28)!
  26. It is a Kingdom where half-Jewish, half-Gentile populations can sit down to the Messianic banquet together, not because of personal worthiness, but because of the Messiah's bounty and graciousness (15:29-39).
  27. It is a Kingdom, rather, that one enters by death to self, and by acknowledgment of the true identity and consequent rights of the King (16:13-28). The "community of the Messiah" ("The

Church of Christ'), then, is but the *subjective* manifestation of the Messiah's *objective* rule. The Church is, in short, "the people of the Kingdom," the necessary result of the proclamation of God's sovereignty, a proclamation which calls into being a real assembly or communitary reality: the Church. It was to begin in the lifetime of Jesus' earthly disciples (16:28).

28. The Kingdom's power, while at the disposition of the disciples, is not automatic nor divisible from faith (17:14-21).
29. The "sons of the Kingdom" are free citizens, above even the obligatory Temple-tax (17:24-27).
30. Death to self, absolutely essential to entrance in the Kingdom, manifests itself in a refusal to recognize any standard of greatness other than the amount of service one renders to the weakest, smallest, least important in the Kingdom (18:1-35). No pride in achievement can justify unmercifulness or harsh treatment of any member of the Kingdom, however seemingly insignificant.
31. The Kingdom God has in mind is a community of the Messiah, yet it admits its internal problem and deals with them in an orderly manner (18:15-35). The problem of continued sinning and consequent need for forgiveness is to remain a live one, even after the beginning of the Kingdom. It is a Kingdom whose common life is characterized by its concern for the little ones, its reconciliation of brethren, its forgiveness of offenses, its purity of intentions, its harmony of life and its common prayer.
32. The Kingdom God has in mind is concerned with a right understanding of male-female relationships (19:3-12). Celibacy, even for sake of the Kingdom, is not possible for everyone.
33. The Kingdom of God belongs to "the children and such as they," not those whose adulthood makes them too proud to come to Jesus (19:13-15).
34. The Kingdom God has in mind does not belong exclusively to the wealthy, whom most people would automatically judge most qualified for it, being the most blessed by God who furnishes the power to become wealthy (19:13-30).
35. In God's Kingdom earth's value-systems and power structures have no importance, except in a negative way in the sense that they are condemned among believers (19:23-26).
36. Loyalty to Jesus Christ, as this is manifest in the sacrifices made for His sake, will be richly rewarded in that expression of God's Kingdom "in the world to come" (19:27-30).

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37. In fact, God's Kingdom attributes no priority to anyone on the basis of supposed merits or personal achievements, because the basis of blessing is the free choice and mercy of the King (20:1-16).
38. The usual, earthly power-structures have no relation to anything Jesus has in mind for His Kingdom. Rather, the measure of greatness and power is service and usefulness to others, not self-seeking and self-aggrandisement (20:20-28).
39. God intends that His Kingdom shall belong to people who will produce the results God desires. Therefore, it cannot long remain the private possession of those who do not (21:23-43).
40. The Kingdom of Heaven is a question of free choice that may be accepted or rejected, but not, however, without serious consequences. Many are invited into it, but few prove finally acceptable (22:1-14).
41. Surprisingly, God's Kingdom does not conflict with normal, constituted human authority nor vice versa, and may be considered consistent with it when properly exercised (22:15-21).
42. While the present phase of the Kingdom of God is played out on earth's stage, the resurrection of the dead ushers men into a different state of life with the God of the living (22:23-33).
43. The religion and ethics of God's Kingdom may be summed up as love for God and unselfish service to one's neighbor (22:34-40).
44. The "son of David," long-awaited Messianic King, must also be the Lord of David (22:41-46).
45. In God's Kingdom, there are not to be "many chiefs," just one Father, one Teacher, one Leader. Everyone else is one of the "brothers" (23:7-10).
46. Nor is God's Kingdom to be exclusive and sectarian on the basis of human traditions and proselytization. Rather, its concerns will be with the things that count: justice, mercy and faith, inward purity, consciousness of God, moral understanding, hatred of sin (23:13-36).
47. The Kingdom God has in mind and of which Jesus is the Messianic King, will not be without its "prophets, wise men and theologians," sent as Christian missionaries to save Israel (23:34). Not only is their preparation emphasized here, but also their mission of mercy to an unworthy people.

48. The way in which God's Kingdom would be carried on will create a situation in which constant vigilance and constant preparation are absolutely essential to please the King (24:36—25:13). There remains the live possibility of losing everything, despite one's privileged position as servant of the King. The King's arrival will be delayed (24:45; 25:5). But the daily life of the citizen must be one marked by faith, sobriety, alertness and dedicated service.
49. The Kingdom involves a trust of the King's goods left in custody of His servants, to be utilized for His benefit (25:14-30). The King's return will be delayed (25:19). This only emphasizes the greatness of the opportunity to make good use of His goods for His glory.
50. The Kingdom involves a proper, personal care for the world's needy to whom service is to be rendered as if to the King Himself (25:31-46).
51. The Kingdom God has in mind is based on covenant sealed in Jesus' blood, furnishing the forgiveness of sins (26:28). The "fruit of the vine" which symbolized "the blood of the covenant" would be shared with Jesus' disciples "in the Father's Kingdom" (26:29).
52. Since Jesus was tried and crucified by the Romans and Jews as "the King of the Jews," and since God vindicated Jesus' right to this title by raising Him from the dead, it should be clear to Matthew's readers that God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel as God envisioned it, was not to be of the type usually dreamed of in current Jewish speculation, but precisely the Kingdom Jesus continuously and consistently represented to them. It is almost as if Matthew were saying: "The exclusively Jewish 'King of the Jews' is dead, never to rise again, not crucified by His own people, but by the King Himself. In His place there arose the true King of the new Israel, the King of the universe with authority in heaven and on earth." (Cf. 28:18.)
53. While our King is one in the daily expectation of whose return from a long trip we are to live (cf. 24:45-48; 25:5, 19), He is always near us, by our side, and His faithfulness will not fail (28:20).
54. Whereas in Mark we read of "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God," the object of the announcement being the person of Jesus

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Himself, in Matthew the characteristic expression is "the gospel of the Kingdom," almost as if it is meant that the object of the Gospel, the purpose of the Christian message is the actual proclamation of the Kingdom. (Cf. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14 in contrast to Mark 1:1, 14).

55. Because the *Kingdom* of God expresses the *will* of God, His Kingdom is evident in His choice to reveal His plans, not to the intelligentsia, but to little children (11:25, 26).
56. God does not will that any of these little ones should be lost through neglect or stumbling blocks of other disciples (18:14).
57. **WHATEVER** God wills is the essence of the Kingdom of God in one's life, regardless of how deeply that cuts across our choices or preferences (26:39).