

(Oftentimes we come to church and merely go through the motions of worshipping God. Even though we pray or read the Bible, we do not get much out of it. The key to seeing God more clearly lies in our hearts. Jeremiah 29:13 reads, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." To know God better, we need to actively pursue God and seek Him with our hearts.)

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



The Pharisees knew a lot about God, but they didn't know God. The people knew the Lord as someone who could heal them physically and provide for their material needs, but they did not know that He could provide with eternal life. Many came for physical blessings, but not many came for the Lord alone. The Lord Jesus was more than just a great leader, good example, good influence, or a prophet. He is the Son of God. May God grant us the spirit of revelation and understanding so that we may truly know the Lord.

Lesson 2

The Gospel of Matthew The Kingdom of God

Listed Scriptures

Mt 4:23-25; Mt 13; Jn 18:33-37; Heb 12:28; Rev 21:1-4; 1 Cor 4:20; Lk 11:20

Lesson Aim

- 1) To enable students to know about the kingdom of God
- 2) To enable students to realize the importance of having God as king of our lives

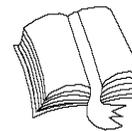
Memory Verse

"Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Lk 17:20-21)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Matthew 10-19

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" was the message that John the baptist went about proclaiming. Not long later, the Lord Jesus too began His ministry with those very same words (Mt 3:2; 4:17, 23). Throughout the entire book of Matthew, the message of the kingdom of heaven ring; it is mentioned about 50 times. Why was this message so important? What was its significance to the people then and to us today?

Since the beginning of time, God kept the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven a secret (1 Cor 2:7-10; Col 1:26-27). But now with the coming of the Lord Jesus, God was bringing into fulfillment what He had kept hidden from the beginning of the world and what had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Prophets of old had spoken powerfully of a coming kingdom governed by a ruler who was to come from David's line. The king would be God Himself in human form (Is 9:6-7). The ruler would bring peace, comfort, justice, knowledge, prosperity and holiness. All

these blessings would be fulfilled when the king came to reign.

In this gospel, Matthew tries to tell his audience that the kingdom of heaven has already arrived. With the coming of the Lord Jesus, the kingdom of heaven was now in their hearts. Through His teachings, signs, wonders, and healing, the Lord relieved the people of their pain, sorrow and daily concerns and brought spiritual freedom, hope, peace and eternal life. This was the good news of the kingdom of heaven that was preached to the people then and for mankind today.

Please also refer to the Bible Background in Lesson 1 for more information on the Gospel of Matthew (Lessons 2 and 3 are Bible studies on the Gospel of Matthew as well).

W A R M U P



What is your definition of “a kingdom”?

If you were to create a kingdom, what would it consist of? Why are these important?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1 *The Kingdom of Heaven*

A . The Characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven

a. Christ is king

Every kingdom has a king or ruler who governs his subjects. In the kingdom of heaven, Jesus Christ is king, and He rules with absolute authority. The kingdom operates according to God’s principles and values.

b. From above

When the Lord was brought before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked Him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” The Lord answered plainly, “You have said so.” But He further said, “My kingship is not of this world...” (Jn 18:36). The Lord Jesus is king, but He

is not a king of the political world on earth. Rather, He is king of the spiritual world. His was not the political and military kingdom that the Jews had hoped for, but His kingdom was from above. We usually think of “kingdom” as a place, but the kingdom of God has no limits or boundaries. Many mistakenly think that the kingdom of heaven will come mightily and visibly, but in actuality, it is invisible and intangible (Lk 17:20). And because it is not of the world, it is hated by the world (Jn 15:18, 19; 17:14)

c. Full of power

God’s kingdom is marked by the power of God’s spirit (Mt 12:28; 1 Cor 4:20). During His ministry, the Lord Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, and performed many wonders that demonstrated that the kingdom of God had come. God’s spirit, divine power and authority are manifested through the mighty works that are performed.

d. Full of righteousness, peace and joy

Romans 14:17 tells us that the kingdom of heaven is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. When we obey the will of God and submit to His Authority, we will experience the blessings and the richness of life in Jesus Christ.

Teaching Tips

You may wish to compare the characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven with those of an earthly kingdom. You can do this by drawing a table and comparing the characteristics side by side.

B . Where is the Heavenly Kingdom?

a. The heavenly kingdom

The kingdom of the Lord Jesus is the heavenly kingdom that has been prepared for the saints since the foundation of the world (Mt 25:34). During His ministry, the Lord revealed the existence of the heavenly kingdom. He says, “In my Father’s house are many rooms” (Jn 14:1-3), which refers to the new heaven and the new earth created by God. It is a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28) and of enduring substance (Heb 10:34). It is a kingdom in which there shall be no more tears, death, sorrow, or pain and where the righteous can live eternally (Rev 21:1-4; Mt 25:46b). In Revelation 21:15-27 there is a description of the place that the Lord Jesus has prepared for us. It is a city full of splendor, where there is no need of sun or moon. It is filled with the glory of God. In fact, heaven is far beyond our ability to understand, imagine or describe (1 Cor 2:9).

b. The church is the kingdom of God

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus Christ teaches us to pray, "May your kingdom come, may thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We understand that wherever God is king and wherever the spirit of the Lord reigns – that is the kingdom of heaven. On earth, the church is the kingdom of God and the house of God (Eph 2:19). In the church, Christ is the head, and His Spirit fills the place (Mt 12:28). It is where God grants His grace, manifests His power, reveals His will to humanity and where He is glorified.

c. In our hearts

One time the Pharisees asked the Lord when the kingdom of God was coming. He answered them, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:20). In fact, the kingdom of God begins here and now, when we regard God as the king of our hearts, and when we conform to the will of God by obeying His commandments and leading a life that is pleasing to Him.

Part 2

The Development of the Kingdom of God



In Matthew chapter 13, the Lord Jesus spoke a series of seven parables concerning the development of the kingdom of God from its beginning and advancement, to its final consummation.

a. Parable of the sower

The kingdom of God is like a sower who goes out to sow seeds. The seeds land on four different soils, which produce different responses. The sower is the Lord Jesus who came to the world to preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven. When the message reaches the hearts of individuals, it is met with different types of responses. To some, the truth has no effect on them at all, while to others, it bears much fruit. Here, the Lord teaches us that the condition of a person's heart determines whether God's word will have an effect on him and whether he is worthy of God's kingdom.

b. Parable of the wheat and tares

In this parable, the Lord explains how the son of man came to sow seeds by coming

to the world and preaching the message of the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, the enemy Satan works by sowing tares among the wheat. Tares are darnel, a weed that closely resembles wheat. As seeds, the tares look the same as the wheat, but it is only when they are fully matured at harvest time that they can be distinguished from each other. The Lord here teaches us that although many may come to believe in the message of the kingdom and are converted into the faith, Satan will cause heresies and corruption to arise. True and false believers will co-exist. However, God will not execute immediate judgement, but will allow evilness and wickedness to persist until the judgement. On judgement day, He will separate the weeds from the wheat and remove evil forever.

c. Parable of the mustard seed

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that is sown. The mustard seed is not the smallest seed known today, but it was the smallest seed used by Palestinian farmers and gardeners, and under favorable conditions the plant could reach some ten feet in height. Like the mustard seed, the kingdom of God first appeared small and insignificant; the Lord Jesus was born in a stable, raised in a town despised by many, chose twelve disciples who were mainly uneducated, common men, and eventually was crucified on the cross. Although the Lord and His message began with humble and insignificant beginnings, the good news flourished and spread throughout the world and affected the lives of many. However, despite the growth of the truth, there is still the ever-present work of Satan.

d. Parable of the leaven

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. The woman represents the church, and leaven represents hypocrisy (Lk 12:1; Mt 16:6, 11), malice and evil (1 Cor 5:8), heresy (Gal 5:9) and similar corrupt conduct and traditions. In the Old Testament, leaven was not allowed in the sacrifices (Ex 13:3; Lev 2:11). But in this parable, leaven was incorporated into the dough. This represents how false teachings, evil, and hypocrisy infiltrated the early church, which caused the truth to become secularized and distorted.

e. Parable of the hidden treasure

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure that is hidden in the ground. A man comes by and accidentally discovers the treasure. During biblical times, people had a custom of burying treasures in the ground to prevent them from being stolen by robbers (Job 3:21; Prov 2:4; Mt 25:18, 25). However if the owner died, the treasures could be discovered accidentally or be forever left buried in the ground. The treasures refer to the gospel of the Lord Jesus (Phil 3:8; Heb 11:26). The ground refers to the church of God. It is only in the church that truth and grace are found (1 Tim 3:15). The man, after discovering the treasure, in his joy goes and

sells all that he has to buy the field. Likewise, we should be willing to forsake everything that we value for the kingdom of heaven.

f. Parable of the fine pearl

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who was in search of fine pearls. The precious pearl refers to the good news of the kingdom of heaven. The value of receiving the truth surpasses everything in this world. In Philippians 3:8, Paul says, "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ."

g. Parable of the dragnet

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. This refers to the gospel of the kingdom of heaven when it is preached throughout the world and attracts many to come. Like the many different kinds of fish that are caught, people from different nations and races will accept the gospel of salvation. When the net is full, it is dragged ashore, and a selection process occurs. The angels will execute judgement by selecting the good and discarding the bad. The bad are those who are evil, corrupt and unclean (Lev 11:9-12). Romans 9:6 records, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel." Therefore, we cannot be satisfied just because we are in the net of salvation. The Lord says that many are called but only a few are chosen. Only the righteous will be "put into the vessels" (1 Jn 3:7,) which refers to the heavenly kingdom. But all those who are evil and lawless will be rejected and thrown into the lake of fire. Therefore, in the last days, the great mission of the true church is to spread the word of God to all men.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1

What are the differences between an earthly kingdom and the kingdom of heaven?

2

Where is the kingdom of God?

3

Why did Matthew's gospel repeatedly mention that the kingdom of God is being at hand?

4

Can you trace the development of the kingdom of God? What do you notice about its beginning, advancement and completion?

5

How can we advance the kingdom of God?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



In this lesson, we have learnt that God's kingdom is wherever God reigns. When we seek and follow God's will and walk according to the Spirit, we are allowing God to be king of our hearts. Like Paul, we need to ask, "What shall I do Lord?" (Ac 22:10). When we allow God to be the king of our hearts and lives, we need to see what God wants us to do when we make seemingly insignificant choices in the course of everyday life. The choices we make, from morning till night, do shape who we are. If we value God as king of our hearts, we will consider if our choices reflect biblical principles or if they bring glory to God's name. Read the following case studies and discuss how each character can apply God's will in their lives.

Case Studies

1. Simon has already graduated from his undergraduate studies. He has been trying to look for a job for seven months, but nothing seems hopeful. He is beginning to worry about his future. One day he receives a call from a company he had previously interviewed with. They offer him a job, and the salary is good. The only drawback is that he needs to work on Saturdays. Feeling very confused, he begins to wonder whether he should take the job. Simon asks some brothers and sisters in church for advice. They congratulate him and say, "Thank God, you have been searching all this time, and now you got this job. It must be God's will." Simon decides to take the job. Do you think Simon made the right decision? How would you know if his decision was in line with God's will?

(Simon has been searching for seven months, and he is beginning to get a little anxious. Now when the first "opportunity" arises, he goes for it. In Matthew 6:31-33, the Lord reminds us that we do not need to worry about what we need, for He will provide. He is our heavenly father, and our duty is to trust in Him. But unfortunately when faced with problems, our total focus is on our problems and the need to resolve them quickly. Often, the decisions we make reflect our needs rather than our faith in God's word or biblical principles. A Christian who puts God first will not consider anything that is contrary

to the teachings of the Bible. He will be able to discern whether his choice will please God or not. He will obey and listen to God's principles even if that decision means putting aside his own wishes, poses more problems, or does not resolve the matter at hand. Sometimes what we think is a good decision and resolves the problem only serves to add to our troubles further down the road. If we have a sincere desire to carry out His will whatever the cost, God will surely guide us and open up better opportunities for us, as experienced by many brothers and sisters and the saints of old. God is loving and gracious, and He will not fail those who choose to trust in Him).

2. Jane has been waiting for this big event for a long time. Prom night. The night she could dress up to the nines, hang out with friends, and behave and be treated like an adult. And what is even more exciting is that Ian has asked her to be his date for the prom. She begins thinking about all the preparations she has to make. But her parents strictly refuse to let her attend. Jane just cannot understand why they would refuse her of this once in a lifetime opportunity. What's the harm anyway? Weren't they always going on about getting experiences in life? Do you think Jane's parents were right in not allowing her to attend? Discuss what God's will is in this aspect.

(As a Christian, God has given us the freedom to make our own choices. Some choices that we make will impact our faith positively, while there are some that can be damaging to our spiritual well-being. Apostle Paul reminds us that "everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial." It is therefore important that we make our choices wisely in light of what is good for us spiritually. Going to the prom is the highlight for all high school seniors in this culture. And for most, it is a much-looked-forward-to event. But as Christians, we have to examine whether what we do is pleasing to God, regardless of how small the matter.

Firstly, Jane needs to consider what her motives are for going to the prom. What is it that makes going to the prom so attractive? Is it because all her friends are going? Is it just because it's an accepted thing? Is it because going on a date would be fun? Secondly, Jane needs to consider what is involved. A prom is the setting for a senior's dance and dinner. Usually there is a lot of loud music, dancing and joviality. The music played, such as rap or hip-hop, ordinarily contains lyrics about power, violence, and sex. When the lights are dim, the music is suggestive and there is a lot of physical contact – particularly in slow numbers - it is very easy to let our guard down and our emotions go.

Thirdly and most importantly, Jane needs to consider what God's views are in this matter. Is this really a situation that would glorify God? Is it a setting that would promote the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life? Would it be healthy to our eyes and mind? Paul instructs us to purify ourselves from everything that would contaminate body and spirit. We have to carefully guard our bodies and our spirit, by keeping away all possible temptations and setting ourselves apart from these things.

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



1. *Is God king of our hearts?*
2. *What other things could take God's place as king of our hearts?*
3. *How are we going to place God as king of our hearts in our daily lives?*