

# The Mind of Christ

## The Great Beginning – Part Two

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the late Spring or early Summer of 30 A.D., Jesus launched His ministry in the northern region of Palestine known as Galilee. He began with simple words.
  - A. Matthew's account reads: *"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"* (**Matthew 4:17**)
    1. The words of Jesus came in the form of a simple command to *"REPENT,"* and in the form of a simple statement: *"FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND."*
  - B. In our last lesson, we took a close look at the command to "repent," and discovered that genuine repentance ALWAYS begins with a change of heart, and ends with a change of life.
    2. If there is no change of life, there has never been a genuine change of heart.
- II. Now, we need to take a close look at the second half of Jesus' statement – the words, *"FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND."*
  - A. These words tell us the REASON WHY people needed to repent – WHY they needed to change and alter their lives, and turn away from

the wrong and turn back to God – it was because the *“kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

1. Before we go any further, let me clear up a very common misconception – the terms “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are used interchangeably in the Scriptures, even by Jesus Himself. Therefore, they mean the same thing.
  - a. **Matthew 19:23** – Matthew records Jesus saying about the rich, young ruler, *“Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the **kingdom of heaven.**”*
  - b. But both Mark and Luke record Jesus saying of the same rich, young ruler, *“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the **kingdom of God!**” (Mark 10:23 and Luke 18:24).*
  - c. **Matthew 19:23-24** – After Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the **kingdom of heaven,**”* he goes on in the next verse to record Jesus saying, *“And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the **kingdom of God.**”*
2. I mention this at the outset because there are some today that try to make a distinction between the two – making the Kingdom of Heaven one thing, and the Kingdom of God another.

- a. They both mean the same thing – there is no difference between the two.
  - b. They are simply two different ways of saying the same thing.
- B. So, let's consider the statement.
1. What did Jesus mean when He said, "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand?*"
  2. And why did it have such an impact on the hearts of His hearers?

## **BODY:**

- I. Let's first begin with the word "**kingdom**" – what does it mean?
  - A. In modern language, the word "kingdom" suggests a territory – an area of land that is under the domain of a King. But that is not how the word was used in the New Testament.
    1. In the New Testament, the phrase "*kingdom of God*" or "*kingdom of heaven*" was not referring to an area or territory that belonged to the Lord – rather it referred to the **sovereignty**, the **Lordship**, the **rule** and the **reign** of the Lord.
      - a. When Jesus said the "*kingdom of God was at hand*," He had absolutely **NO** references whatsoever to some kind of a territorial kingdom over which the Lord would reign as an earthly King.

b. This is important to understand because there are some religious people today who believe this is exactly what the term means – and even some of our own brethren are a little “foggy” on the way they use the term as well.

(1). There are those in the religious world who hold to the idea of a millennial reign (1,000 year reign) of Christ on the earth someday in the future – claiming that when Jesus came the first time, He intended to establish that kind of kingdom.

(a). They say since Jesus was rejected by the Jews and crucified, He had to go back to Heaven until some time in the future when He will return and establish the kingdom on earth and reign as its King for a thousand years.

(2). Some of our own brethren get confused when they talk about the kingdom and the church.

(a). While it’s true that the terms “*kingdom*” and “*church*” are also used interchangeably in the New Testament, and while it’s true that from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 onward, the “kingdom” is spoken of as being in existence, it’s wrong to think of the “*kingdom*” or the “*church*” as being an “institution” – some kind of

physical, material **“thing”** of which we are all members.

(b). Even our speech sometimes betrays us – including my own. We say such things as, “where do you go to church,” or “are you a member of the church,” or “what time does church get out.”

B. So, how do we properly define the term *“kingdom?”* A simple definition of the word, as used by the Lord, would mean the **sovereignty** of the Lord, or a state and condition of things in which the Lord rules and reigns Supreme.

1. Surprisingly, this is how many of the Jews in Jesus’ day understood the phrase *“kingdom of God”* or *“kingdom of heaven.”*

a. Jewish Rabbis and teachers always sought to make a distinction between the “yoke of heavenly sovereignty,” and the “yoke of ungodly sovereignty,” or the “yoke of flesh and blood.”

(1). In other words, they understood we are either under the sovereign rule of the Lord, or we are under the reign of our own fleshly nature. One or the other rules and controls our lives – either the Lord, or the flesh.

b. This is why every synagogue service began (and still begins) with the recital of the **“Great Shema”** – *“Hear, O Israel: The*

*LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).*

- (1). Every time a Jew recited those words, he was reminding himself that he was taking upon himself the “yoke of the sovereignty of the Lord” – he was acknowledging Jehovah as the ABSOLUTE and ONLY LORD OF HIS LIFE.
2. However, the Jews in Jesus’ day also added another dimension to the idea of the “*kingdom of God.*” They also looked for this absolute sovereignty and Lordship of God to someday be manifested throughout the whole world.
  - a. The Rabbis and teachers of Jesus’ day would constantly talk about the day when the Lord’s sovereignty would be accepted by every man, woman and child around the entire world – both Jew and Gentile.
    - (1). They believed this day would come with the beginning of the Messianic Age – when the Messiah would come and declare Himself to the whole world.
    - (2). They believed the Messiah would rule over the physical Kingdom of Israel from the city of Jerusalem, and that all the enemies of the Lord would be subdued or completely destroyed, and that all men and women everywhere

would acknowledge faith in the God of Israel – the ONE and only TRUE GOD.

b. In other words, their concept of the Messiah was someone who would reign as King over the physical Kingdom of Israel, and would usher in a time when the Kingdom of Israel would spread throughout the whole world.

(1). Obviously, when Jesus talked about Jerusalem being destroyed and the Temple being torn down, He didn't fit into the mold of being the kind of Messiah the Jews of His day were expecting.

(2). That's why they called Him a false teacher, and why they eventually crucified Him.

II. But when we turn to the teachings of Jesus on the subject of the "kingdom," we find some things that not only flew in the face of popular thinking, but to some, teachings that even seemed contradictory.

A. For example, there were times when Jesus spoke of the "kingdom" as coming in the future, then at other times He spoke of the "kingdom" as though it were already in existence.

1. One example of this was when Jesus healed the demon-possessed man. Jesus said, *"if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely*

*the kingdom of God **has come** upon you.” (Matthew 12:28, and Luke 11:20)*

- a. We also read where Jesus told a man, “You **are** not far from *the kingdom of God.*” (Mark 12:34).
  - b. On another occasion, Jesus said “*the kingdom of God **is within you**” (some translations say “*the kingdom of God **is among you**”) (Luke 17:20-21).**
2. However, on other occasions, Jesus and John both preached, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is **AT HAND**” – near to becoming a reality.*
- a. Jesus told His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God **present with power**” (Mark 9:1 - NKJV).
  - b. The King James Version reads, “And he said unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God **come with power.**’” (Mark 9:1 - KJV)
  - c. And the New American Standard Bible is even more emphatic: “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.**" (Mark 9:1 - NASB).

(1). In other words, Jesus said many of those who were hearing Him at that moment would still be living when the kingdom of God comes with power.

B. So, how is it possible for the "*kingdom*" to be IN someone, or for the "*kingdom*" to HAVE COME, and yet still be COMING in the future?

1. Let's go back to our definition of the word "kingdom." It is the sovereignty of the Lord, or a state or condition of things in which the Lord rules and reigns Supreme.

a. When we use the words "sovereignty of the Lord," or the words "rule and reign," we are describing **A RELATIONSHIP**.

(1). We are describing a close, intimate relationship with the Lord in which He rules and reigns within our hearts.

(2). We are talking about our hearts and minds being under the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ – where the Lord is clearly recognized and accepted as our Sovereign Lord and God – the Sovereign Ruler of our hearts, souls, minds and spirits.

2. This is what Jesus meant when He talked about the "*kingdom of God*."

- a. He was describing a state or condition of things where the Lord would rule and reign within the hearts of men and women everywhere.
  - b. He was describing an intimate relationship in which **THE LORD IS IN US**, and where **WE ARE IN THE LORD** – where we are intimately bound together in a relationship much like a marriage.
    - (1). It would be a kind of “one flesh” type of relationship – where we are inseparably welded and joined together.
    - (2). It would be the kind of relationship where the Lord is our Husband and we are His faithful, loving and devoted wife – where we are literally the Bride of Christ.
3. Jesus NEVER came for the purpose of establishing a physical, material, earthly kingdom. Rather, He came to establish the kind of “kingdom” where He would rule and reign as sovereign Lord and King in the hearts of men and women.
- a. This is the kind of “kingdom” God has always wanted to have with His people. Two Old Testament passages clearly illustrate this.
    - (1). **Judges 8:22-23** – *“Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.’*

*But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; **the LORD shall rule over you.**’*

- (2). **1 Samuel 8:1-7** – *“Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.’ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for **they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.**’”*

- C. Perhaps the one passage that is most important in our understanding of the “kingdom,” is a statement Jesus made to the religious leaders of His day.

1. In **Luke 17:20-21**, it reads, *“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.**”*

a. Jesus said the coming of His kingdom would not be observed.

In other words, it would not be like the coming of most kingdoms – with a military campaign of advancing armies and warfare. The coming of His kingdom would be **UNOBSERVABLE. WHY?**

b. Jesus said His kingdom is *“within you.”* It is the **INTERNAL RULING AND REIGNING of the Lord** within the hearts of men and women – the way God had always intended for it to be.

c. This is how we can be IN THE KINGDOM, while at the same time the kingdom is IN US.

(1). In other words, we can be in a fellowship of others who have the Lord ruling and reigning in their hearts, while at the same time have the Lord ruling and reigning in ours.

## **CONCLUSION:**

I. Now do you see why Jesus said we need to **“REPENT?”**

- A. Now do you understand why it's necessary to FIRST cleanse our hearts of sin and prepare the way for the Lord to enter in and rule from within?
1. The message of Jesus hasn't changed in two-thousand years. In one sense, Jesus still wants us to *“repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*
  2. The Lord stands prepared at this very moment to take His rightful place in your heart as the Sovereign Lord and King.
    - a. First, we need to throw out the lord (Satan) whom we've been serving – he must be removed (evicted).
    - b. Then we need to open the door of our heart for Jesus Him to enter – He won't force His way into our hearts. He won't come where He's not welcomed.
- II. Sadly, the people of Jesus' day never realized that the One who spoke to them about the coming kingdom was the King Himself – the very One who had come to rule and reign in their hearts.
- A. Unfortunately, people today still won't recognize Jesus as the Lord of their life.
1. When it comes to submitting control of their life to Jesus, they simply refuse.
    - a. They say, “it's **MY** life, and I can live it the way I want.”
- B. How about you?

1. Is Jesus the King of your life?
  - a. Have you enthroned Him as your Lord and Master – are you living to do His will?
  - b. Have you truly believed in the Lord Jesus, repented of your sins, confessed your faith in Christ, and been buried with Him in baptism?
2. Or do you let Him reign in your life **ONLY** when His rule doesn't interfere with your own?