

Not Far From The Kingdom

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Introduction

The kingdom of God was a focal point of prophecy. Jacob said that the scepter would not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the coming of Him to whom authority belongs (Gen. 49:8-10). Isaiah said that the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, would reign on David's throne, thus establishing a just and righteous government (Isa. 9:6-7). Daniel said that in the days of the Roman empire, God would establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44-45).

Genesis 49:8-10 ... 8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. 9 "Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? 10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (NASB95)

Isaiah 9:6-7 ... 6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. (NASB95)

Daniel 2:44-45 ... 44 "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. 45 "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (NASB95)

As the time drew nigh for God's purpose to be fulfilled, both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2) and Jesus Christ (Matt. 4:17) preached that "the kingdom of God is at hand." In other words, its establishment was imminent. After centuries of preparation and anticipation, the Messianic kingdom would soon be inaugurated (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1).

Matthew 3:1-2 ... 1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (NASB95)

Matthew 4:17 ... 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (NASB95)

Matthew 16:28 ... 28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (NASB95)

Mark 9:1 ... 1 And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." (NASB95)

Not only was the kingdom of God near unto men, but the Bible also speaks of men who were near unto the kingdom. During his last visit to Jerusalem, Jesus paid a very high compliment to one of the scribes who had questioned Him. He said to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:28-34).

*Mark 12:28-34 ... 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; 33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**" After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions. (NASB95)*

While the scribe had been appraising Jesus, Jesus had been appraising the scribe. His discreet answer led Jesus to say that he was not far from God's kingdom. Clearly, the distance to which Jesus referred was not physical but spiritual. As we shall see, this individual had a grasp of spiritual truths, which, if pursued, would lead him into the kingdom of God.

The Nature of the Kingdom

The New Testament uses various phrases to describe the people of God. These include the church of Christ, the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, the temple of God, the bride of Christ, the household of God, the vineyard of the Lord, etc. Each of these expressions portrays different spiritual relationships and responsibilities.

When Scripture speaks of the kingdom of God, it describes a monarchical form of spiritual government. The Christian religion is not a democracy where the will of the majority holds sway; rather, Christ is our King (Luke 1:31-33), and His Word is our final source of authority (Col. 3:17). Furthermore, we must be loyal and obedient citizens (Eph. 2:19-20).

Luke 1:31-33 ... 31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." (NASB95)

Colossians 3:17 ... 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (NASB95)

Ephesians 2:19-20 ... 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, (NASB95)

Furthermore, "the kingdom of God" and "the church of Christ" refer to the same spiritual realm. Some argue that the "kingdom" and the "church" are distinct from one another. Premillennial teachers say that Jesus came to establish His kingdom, but was rejected by the Jews. They say the church was set up as an afterthought or substitute measure, and the kingdom will be established later. However, a careful examination of Scripture reveals that this is a false distinction (Matt. 16:16-19; Col. 1:13-14, 18; Heb. 12:22-24, 28-29; Rev. 1:4, 6, 9).

Matthew 16:16-19 ... 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (NASB95)

Colossians 1:13-14 ... 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NASB95)

Colossians 1:18 ... 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (NASB95)

Hebrews 12:22-24 ... 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (NASB95)

Hebrews 12:28-29 ... 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire. (NASB95)

Revelation 1:4 ... 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, (NASB95)

Revelation 1:6 ... 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB95)

Revelation 1:9 ... 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (NASB95)

The Dividing Line

In the New Testament the kingdom of God is represented as both a rule unto which man must submit (Luke 17:20-21; Rom. 14:16-17) and a realm into which man must enter (Luke 16:16; Matt. 4:23-25). In either case, we may be near unto or far from God's kingdom, depending upon our attitude and disposition.

Luke 17:20-21 ... 20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (NASB95)

Romans 14:16-17 ... 16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (NASB95)

Luke 16:16 ... 16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (NASB95)

Matthew 4:23-25 ... 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. 24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. (NASB95)

God's purpose in establishing the kingdom/church was to bring men and women into full submission unto Christ. He removes us from the sinful realm of darkness and translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13-14). The New Testament reveals the conditions for citizenship in this spiritual kingdom. We are saved through an obedient faith (Matt. 7:21-23). The Lord adds people to His church as they are saved (Acts 2:46-47). It all boils down to one simple question: "Are you willing to do what God has said?" This is the dividing line.

Colossians 1:13-14 ... 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NASB95)

Matthew 7:21 ... 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (NASB95)

Acts 2:46-47 ... 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB95)

The Qualities Of Nearness

Many are far from the kingdom of God: Romans Chapter Three describes the state of fallen humanity. Mankind is lost and undone. Their hearts are corrupt and defiled. Ignorant of God's word and lacking spirituality, they are self-righteous, self-seeking, self-destructive, self-condemned (Rom. 3:10-18).

Romans 3:10-18 ... 10 as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; 11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one." 13 "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving," "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 17 And the path of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (NASB95)

Others, like this scribe, have progressed spiritually to the point that they are near unto the kingdom of God. The difference is one of attitude. When Jesus saw that the scribe **answered wisely**, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). The Greek word translated "wisely/intelligently" is defined as "sensibly, discreetly" and is descriptive of action that is "wisely, thoughtfully" pursued [Thomas, BDAG].

Mark 12:34 ... 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions. (NASB95)

Knowledgeable

In the context, Jesus had been discussing the true nature of devotion. He was asked, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Our Lord answered that the first commandment is to love God supremely and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-31). This scribe expressed full support for Jesus' statement. He understood man has a tendency to substitute ceremony for substance. Without belittling the importance of divinely-ordained sacrifices, this man clearly understood that love for God and one's fellowman is at the heart of genuine religion

(Mark 12:32-33). Obviously, he possessed a knowledge of God's Word and was sufficiently perceptive to make proper application.

Mark 12:28-31 ... 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (NASB95)

Mark 12:32-33 ... 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; 33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (NASB95)

Knowledge is essential. Hosea condemned the Israelites, saying that they faced certain destruction because of their lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Jesus affirmed that men are drawn to God as they hear, learn and are taught (John 6:44-45).

Hosea 4:6 ... 6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. (NASB95)

John 6:44-45 ... 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (NASB95)

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. Knowledge, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

Open-Minded

The scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees generally opposed Jesus. However, this man was not governed by the herd instinct. The Jewish leaders constantly disputed with Jesus, listened only with a view to entrapping Him in His words, and summarily dismissed His teaching. Yet, this man listened with an open and receptive mind.

Let us learn from his example: Open-mindedness is essential. A wise son will incline his ear to wisdom and apply his heart to understanding (Prov. 2:1-5). Let us be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

Proverbs 2:1-5 ... 1 My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, 2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; 3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; 4 If

you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will discern the fear of the Lord And discover the knowledge of God. (NASB95)

Acts 17:11 ... 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. (NASB95)

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. Open-mindedness, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

Courageous

This scribe was courageous in speech. He was willing to acknowledge that Jesus spoke the truth. As a rule, the scribes and Pharisees did not believe on Jesus. Those that did believe were often afraid to confess Him (John 12:42). Yet, here was a man bold enough to acknowledge truth when he heard it. He courageously affirmed his agreement with the teachings of Jesus.

John 12:42 ... 42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; (NASB95)

Courage is essential. Like David of old, we should be willing to openly speak of God's testimonies without shame or fear (Psalms 119:46). It is imperative that we have the courage to openly confess Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33).

Psalm 119:46 ... 46 I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings And shall not be ashamed. (NASB95)

Matthew 10:32-33 ... 32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (NASB95)

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. Courage, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

Humble

Pride and arrogance were characteristic of the scribes and the Pharisees (Luke 18:11-14). Truth is hidden from those who are proud and preening (Luke 10:21). However, this scribe was different. He was humble in spirit.

Luke 18:11-14 ... 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was

beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (NASB95)

Luke 10:21 ... 21 At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. (NASB95)

Humility is essential. Jesus praised this disposition when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). We must walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

Matthew 5:3 ... 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (NASB95)

Micah 6:8 ... 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? (NASB95)

So far, so good. This scribe was on the right path, but he had not yet reached the kingdom of God. He still had further to travel. You see, humility, by itself, will not save a man. It will, however, make one a fit candidate for conversion.

The Terms Of Admission

This scribe demonstrated the right attitude toward God, God's law and his fellow man. Yet, attitude is not enough; it must be accompanied by action. Jesus' statement, "Thou are not far from the kingdom of God," must have been an invitation for him to come the whole distance. What good is it for one to remain at the border of God's kingdom? So near and yet so far. So near, and yet he was still lost.

To enter the kingdom of God, one must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-5). This involves faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance from past sins (Luke 13:3), confession that Jesus is the son of God (Matt. 10:32-33) and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27). If you have not been baptized, you have not put on Christ, you are not yet a part of His body, or a citizen in His kingdom, or a member of His church. You may be near the kingdom, but you are not yet in it.

John 3:1-5 ... 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (NASB95)

John 8:24 ... 24 "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (NASB95)

Luke 13:3 ... 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. (NASB95)

Matthew 10:32-33 ... 32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (NASB95)

Acts 2:38 ... 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NASB95)

Acts 22:16 ... 16 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' (NASB95)

Romans 6:3-4 ... 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (NASB95)

Galatians 3:26-27 ... 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (NASB95)

Conclusion

Many today are in the same condition as this scribe. How near have they come to the kingdom? In many cases they have been brought near by the actions of others. They have been positively influenced by some faithful Christian. They are acquainted with the truths of religion. They have studied the Scriptures and have a basic understanding of the gospel of Christ. They respect the Bible as the Word of God. They admire the person of Christ, His moral purity, His teaching, and His compassion. They may even attend periods of Christian worship. They obey many laws of Christ, either from habit or conviction. Many times they have desired to go further. They may have even resolved to yield all to the Savior. And yet, they still have not rendered obedience.

How far are they from the kingdom? Men may travel a long distance in the right direction, and yet not complete the journey. They refuse to take the last few steps. They have yet to receive the gospel of Christ with their whole nature. The assent of the understanding must be followed by the consent of the will. They have not yet surrendered themselves to Jesus. Men may give much, but withhold more. Jesus demands our all, and He will not accept less.

Why remain on the outside looking in? Why remain on the borderland of God's kingdom? Christ stands at the door and desires entrance into your life (Rev. 3:20). Do not keep him waiting in the cold. Do not stop short of full obedience. Come the whole distance. Act on your faith. Turn from your sins. Confess Christ before men. Be buried with Christ in baptism. Then be raised to walk in newness of life. Spend yourself in His service, and heaven will be your home.

Revelation 3:20 ... 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (NASB95)

Whether or not this scribe was ever born into the kingdom of God is not stated. Perhaps this man was eventually numbered among the “great company of priests” and other Jewish leaders who were obedient to the faith after the day of Pentecost (Acts 6:7). One hopes so. And yet, for all his nearness to the kingdom of God, it may be that he never entered it. How tragic it is that many who are not far from the kingdom of God never actually enter therein. As someone once said, “On the plains of hesitation bleach the bones of countless thousands who on the threshold of victory sat down to wait; while waiting, wasted and died.” Therefore, if you believe, do not hesitate. Obey today!

Acts 6:7 ... 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. (NASB95)

Sources: Walton Weaver, “Not Far From The Kingdom,” *Gospel Communicator*, (Longview, TX: Judson Rd COC), July, 1988. Misc Commentaries. Extensively revised.