

# THE ONE KINGDOM

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S RULE AND REIGN



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## **Understanding God’s Rule and Reign**

### **A Common Misunderstanding**

Many believers hear the expression “the kingdom of heaven” and immediately think only of a place called heaven. That misunderstanding affects how entire passages are interpreted and often causes readers to miss the main truth Jesus was teaching. I was reminded of this again recently. The speaker referred to the kingdom of heaven mainly as a location instead of understanding that Jesus was primarily speaking about God’s rule, authority, and reign. The Third Heaven is certainly the current dwelling place of God, but in the Gospels, the kingdom of heaven often describes the authority of God exercised through the reign of the King. That distinction is very important because it changes how we understand many of Christ’s teachings.

The expressions “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” are closely connected throughout the Gospels. Matthew frequently uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven,” while Mark, Luke, and John usually say “kingdom of God.” Yet many of the passages are parallel accounts describing the exact same teachings and events. Even Jesus Himself used both expressions interchangeably in Matthew 19:23-24. In one verse, He said “kingdom of heaven,” and in the very next verse, He said “kingdom of God.” The Lord gave no indication that He was suddenly speaking about two completely separate kingdoms or two unrelated spheres.

This misunderstanding has confused many sincere believers. Some teachers strongly divide the two expressions as though one

always refers to an earthly Jewish kingdom while the other refers only to a spiritual kingdom. Yet the Gospel accounts themselves repeatedly overlap the two terms. The Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture perfectly, and the parallel passages harmonize beautifully when read carefully. The problem often comes when men build systems that force distinctions beyond what the Scriptures themselves clearly teach.

## **The King and His Kingdom**

One of the clearest examples of this truth is found in Matthew 19:30 through Matthew 20:16. Peter had just asked the Lord what reward the disciples would receive because they had left everything to follow Him. Jesus answered graciously, but then added this very important statement: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” Immediately after saying this, the Lord gave the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The parable was given specifically to explain that statement.

The lesson was not mainly about a place called heaven. It was about the character of the King and the way His kingdom operates. The householder went out at different times during the day and called laborers into his vineyard. Some worked from the early morning hours under the heat of the sun. Others were called much later and labored only a short time before evening arrived. Yet when the laborers were paid, each one received the same penny.

At first glance, the laborers who worked all day appeared justified in their complaint. Human reasoning quickly says they deserved more because they labored longer and endured greater hardship.

But Jesus was not merely teaching economics or wages. The Lord was revealing the spirit that existed within the hearts of the laborers. The issue became far greater than the penny itself.

The laborers who complained immediately began comparing themselves with others. Instead of rejoicing that others had also been blessed, they became resentful because grace had been shown equally to all. Their thinking was centered upon merit, comparison, and self-importance. They believed their longer labor made them more deserving in the eyes of the master. Yet the householder reminded them that he had done them no wrong. They had received exactly what had been promised.

### **The Goodness of the Householder**

The entire lesson centered upon the goodness of the householder. The laborers who came later simply trusted his kindness and rejoiced to be included in the work. But those who worked all day began focusing on themselves instead of the goodness of the master. Their words revealed envy, pride, and resentment. What should have been a joyful ending became a revealing exposure of the human heart.

Often this same spirit appears among believers today. Men naturally compare themselves with others. Some feel more deserving because of years of service, knowledge, sacrifice, position, or outward accomplishments. Others quietly become resentful when God blesses someone else in unexpected ways. Yet Jesus repeatedly warned against such thinking because God's kingdom does not operate according to human pride and self-

promotion. The Lord measures the heart rather than outward appearance alone.

The laborers who came later possessed a very different spirit. They were simply thankful to be called into the vineyard at all. They trusted the goodness of the householder and rejoiced in what had been given to them. There was humility in their attitude because they understood that everything they received came from the kindness of the master rather than from personal merit. This is one of the great truths Jesus was teaching about His kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven operates differently from the kingdoms of this world. Men often measure greatness by recognition, authority, titles, influence, or visible success. But God frequently honors those whom men overlook. Quiet believers who faithfully love the Lord, serve others, pray faithfully, and walk humbly with God may be far greater in His kingdom than those who constantly seek prominence and praise.

## **First and Last**

This is why Jesus concluded the parable by repeating, “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” The “first” became last because of the spirit within them. Their outward labor may have appeared impressive, but their inward attitude revealed pride and comparison. Meanwhile, those who trusted the master's goodness demonstrated the humility that belongs in God’s kingdom.

The Lord was teaching far more than a lesson about rewards. He was exposing the condition of the heart under the King's authority. Some people outwardly appear very spiritual while inwardly

struggling with jealousy, pride, resentment, or self-glory. Others may appear less impressive outwardly, yet possess hearts that humbly rejoice in the goodness of God. The Lord sees what men cannot see.

Jesus constantly directed people to the condition of their hearts. The Pharisees focused heavily upon outward religion, appearance, and recognition before men. But the Lord looked deeper. This is why He told Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The issue was not merely arriving at a heavenly location someday. The issue was whether the rule of God had entered the heart and transformed the inner man.

The kingdom is closely connected to the reign of the King Himself. Wherever hearts willingly submit to His authority, His kingdom is being expressed. This is why Jesus repeatedly emphasized humility, repentance, faith, forgiveness, mercy, and childlike dependence upon God. These attitudes reveal hearts that recognize the authority and goodness of the King.

### **The Error of Division**

Confusion also enters when teachers force an artificial separation between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God.” Some describe them as two entirely different spheres with little connection between them. Yet the Gospel accounts themselves repeatedly overlap the two expressions. The Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture perfectly, and the parallel passages harmonize beautifully when studied carefully.

This does not mean there are no distinctions in emphasis. Matthew especially presents Christ as the promised King of Israel and emphasizes the kingdom's prophetic and Jewish aspects. The other Gospel writers often stress God's broader reign over all people. But emphasis is not the same as separation. Both expressions point to God's reign exercised through the King's authority.

The danger of misunderstanding these truths is that people can become so focused upon systems and terminology that they miss the very heart of Christ's teaching. The Lord was not merely presenting prophetic charts or defining future locations. He was revealing the nature of His kingdom and the kind of spirit that belongs under His authority. The King Himself stood before them, teaching them how God rules.

Many believers have unknowingly reduced the kingdom to a future destination rather than understanding it as the reign and authority of God expressed through the King. Yet Jesus repeatedly emphasized the present reality of God's rule within the hearts of those who belong to Him. This truth brings great clarity to many passages throughout the Gospels.

## **The Heart of the Kingdom**

The laborers in the vineyard revealed two completely different attitudes. One group rejoiced simply to be called into the work. The other believed they deserved greater honor because of what they had done. Their outward labor appeared impressive, but their inward spirit exposed pride and comparison. By the end of the

parable, the Lord showed that the “first” became last because they misunderstood the heart of the King.

This remains one of the greatest struggles among believers today. Human nature longs for recognition, superiority, and praise. Men often desire to appear important in the eyes of others. Yet the kingdom belongs to those who humbly bow before the authority of the King and rejoice in His goodness toward others. God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.

The Lord was not merely teaching people how to get to heaven. He was revealing the nature of His kingdom and the kind of heart that belongs under His reign. The entire lesson centered upon the reign of the King, the goodness of God, and the attitude of the heart under His authority. Those who truly understand His kingdom will not boast in themselves or compare themselves with others. They will humbly rejoice in the goodness and grace of the King who called them into His vineyard.

## **The Kingdom Fulfilled**

The final kingdom described in Revelation 21 reveals the completion of God’s reign. There we see the new heaven and new earth, where all things are made new. Sin, sorrow, suffering, death, and rebellion are forever removed. The King reigns openly, and His people dwell with Him eternally. That kingdom will never end because the authority and goodness of God are eternal.

Yet even there, the redeemed are not praising themselves for their merit. They are rejoicing in the goodness, grace, and glory of God. The kingdom of heaven is far more than a place. It is the

everlasting reign of God expressed through the goodness and authority of the King Himself. Those who truly understand His kingdom will not seek to make themselves first. They will simply rejoice that by His grace they belong to the King.

## **Summary**

The most important truth learned from this study is that the kingdom of Heaven or God is far more than a future place called heaven. Jesus was revealing the reign, authority, and rule of God through the character of the King Himself. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard showed that God's kingdom does not operate according to human merit, comparison, or pride. The "first" became last because their hearts were filled with self-importance rather than humble gratitude. Those who simply trusted the goodness of the master revealed the spirit that belongs in God's kingdom. The Lord measures the heart more than outward labor or recognition before men. Jesus continually taught that humility, faith, repentance, and submission to God are marks of those who truly belong to His kingdom. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are closely connected expressions describing God's reign exercised through His authority. The entire lesson centered upon the reign of the King, the goodness of God, and the attitude of the heart under His authority. Those who truly understand His kingdom will rejoice more in the goodness of the King than in their own importance.

With love and prayers,  
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