

Matthew 21-01-03b

We're looking at the truth of the word of God as it relates to the kingdom. We closed looking at the fact that this is important for us. Paul, as a church age apostle, well after Pentecost, spends two years plus in Rome preaching the kingdom to all who would visit him.

So it's important. So we need to know what it is. And as we look at Matthew chapter 13, the first thing we see is that the kingdom was preached.

We've already seen John the Baptist preaching it and those who are trying to press into it by force. Back in Matthew chapter 11, when John asks him, uh, are you the one who shall come or do we look for another? I know you're the lamb of God and the suffering servant. Are you also the conquering king or is that a separate Messiah? And Jesus sends those messengers back to John in prison to tell him what they have seen.

And because John knows his old Testament scripture, when he is given that answer, he understands it. It is given to him to understand who Jesus is as both the suffering servant and the conquering king, because John knows his scriptures. And in verse 11 of that chapter, 11, 11, Jesus says among those born of women, there has not been one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is leased in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent try to force their way in the violent, take it by effort by efforting.

And this is an insight into what the kingdom is and what the kingdom isn't. It was not available before John the Baptist from the days of John the Baptist until the present. Jesus says there has been effort.

There's been pressure, if you will, for the kingdom. And there are those who are trying to take it by force. It's a very interesting, uh, statement, all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

This is a reminder that this is the basis for understanding and the basis for changing one's mind and entering the kingdom is the law and the prophets. And if you're willing to receive it, he is Elijah, who is to come. If you are willing, not if you are elect, not if you are, uh, inscrutably loved and for ordained in the distant eternal past, if you are willing to receive, if you're willing to receive.

So, uh, he who has ears to hear, let him hear that's 11, 11 through 15. I'd like to give you just a little sampling of what is misunderstood about the kingdom in our day. Uh, you can pull up any number of similar materials.

Uh, if you just put King Jesus and kingdom work in quotes and plug that into your search engine, you'll get, um, all kinds of things. Regent, uh, university has an article on what is

kingdom business. Um, Regent university has a center for entrepreneurship and they have an article on their, uh, website.

What is kingdom business? It is headed by Matthew six 33, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Uh, we all know what business is. It's commercial activity designed to generate a return for the owners.

That's how most people define it as capitalists and entrepreneurs start businesses so they can generate a profit and long-term wealth for themselves. Nothing inherently wrong with this view, but it's limited to business and has the to fuel our greedy nature as born again, believers and servants of King Jesus. We do not just operate businesses, but our businesses must be kingdom businesses.

In other words, our businesses are not owned by us, but by the King. So we call them kingdom businesses or the businesses of the King. Well, what is a kingdom business? One, it is not a tool to generate money or to support missions.

Uh, the business itself is a mission. Number two, it's not a tool to make money using the Bible. Uh, money is generated through obedience to the King and proper stewardship of the King's resources.

Three, it is not a strategy to isolate ourselves from the world. Kingdom business should take us further in the world, not take us out for it is a business operated by a Christian. Just because you're a Christian in business, it doesn't make your business a kingdom business for your business to be a kingdom business.

You must submit your life and business to the Lordship of King Jesus. What then is a kingdom business? It is a profit making enterprise under the Lordship of Jesus Christ operated by born again believers. It honors the Lord Jesus Christ through its products and services.

It is managed based on biblical principles serves as a light in the marketplace and its profit is used for the advancement of the kingdom of God in the earth. Simply put, kingdom business is God's business managed God's way by God's steward for God's purposes in the world and its proceeds again are used for the advancement of the kingdom. So how does one advance the kingdom? They don't say, but generally if you look at those who purport to be claimed to be or hope to be advancing the kingdom, it is a combination of evangelism and social influence.

The dangers of this have been decried and the alarm has been sounded in the Baptist world by people like Scott McKnight. In our country, the younger generation is becoming obsessed with social justice. He says, including through government opportunities, politics, and voting.

Scott McKnight has written a book called the Jesus Creed, Loving God, Loving Others.

Good title. Although I wouldn't use the word creed, but loving God and loving others, that really is the summation of what we should be doing.

So it's a good title. But the younger generation becoming obsessed with social justice is leading young Christians out of the church and into the public sector to do what they call kingdom work. I want to raise a red flag here.

There is no such thing as kingdom work outside the church. And I don't mean the building. The kingdom is about King Jesus and King Jesus people and King Jesus ethics for King Jesus people.

Social justice outside the church is not biblical justice or kingdom work. It is social work. Fine.

That's a good thing, but let's not call this kingdom work. Instead he calls on listeners to make the church a beachhead of justice and peace and love for those in need in the church. Then let that kind of church and kingdom and justice work spill over into the walls of your community.

Churches have lost sight in other ways of their mission of spreading the gospel of God's atoning work through Jesus, says McKnight. We like our music and our drama groups. We're now more and more driven to act justly in social ways by engagement with the poor and despised.

And we're hoping that in doing this, our little lights will shine. Churches have shaped themselves using entertainment and business models, even down to satisfaction surveys. There are actually big churches that hand out, how satisfied are you with our church? How can we do better? Uh, you know, good, good intention.

I think it's important to, to know, but if your church is so big that you don't know people well enough to know what their thoughts are about how things are going in the church or what they feel their, their benefits and their opportunities are, you know, maybe you ought to divide that thing up into smaller groups where people can know each other and you don't have to send them a paper survey and get it back in the mail to find out if their needs are being met or their, their goals, uh, in coming to church are, uh, you know, the potentially being met. But, uh, the very thing that he's talking about, entertainment and business models in a church are because churches more and more view themselves, many churches view themselves as pieces of the kingdom. A kingdom has a government, a government has a structure and a program and a set of policies and spends money to implement, you know, it raises taxes and then it spends taxes for defense and infrastructure and, you know, its own employees and the rest of it.

Well, if you model your church as a piece of the kingdom, it's inevitable that you're going to create structure, revenue, input, outflow of that revenue and so on. And it's the goals

don't really change if you call it King Jesus and kingdom work and a kingdom church and so on. But if your goals are, let's love God, love one another, let's look out for those who are needy in our group.

Those are worthy goals, but they've mashed that onto a kingdom model. You don't need the kingdom model to do those things. And the new Testament, most importantly, does not mash love and the one another commands onto a kingdom model, love each other because of King Jesus.

Um, you know, look out for those visit the sick and afflicted round about us because we're a piece of the kingdom. Those are two unlike things that are, one is used to try to justify the other. And you don't need this idea.

And the problem is when you start invoking lordship of King Jesus, people always invoke it on others. You know, there's, there's token lip service given to acknowledging the lordship of Jesus. You know, he is the Lord of my life and all of that, but it departs from the emphasis of new Testament scripture.

So our purpose, and you can look at all of this, I'm telling you, there is a, in my view, in my opinion, there is a problem in the church today, the post modern church with having the next big thing be viewing church as kingdom and Jesus who is the head of the body, uh, is instead viewed as King new Testament scripture. Not once uses the phrase kingdom work. It doesn't once use the phrase King Jesus nowhere.

I was, uh, Elizabeth and I were having a conversation, uh, over these last days on this subject. And I, with her use the idea of our new Testament scriptures being like your hand and just like the opposable thumb is one of the most important things that we've got as human beings. This is the apostle Paul.

I, this is just my personal, it's like thinking of your, your mental life as, as, as goals and values and priorities. This is just something I made up out of old cloth. You can ignore it.

But I think of the apostle Paul as the thumb in new Testament scripture. He's, he's primary in terms of everything after the gospels. It's Paul.

That's why God put so many of his letters in the new Testament. Then you've got John, you've got Peter, you've got James and you've got Jude. That's, that's everybody.

When you talk about Luke acts, Luke is heavily influenced by Paul. When you talk about the gospel of Mark, heavily influenced by Peter, Matthew, the gospel that we're looking at right now is the only piece of the new Testament that is not, uh, associated with an apostle whose later work is reflected in the new Testament. Matthew is an apostle himself, but we have no writings of his.

We don't have any record of his ministry and acts or what he did after the Lord left. So

Matthew is the gospel of the kingdom. And it's the one piece of the new Testament that doesn't have later in reinforcement and adumbration.

Mark does in the letters of Peter, Luke does in acts and in Luke's time spent with the apostle Paul and his travels and his journeys and the records of Paul's preaching in the latter chapters of acts. Uh, John of course has not only the gospel of John, but first, second and third John and the revelation. And then you have that wonderful collection, which, and I think Hebrews was written by Paul.

So I just put that under Paul. So this is where you get your new Testament. So if kingdom is important, this is my, this is my summary point here.

If the kingdom is important, we should find it in the apostolic writings of the new Testament. We should find it in the epistles. We should find it in Paul.

We should find it in Peter. We should find it in John, James, Jude, find it talked about in Paul and Peter's words as recorded in acts. We ought to be hearing about the kingdom.

And this is my suggestion in terms of a rule of thumb. If you don't hear in the modern church, the same emphasis you find in your scripture, it's time to be reserved. If people are using language and phraseology and creating an emphasis and developing a message that you don't find similarly developed with similar vocabulary in the apostolic writings of the new Testament, the epistles in particular, one should be dubious.

Scripture is our guide. And if people can't get through three sentences without saying King Jesus, and that's not a phrase found anywhere in your new Testament, stepping back a pace. If people are talking about kingdom work and the church is a piece of the kingdom and kingdom, this and kingdom, that, and scripture does not give us that emphasis.

Me personally, I'm stepping back. What does scripture emphasize? What is the overarching emphasis? And I gave you a clue when I mentioned the title of Scott McKnight's book, what is the emphasis in scripture, faith, hope, and love repeated, repeated, repeated. It's not tied to a kingdom message.

It's not tied to King Jesus, or I'm a child of the King. I'm a citizen of the kingdom. I'm, you don't need kingdom for love.

In fact, as soon as you start talking kingdom, you think, well, kingdom requires a King, a kingdom. What are the elements of a kingdom? Well, there's a fellow here that has said, there are five things that characterize a kingdom. And one, a kingdom has a King.

Makes sense. Number two, he rules. He's got a government, some sort of a structure.

Think about the millennial kingdom. Is there a ruling structure in the millennial kingdom?

Is there a throne? And are there designated individuals who are going to sit on that throne? Is there a rod of iron that is going to be wielded? Is there going to be enforced justice? Is there going to be capital punishment? Is there going to be a whole system of government under that throne? That's number two, a King and a formalized structured method of rule. Number three, there is a people who make up the kingdom.

There are people who are ruled. And in the millennial kingdom, of course, that's going to be the resuscitated, reconstituted nation of Israel. It is the throne of David.

David's throne ruled over Israel, subjugated surrounding peoples, but he ruled Israel. Number four, there is a law. There's a body of law that is enforced by that rule to which the people are held.

In the Old Testament, the law that comprised the nation of Israel, defined the kingdom of Israel, if you will, was the law of Moses, explained and expanded by the prophets. And finally, there is a land. There's some sort of territory.

If you want to spiritualize it, a kingdom has to have some sort of borders. There's no such thing as a borderless kingdom. The reach and the extent and the province in which that rule is done pertains.

There may be other kings outside of that, even in the millennial kingdom. Remember, we are told that the kings of the earth are going to bring tribute to Jerusalem. So the millennial kingdom has limits and has borders.

There are other kings. The king in Jerusalem is not king of the world. He's king of Israel.

Other kings are subordinate. They pay tribute for 10 centuries or so, and then they're all going to rebel when Satan is released. But there are other kingdoms.

So a kingdom has borders. So all of these elements are needed to speak biblically about a kingdom. I'm reading, by the way, from an article by Scott McKnight.

And because a kingdom is a people, he says, and not reducible to an ethic or the unleashing of God's redemptive power, the Bible reader is driven to ask for the New Testament, who is the kingdom people now? And he says, the answer is the church. The church is the kingdom people with church understood not in supersessionist ways. We're not replacing Israel.

This is the whole replacement theology that God's done with Israel. And now the church is taking the place of the kingdom of Israel, if you will. He says, no, that's not right.

It's not supersession, the church replacing and God abandoning Israel. It's not that, but it's expansionist and progressive. The church expands Israel by opening its doors to Gentile.

So Israel is still here, but now Israel and the church are the kingdom. Well, without getting into the gory details of why that's in my view off the mark, let me just say, kingdom is important and we need to understand what it is and what it isn't. We are not encouraged to think of ourselves as a kingdom with a king, with a land, with a government and with a body of law.

What is the law that governs the church? It's the law of love. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are edifying to my fellow believers, right? The law of love. All things are lawful, but I will not be governed by anything.

I will not be controlled by anything. The law says you can have a glass of wine. If alcohol takes control, you better be not drunk with wine.

You're supposed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess. Let your moderation be known unto all.

The Lord is near. The Lord is at hand. Moderation in all things.

Paul says, all things are lawful, but I will not be dominated. Nothing is going to take control of me. I want the full orb'd influence of the Holy Spirit in my soul and in my heart and in my life.

The only thing that's going to be influential over me is God's Word and God's Spirit. I will not be dominated by anything, even though it's lawful. And this can be a hobby.

It can be a pursuit. It can be a pastime. It can be something on the internet.

It can be candy crush. It can be Twitter. It can be Facebook.

It could be name your poison. We should be characterized by, we should be reflecting love. And love in the New Testament Scriptures is not tied to kingdom.

I defy anyone to show me in the New Testament Scriptures where love, the law of love, the love of God, the love of God, the love of God, the love of God, the love of God, the love of God. Sixty one another passages. I made myself a list a couple of weeks ago.

One of these days, I'll go through it. I found every one another in the New Testament and there's 60. Paul had that, Paul Simon had that song, 50 ways to leave your lover.

Well, this is 60 ways to love your brother. 60 ways to love your brother. We'll have to modify that song.

I'll get Kenny to sing it for us. 60 ways to love your brother. And then we'll just list all of those passages.

That is the law. That is the dominating principle for church. Church is not a kingdom.

Church is never associated with King Jesus. Not once. When is the next time that you see Jesus identified as the King of Kings? Revelation chapter 19, it's written on his thigh.

What is he doing? He is wrapping up Armageddon and the tribulation and starting his kingdom. King of Kings. There are other kings in the earth when? In the millennial age.

King of Kings, Lord of Lords. Who are these other lords? I thought there was only one Lord, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, right? If he's Lord of Lords, there's got to be other Lords. If he's the King, he's the King of Kings.

Who are the other kings? Ask somebody who's really hung up on this kingdom now, King Jesus, kingdom work. If Jesus is the King of Kings, who are the other kings? If he is the Lord of Lords, who are these other Lords? Why are we not told about these entities? And most importantly, why is it that nowhere in the New Testament scripture do we have this phraseology or this emphasis or this perspective that you have to hang the ornaments of faith, hope, and love on like a plastic Christmas tree instead of focusing on faith, hope, and love as the goal, as the defining unique elements of the body of Christ, representing Christ in this earth. If we're representing Christ and Christ is the King, then we should be strutting around like kings because we are his body.

The church ought to be the King. If it's King Jesus and we represent Christ on this earth, oh, but we're servant kings. Well, if you're a servant, what defines your servant status and your servant policy? Love and humility.

Do you need a kingdom model to be imbued with and to reflect love and humility toward fellow members of the body and to live quietly and peaceably with all men and be ready to give an answer to those who ask you a reason for the hope that is in you? Where is there any kingdom or kingship or throne-ism in that? It's a distraction. It takes away from the central opportunity we have. My final thought this morning, I didn't get to near my prepared, this is what happens when I over-prepare.

You can't over-prepare and you can't under-prepare. I've got three pages of notes and I only got to my first paragraph, but here's the thing. Here's what I would like to leave you with.

I said you should hold anybody who's presenting the Word of God to the standard of answering the question, so what? Talking about the kingdom, understanding what it is and what it isn't, how should we then live? Well, to understand the role of the kingdom in our lives, think about the previous model. Remember when it says all Scripture is written for our benefit, all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. These things in the Old Testament were written for our instruction upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

So let's do that. As we close this morning thinking about the kingdom, what does the Old Testament have to tell us about the kingdom? The answer is what we started with this

morning. What was the message of John the Baptist? If you summarize it in one sentence, what was his message? Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

So in the Old Testament, where was the kingdom? Israel had a king, had a land, David, Solomon, Jeroboam, Rehoboam, all the way down through Israel, Eve, Judah, Hezekiah, Jeconiah. You've got a line of kings, you've got a thing called the kingdom, but evidently that wasn't the kingdom, capital K, right? Because John says, you need to get ready, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight, because the real kingdom, the kingdom that God intended all along is at hand. It's imminent.

You need to get ready and be qualified, prepare yourself to enter it, right? So if you're an Old Testament saint, where is the kingdom? And I mean, even if you're living in Judea and David's on the throne, where is the real kingdom, present or future? It's future, right? God's intention for Israel isn't just to get them into that little patch of the Middle East and have David sitting on the throne. I mean, the thing's hardly the size of the state of Rhode Island, right? The real kingdom for which God is preparing his chosen people is the kingdom that John announces and that the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David, is the king of. His kingdom, there shall be no end.

Remember the vision of Daniel, where you've got the head of gold, the shoulders and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, feet of iron mixed with clay. What happens to that statue in the vision, Nebuchadnezzar's vision that Daniel interprets? What happens to that statue? A stone made without hands flies into it and crushes it. And the interpretation of the dream is that is the final kingdom of which there shall be no end.

Who is the king of that kingdom? It's the Lord Jesus. Who is the one who announces the coming of that kingdom? Elijah slash John the Baptist, right? So in the Old Testament age, that kingdom is future. What does that tell you about us now in the New Testament age? Where is the kingdom? Is it present or is it future? The answer is the same as where the kingdom was for the Old Testament saints.

You can have elements, you can prepare yourself and learn the thinking that corresponds with the kingdom. You can prepare yourself by understanding how the law works and what the goals and purposes are and what it is to serve the Lord Christ. We prepare ourselves now so that when the kingdom comes, we recognize it.

When the message comes, repent, here's the kingdom, we've got the same kind of background that John's listeners should have had, that Jesus is talking about in the parable of the sower and the seed. If the seed comes and they do not understand it, that's their fault. They're hard-packed soil.

Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, doesn't stand in the way of the sinners, doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful. That turns you into hard-packed

soil. You're listening to that stuff and you're not prepared.

Your soil cannot absorb when important information comes from the word of God. The seed doesn't penetrate, you don't understand it. I would submit to you today that there is a lot of kingdom messaging and kingdom thinking that is a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

And if you don't lay the foundation, if you have not got the background, you can be carried away on the bus that says, this way to the kingdom and miss it completely. Pharisees knew their scriptures backward and forward. Pharisees did peer review on their opinions and their peers all told them, oh yeah, I agree with you, Rabbi Zephaniel.

I agree with you, Rabbi Uziah. I agree with you, Gamaliel. And they all missed it.

Nearly all of them missed it. Saul had to be struck down on the Damascus road to shake the scales off his eyes, as it were. In getting blinded on the road, he could then see spiritually.

But he was prepared and he invested his Old Testament knowledge in that New Testament truth. We need to be cautious about movements within the formal church, whether it's a code or a prayer of Jabez or spiritual temperaments or whatever the latest wind is that blows through. Blackabee's experiencing God or purpose-driven church, whatever it might be, because I will tell you the kingdom message right now is a lot like Henry Blackabee.

Figure out where God is at work and then join him in his work because it's kingdom work and you're in the kingdom. You're a citizen of the kingdom. So wherever there's kingdom work, you should join in the work.

My closing thought here, and I've run egregiously over time and I apologize, but my closing thought is, have you ever been trying to do a thing that you know how to do really well and you're doing it? Let's say you're baking something and you've got your ingredients, you got your mixer, you got your spices or your corn starch or whatever it is, but your child comes in and says, oh, I want to help. And they stick a spoon in and flip the eggs in the floor or they spill the flour or the immature and inexperienced trying to help you when you've got a deadline and there are things that need to be done. There's sometimes when you don't want people to join you in your work, in a nutshell.

There are times when you need to do the work that needs to be done. And if you're going to have help, it needs to be informed, a communicative, mature fellow workman. You're building fence, you're doing something where there's danger involved.

You need informed, experienced help, not zeal without knowledge. And little kids coming in trying to help you with a thing and they end up lighting it on fire, destroying it, spilling it, cracking it, dropping it. Anytime you hear somebody say, find where God is at work

and join him in his work.

Just remember, God doesn't need a bunch of complications when he is doing his work. He'll call and employ the people he wants to help him in that work. It's not up to us to go find him and meddle in his work.

God will call, God will equip, God will use those who have made the choices to be mature. That's our goal. Be thoroughly equipped for every good work and God will plug us in where we are most useful, where we are most beneficial.

The kingdom concept, in my view, is a distraction. It's not in the New Testament and it leads people to think that they are doing kingdom work for King Jesus and missing the message of personal expression as members of the body of Christ, of faith, hope, and love. Body of Christ, faith, hope, and love.

That's the New Testament model repeated over and over and over again. My encouragement for the coming year, 2021, is that we put our emphasis where the Word of God puts the emphasis. We'll have our hands full, our hearts full, our souls full, just doing that.

We'll close here in a word of prayer. We'll pick up here developing what the kingdom is and what the kingdom isn't and how the seed parables have application, genuine application, in our lives next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your Word.

Thank you for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit. We ask for understanding. We appeal to you for wisdom and strength to live our lives and to invest the time that you give us in ways that are pleasing in your sight and that glorify your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

We pray these things in his name. Amen.