

Jesus and the kingdom of god

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Mark 1.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ & Matthew 4.¹⁷ (part 1)— questionnaire 1 in the series

¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus entered Galilee preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom, ¹⁵announcing, “the time has come, and God’s kingdom is imminent. Transform your views and actively believe this positive proclamation” (author’s translation).

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the first in the series.

1. Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.
 - ? What does the kingdom of God mean to you and what is its nature?
 - ? How does speaking of “the rule of God” impact/ alter/ amplify the way you think of “the kingdom of God”?
 - ? How do you think and feel if you think of the kingdom of God as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over them, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself lives and governs?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the inauguration or establishment of God’s kingdom was at the very heart of Jesus’ ministry and intentions?
 - ? What other principles and intentions do you place at the very heart of Jesus’ ministry?
 - ? How do these other principles and intentions relate to the idea of the inauguration or establishment of God’s kingdom?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

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Mark 1.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ & Matthew 4.¹⁷ (part 2) — questionnaire 2 in the series

¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

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In our previous questionnaire, we suggested that the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself lives and governs and by which individuals and societies endure.

1. In Jesus’ initial proclamation about God’s kingdom or rule, he announces that “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,” or, as we have translated it, “the time has come, and God’s kingdom is imminent.”
 - ? This seems to suggest that the kingdom of God is not something that is far off in time or space, but that it is to be found on earth, not only in heaven, and that it is to be part of earth’s history not of some far-off hereafter.
 - ? How do you feel about this observation? If this does not jive with your view of the kingdom of God, why not? What is your view?
 - ? Did Jesus really hope to change the world, or was he merely hoping to set things up for a life hereafter? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? To what statements or actions of Jesus would you point to either assert or deny that Jesus hoped and intended to now only save souls in the great beyond but that he hoped and intended to change the world as he found it?
 - ? How are things going with the inauguration or the establishment of God’s kingdom or rule on earth? Why do you answer as you do?

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- ? Is the world any closer to adopting God's principles and values and living a life consistent with those principles and values than it was in Jesus' day? Why do you answer as you do?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

Mark 1.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ & Matthew 4.¹⁷ (part 3)— questionnaire 3 in the series

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history.

1. In announcing the gospel or good news about God’s kingdom, Jesus suggests two things that he wants his audience to do in response to the announcement.
? What are those two things?
2. In the traditional KJV translation, Jesus firsts asks his audience to “repent.” In my translation, Jesus asks his audience to “transform your views.”
? What does this suggest about the nature of repentance?
? This world has certain “views,” certain values, and certain behaviors and actions that flow from these views/ values. What are some of those views/ values that must change if we are to abide a life after that of God and characterized as “the kingdom of God”?

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- ? What are some examples of Jesus' teachings in which Jesus transforms the views/ values of this world into something entirely new and thus make it possible to inaugurate the kingdom of God?
3. Jesus' second request is that his audience "believe the gospel," or "believe this positive proclamation" that the time has arrived, and the kingdom of God is imminent.
- ? How difficult or easy to believe that the world can be transformed into something entirely new and godly?
 - ? What is meant by "imminent"?
 - ? What is the status of the kingdom of God today?
 - ? What do you do with the difference that seems to exist between Jesus' expectation of an imminent change and the realities of a largely unchanged world as we have it today?
 - ? What role do you play today in being part of a transformed world and the inauguration of God's kingdom?
 - ? What can you do to carry out that role?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

Matthew 4.²³; 9.³⁵ & Luke 4.⁴³— questionnaire 4 in the series

²³And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

³⁵And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

⁴³And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the fourth in the series.

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In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God.

1. We saw in our first reading that Jesus’ ministry was characterized as being focused on the kingdom of God and its imminent inauguration. In Luke 4.⁴³, Jesus expresses his belief that God sent him for the very purpose of proclaiming God’s kingdom or rule.
? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that the proclamation and inauguration of the kingdom of God was one of, if not the most central aspects and purposes of Jesus’ ministry?
2. In both 4.²³ and 9.³⁵, Matthew pairs Jesus’ proclamation of God’s kingdom or rule with his healing all manner of sickness and... disease.
? What, do you think, is the significance of this pairing?

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- ? How does God's kingdom or rule relate to healing?
- 3. We can think of God's kingdom or rule in terms of His taking control over things formerly out of control or things controlled by other agents—individual or societal.
 - ? How do healings demonstrate God's control?
 - ? How do healings demonstrate that we can trust in Jesus' message of the kingdom of God and that God can take control and rule in a manner beneficial to all?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

John 18.³⁶— questionnaire 5 in the series

³⁶Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

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1. In this reading from John, Jesus is undergoing trial/ interrogation by Pilate. Because of rumors swirling around Jesus and the accusations that Jewish leaders make against him, Pilate asks Jesus, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” This is Jesus’ reply.
? What do you learn about the kingdom of God from Jesus’ response to Pilate?
2. We have asserted that in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus thought not only of existence in an afterlife but of fundamentally changing the world as it is. In answering Pilate, Jesus says, “my kingdom is not of this world.”
? What does this mean to you?
? Does this response seem to confirm or challenge our assertion? Why do you answer as you do?
3. Consider the words, “of this world.” Elsewhere, Jesus says, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world,

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therefore the world hateth you” (Jn. 15.¹⁹). Consider too, Jesus’ intercessory prayer offered in behalf of his disciples.

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Jn. 17.¹⁴⁻¹⁶).

- ? After reading these passages, how do you understand the prepositional phrase, “of the world”?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding it to mean something like, “like the world,” “after the manner of the world,” etc.? Why do you answer as you do?
4. Jesus reminds Pilate how the subjects of a worldly kingdom, with the king’s blessing, would respond to an attack on its king.
- ? What is that response?
 - ? How is the response of those in Jesus’ kingdom different?
 - ? How do you feel about the nonviolent response to threats and attacks against Jesus?
 - ? What does it have to say about the way in which Jesus’ kingdom “is not of this world”?
 - ? How, then, does this passage confirm rather than challenge our assertion that the kingdom of God as Jesus envisioned it was an alteration to the ways of this world and could serve to change and improve the world?
5. Consider the following passage.

“Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me.

Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; and again, the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me” (DC 98.¹⁴⁻¹⁷).

- ? How does this passage relate to Jesus’ statement to Pilate and his expectations that his kingdom could operate in this world to change and improve it?
6. So, Jesus’, we submit, could and did hope and intend that his kingdom would exist on earth and in time. It would be very different from the kingdoms of this world. For example, it would, we learn in Jesus’ answer to Pilate, be very different in its use or non-use of violence and violent resistance.
- ? In what other ways is the kingdom of God different from the kingdoms of this world? (This question is one that the reader should keep in mind throughout our explorations of Jesus and the kingdom of God)

(edition: December 20 , 2024)

Luke 6.²⁰ & Matthew 5.³— questionnaire 6 in the series

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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The passages of this questionnaire are the first of several from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus speaks of the kingdom. In the case of Matthew, the passage begins both the sermon and Jesus’ Beatitudes.

1. In these two passages, Jesus identifies the poor as those who possess and inhabit the kingdom of God. It might seem that Matthew and Luke have slightly different takes on this first Beatitude and what is meant by “poor.” Some read Matthew’s version in a spiritual sense and Luke’s in a temporal sense.
 - ? Do you think Matthew and Luke understand Jesus’ statement differently or can you harmonize the two? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If you harmonize them, do you harmonize to the spiritual or to the temporal? Why?

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- ? How would you feel if we harmonized the two so as to understand Luke’s “poor” and Matthew’s “poor in spirit” as both referring to those who experience temporal poverty? Why do you feel this way?
- ? What attitudes or beliefs would one have toward poverty, real destitution, and those who experience it that they would reject the consolation (“invitation” or “comfort”) that Jesus offers the poor when he says that they are the kind of people who inherit the kingdom of God/ heaven?

2. Consider the following.

The Greek word used for “poor” in Matthew’s “poor in spirit” and Luke’s “poor” is *ptōchos*. It means “destitute, impoverished, mendicant.” Related verbs are *ptossō*, “to crouch, be prostrate, bow down timidly,” and *ptōcheuō*, “to become a beggar, be indigent.” While another word, *penes*, for “poor” “denotes one who has to earn his living because he has no property, *ptōchos* denotes the complete destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging... It is the fate of a *ptōchos* to have nothing... but that of a *penes* to live frugally” (*TDOT*).

Now, consider the word, “spirit.” We sometimes speak of “school spirit.” We also speak of someone having their spirit broken. When we speak of someone having “school spirit” we mean that they have enthusiasm and are energetic and active for their school. When we speak of someone having their “spirit broke,” we mean their will to continue is weakened; they have become discouraged.

- ? How might you apply these observations to the idea of being “poor in spirit” or “poor in relation or relation to spirit”?
- ? Is it accurate to say that those who are temporally poor—truly poor, beggaredly so— often experience a serious lack of zest for life; that they can feel a lack of vitality and hope; that they can struggle to find a will to go?
- ? How do you respond to the assertion that all of this is what Jesus means when he speaks of the “poor in spirit”?

(*edition: December 4, 2024*)

Luke 6.²⁰ & Matthew 5.³— questionnaire 7 in the series

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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1. Jesus’ statement to the poor may be read as “consolation.” Consolation can mean both “invitation” and “comfort”—it is easy to see how they are related since invitation often brings the one receiving the invitation a sense of comfort.
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus inviting the poor into “the kingdom of God/ heaven?”
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus offering the poor/ those discouraged and hopeless through temporal destitution comfort through this kingdom of God statement?
2. Jesus says to the poor, “yours is the kingdom of God.” The verb is in the present tense.
 - ? What do you make of this observation?

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- ? Do you think of Jesus' invitation to enter the kingdom of God/heaven as an invitation to enter into the kingdom at some far off, future, perhaps even other worldly time and place or as an invitation to enter immediately? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Consider both these possibilities. What do you learn from each of them? How does each impact the way you think of the kingdom of God? Of the poor?
 - ? What does it say about God and His kingdom that it is very specifically a place in which the poor are invited and where they can find comfort?
3. Jesus', "yours is the kingdom of God," could be read as descriptive rather than invitational. We might accurately translate Jesus' statement as, "the kingdom of God belongs to you." The poor are not simply invited out of compassion, but because they are the very kind of people who belong in the kingdom, the very kind of people for whom it was created.
- ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate this possibility?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

Luke 6.²⁰ & Matthew 5.³— questionnaire 8 in the series

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the eighth in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus’ ministry of physical healing as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; and 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place.

1. Consider the following passage.

“Behold, verily I say unto you, for this cause I have sent you... that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail; yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited. First, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble; and after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame,

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and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come” (DC 58.^{6, 8-11}).

? How does this passage relate to the idea of the poor being especially invited to enter the kingdom of God and there find comfort from their destitution and the worries, discouragements, and hopelessness that poverty so often brings?

2. Take a few minutes to consider one of Jesus’ kingdom of God/ heaven parables—this one the parable of the wedding feast found in Matthew 22.²⁻¹⁴.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, ‘Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.’

“But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.’

“So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, ‘Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?’

“And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.’”

? How does the DC passage relate to this parable?

? How do they both relate to the two verses explored in this questionnaire?

3. In the DC passage, “First, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble were invited to the “feast of fat things” and the “marriage of the Lamb.” In the parable found in Matthew, the same class, the wealthy—represented in the parable by landowners and merchants (vs. 5)—were first to be invited.

? What was the response of the landowners and merchants?

? Could we understand the DC’s “rich and the learned, the wise and the noble” to have similarly responded negatively to the invitation? Why do you answer as you do?

? What do you think and feel when we suggest that in both passages, those who are mentioned as having been invited “first” were not invited first because they were preferred or spiritually privileged—rather, the mention of their having been invited first is focused on the fact that they rejected the invitation?

4. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus offered a contrast to his, “blessed be ye poor.” That contrast was, “But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation [comfort or invitation or both]” (Lk. 6.²⁴).

? How do you feel about Jesus’ statement toward the rich?

? How does Luke’s contrast clarify the nature of the poverty and the poor to which Jesus speaks?

5. One could understand that the rich have already been consoled in this life through their ease. One could understand that the rich have already been invited into the kingdom and refused the invitation.

Or, finally, one could understand that the kingdom of God simply wasn't created for the rich; that they were not the type of people who belonged in the kingdom; or the type of people to whom the kingdom of God and the ideals and principles by which it existed appealed or to which they would conform.

- ? Consider each of these. What does each teach you about the poor? About the rich? About the nature of the kingdom?
- ? As you think of the last possible meaning—that the kingdom of God simply wasn't created for the rich; that they were not the type of people who belonged in the kingdom; or the type of people to whom the kingdom of God and the ideals and principles by which it existed appealed or to which they would conform—what would it be about the kingdom and its ideals and principles that the rich might find unappealing? (This question is one to keep in mind as we continue to explore the meaning and nature of the kingdom of God.)

(edition: December 20, 2024)

¹⁰Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God ,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the ninth in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus’ ministry of physical healing as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; and 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place.

In today’s questionnaire, we consider the eighth Beatitude as found in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and its relation to Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God.

1. First, we should understand what Jesus means by being “persecuted for righteousness’ sake.”
? What does this “for righteousness’ sake” mean to you?
? How do you feel about reading “persecuted on account of righteousness/ goodness”?
2. The words, “righteousness/ righteous” have been loaded down with all sorts of meaning and assumptions.

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- ? What, do you think, did these terms mean to Jesus' audience at the time he delivered it?
 - ? What did they mean to Jesus, do you think?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that individuals might be persecuted precisely because they seek to live by good and proper values?
3. Now, consider the word, "persecuted."
 - ? In your view, what does it mean to be persecuted?
 4. We most often think of persecution in religious terms, but the word has a broader meaning. It can be to "harry, harass, pursue, exclude, accuse." Many classes of people can be "persecuted." The promise of the first beatitude was "the kingdom of heaven." The promise of the 8th beatitude is the same.
 - ? What does this suggest about the relationship between those "persecuted, harassed, excluded, etc. because they seek to live by good and proper values—the condition of the 8th beatitude—and being "poor"—the condition of the first beatitude (It might be helpful to review the questionnaire for the 1st beatitude)?
 5. Jesus promises/ comforts those persecuted, harassed, excluded, etc. because they seek to live by good and proper values with the words, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven/ God" [see footnote 1].
 - ? What does it tell you about the kingdom of God that it is made up of people who are victims of harassment, exclusion, and prosecution because they seek to live by good and proper values?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

Matthew 6.¹⁰ & Luke 11.²— questionnaire 10 in the series

¹⁰Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

²Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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In this questionnaire, we remain in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and consider the kingdom of God in light of his instruction on prayer as found in “The Lord’s Prayer.” Traditionally, the prayer is seen as having seven pleas. In this questionnaire, we consider the second and third pleas.

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1. After the first plea of the Lord's Prayer that God's "name" be "hallowed," or His "power" be held as "preeminent" (the most basic idea of holiness is the fact of uniqueness, of being set apart, of being unusual, and, in the case of God, of being unmatched, unparalleled, preeminent), Jesus suggests that his disciples pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
 - ? What is one asking for when they make this plea that God's kingdom might come?
 - ? Is a discussion of and desire for the coming of God's kingdom are significant part of your prayers? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How is the desire to see God's kingdom come and the plea that it be so manifest in your prayers?

2. The next plea is "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."
 - ? To what degree is the will of God done in heaven?

 - ? How does the idea of God's will being done on earth relate to the plea that "Thy kingdom come"?

3. We have suggested that Jesus' intention was not only to prepare his followers for entrance into the kingdom of God in the next life, but to provide principles and laws by which humans could establish a kingdom in the mortal life of humans. When we read the plea, "May thy kingdom come," we hear, "May thy kingdom come here and now."
 - ? Do you feel that the two pleas found in this reading confirm in any way our previous assertions? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How do these two requests from the Lord's Prayer suggest that Jesus did indeed hope to establish God's kingdom in the mortal life of humans?
 - ? How is the doing of the will of God on earth indicative of the kingdom of God?

(edition: December 20, 2024)

¹⁹Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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1. In the first and eighth beatitudes, Jesus indicated who and what types of people were part of the kingdom of God—the poor and the persecuted, two groups that have much in common. In today’s

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reading, Jesus indicates who and what kind of people are not and cannot be part of the kingdom of God.

- ? Who is excluded from the kingdom of God according to this reading?
- ? What was the nature of pharisaical “righteousness” that it had no place in the kingdom of God, either in the earthly present or in the eternal future?
- ? Why is this, do you think?

Consider, for example, the following passages and the nature of pharisaical righteousness in relation to Sabbath day observance.

“[Jesus] entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, ‘Stand forth.’ And he saith unto them, ‘Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?’

But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, ‘Stretch forth thine hand.’

And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other” (Mk. 3.1-5).

“[Jesus] went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?’

And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; and answered them, saying, ‘Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?’

And they could not answer him again to these things” (Lk. 14.1-6).

The Old Testament had taught the Pharisees that the diseases and ritual defilements of others could spiritually defile another individual. Thus, in both instances above, the Pharisees themselves tried to distance themselves from the defiled individuals and expected Jesus, who claimed to be a man of God to maintain distance from defilement.

- ? What does this tell you about the nature of pharisaical righteousness and about the nature of the kingdom of God?
 - ? What is the nature of “righteousness” that is compatible with the kingdom of God?
2. Those who “break one of these least commandments” or “teach men” to break even the least of the commandments may be “least in the kingdom,” but they are still included in the kingdom. But the pharisees are outright excluded.
- ? What do you think and feel about this observation?

(edition: December 21, 2024)

Matthew 6.³³ & Luke 12.³¹— questionnaire 12 in the series

³³But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

³¹But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the twelfth in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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1. In the course of his Sermon on the Mount Jesus devotes a good chunk of time giving counsel concerning temporal, material, and economic matters. This discussion is found in Matthew 6.19-34. Take a moment to review these verses.

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- ? What, to you, are the highlights of Jesus' counsel concerning our material and economic needs and interests?
2. Jesus counsels that we make "all these things" of secondary importance to the kingdom of God.
 - ? To what does Jesus' "all these things" refer?
 - ? What "necessities" would you add to Jesus' food, drink, and clothing?
 - ? What does making God's kingdom a priority above the necessities of life look like in our day to day lives?
 - ? How closely do you follow Jesus' counsel about putting God's kingdom first, even above the acquisition of life's necessities? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What is one thing you could do to show more clearly that your top priority is the kingdom of God?
 3. Jesus promises that when we place the kingdom of God above the acquisition of life's necessities, life's necessities will be given to us.
 - ? Do you believe this? Have you experienced it?
 - ? What does this look like? How does it work?
 - ? What does all this suggest about things that are not life necessities, our attitudes about them, and our efforts to possess them?

(edition: December 27, 2024)

Matthew 7.²¹— questionnaire 13 in the series

²¹Not every one that saith unto me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the thirteenth in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus’ ministry of physical healing as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple’s prayers; and 9) the kingdom of God should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life’s necessities.

1. In previous readings we have found that those who enter the kingdom of God are 1) those who believe in the possibility of a new kind of governance based upon godly principles and values; 2) those who are poor; 3) those who are persecuted; and 4) those whose behavior goes beyond the legalistic behavior of pharisaical individuals. In this reading, Jesus adds another qualifier for the kingdom.

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- ? What is that qualifier?
- ? How would you characterize doing the will of the Father? What is entailed in doing the will of the Father?
- ? How is doing the will of the Father different than what legalists such as the pharisees think it to be?
- ? How can you think, speak, and act so as to avoid being like a legalists such as the pharisees?

(edition: December 28, 2024)

Matthew 10.⁷— questionnaire 14 in the series

⁷And as ye go, preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

⁸Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. ⁹Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, ¹⁰Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the fourteenth in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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1. There is much in this reading concerning God’s kingdom that we have found in previous readings. In Mark 1.¹⁵ and Matthew 4.¹⁷ (questionary 1), the Evangelists have Jesus declaring that the kingdom of

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God is “near,” “approaching,” “almost here.” In Matthew 4.²³ and again in 9.³⁵ (questionary 4), Jesus’ message of the kingdom’s approach was associated with healings. In Matthew 6.³³ and Luke 12.³¹ (questionary 12), the kingdom of God was to take priority over the acquisition of basic human material needs. In this reading, the disciples are called to preach Jesus’ message of the kingdom’s eminence, they are to accompany this message with healing, and they are to ignore their most basic human needs as Jesus taught.

- ? Does this apply to you? If so, how? If not, why not?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that disciples are called to preach the same message of the kingdom in the same manner as Jesus?
- ? What do you do to be true to this call?
- ? What can you do to be truer to Jesus’ call?

(edition: January 1, 2025)

Matthew 11.¹¹⁻¹² & Luke 7.²⁸— questionnaire 15 in the series

¹¹Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

²⁸For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

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1. Jesus offers very high praise of John the Baptist by saying that “among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” However, in the very next breath, Jesus declares that “he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
 - ? What do you make of this paradox?
 - ? What does Jesus’ statement have to say about the kingdom of God? About those who are citizens of it?

2. We have suggested in previous questionnaires that in Jesus’ view the kingdom of God is not to be thought of only in terms of a kingdom in a future life but something that can be experienced in the world of here and now.
 - ? How does this reading confirm that the kingdom of God is something that can be experienced in this life?

3. Jesus laments that previous to his ministry, during John the Baptist’s ministry, and up to the present “the kingdom of heaven has experienced violence” and that “violent individuals have captured it.” In an earlier reading, we heard Jesus declare, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - ? How do Jesus’ statements that “the kingdom of heaven has experienced violence” and that those are blessed “which are persecuted” relate to each other?
 - ? What, do you think, does it mean that “violent individuals have captured the kingdom of God?”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that the principles of the kingdom can be corrupted by violence?
 - ? Can you point to examples when ideas of violence have captured and overwhelmed true principles upon which the kingdom of God is based?

4. In John 18.³⁶, which we explored in questionnaire 5, we saw that Jesus rejected violence as a means of defending the kingdom of God as violence was inconsistent with that kingdom.
 - ? How might Jesus’ lament that “violent individuals have captured [the kingdom of God]” relate to Jesus’ earlier rejection of violence due to its incompatibility with the kingdom?

(edition: January 7, 2025)

²⁸But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

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1. Here is Jesus’ statement in context.

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“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroadz’ (Mt. 12.²⁵⁻³⁰).

We have seen in previous questionnaires in this series that healing is intimately connected with the message and reality of the kingdom of God (#4 and #14).

- ? According to this reading, what else is intimately connected to the message and reality of the kingdom of God?
- ? What is it about the casting out of “devils” that it can serve as a witness of the presence of the kingdom of God?
- ? How does the casting out of devils demonstrate God’s rule and his ability to gain control over previously uncontrollable forces?

The word translated as “devils” is Greek *daimōn*. This word can be either good or bad. Greeks used it to describe their beloved gods. Its most basic meaning is “an overwhelming or uncontrollable force or influence.”

- ? What are examples today of overwhelming or uncontrollable forces or influences?
 - ? How does the overpowering of overwhelming influences in people’s lives demonstrate the reality of God’s rule and his ability to control previously uncontrollable forces?
 - ? Have you see evidences of overwhelming influences and uncontrollable forces being overpowered, thus serving as a suggestion that the kingdom of God is in some sense present?
2. Jesus compares his exorcism of overwhelming and uncontrollable forces and influences to “bind[ing] the strong man” and “spoil[ing] his house.”
- ? What do you think and feel about this?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that the inauguration of the kingdom of God is not only the bringing in of something better but the active dissolution of that which is evil and detrimental?
 - ? What sorts of forces, powers, and influences in our world today need to be stopped and removed in order to make room for the kingdom of God?

(edition: January 5, 2025)

Matthew 13.²⁴⁻³⁰— questionnaire 17 in the series

²⁴Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: ²⁵But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. ²⁶But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

²⁷“So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, ‘Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?’

²⁸“He said unto them, ‘An enemy hath done this.’

“The servants said unto him, ‘Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?’

²⁹“But he said, ‘Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. He utilizes several parables to teach about the kingdom. This is one of them. This parable contains the following symbolic elements:

- a field owner
- his field
- wheat seed/ plant
- an enemy
- darnel seed/plants
- field hands.

? What is a "tare"?

Tare is a seed known as "darnel." This seed becomes a weed that has the appearance of wheat but bears no wheat.

? After reading the parable, what, do you think, do each of these elements represent?

? How does your interpretation of the parable compare with Jesus', found below?

"Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, 'Declare unto us the parable of the a tares of the field.'

He answered and said unto them, 'He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt. 13.³⁷⁻⁴³)

2. We have suggested repeatedly in our previous questionnaires in this series that as Jesus conceived of it the kingdom of God was something to be experienced in this life and not only or even primarily something to be experienced in a future "eternal life."

? Does this parable support this suggestion and point to a kingdom of God that is experienced, at least in part, in this life as well as a future? Why do you answer as you do?

3 This parable follows immediately upon Jesus' most famous and well-known parable: the "Parable of the Sower." In the Parable of the Sower, a sower sows seed that Jesus interprets as "the word of the kingdom" (see Mt. 13.19), or the message of/ about the kingdom.

? How does the word, message, and principles of the kingdom help bring about the kingdom?

In the Parable of the wheat and the tares, the seed of the word is replaced by a seed that is "the children of the kingdom."

? How does the scattering of individuals who live by principles of the kingdom help bring about the kingdom?

- ? What are you doing to encourage other individuals and your society to move away from the evils of this world to principles on which the kingdom of God is based?
- 4. Tares, i.e., individuals whose lives are inconsistent with the kingdom, infiltrate the kingdom through Satan's efforts. This can be related to the violence that is ever perpetrated against the kingdom and, sometimes within the kingdom.
 - ? How do you feel about this infiltration?
- 5. The Lord allows those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom to "grow together until the harvest."
 - ? How do you feel about this?
 - ? How is it, do you think, that the two can often not be distinguished one from the other?
 - ? What is the "fruit" than one bares but the other is without?
- 6. Jesus says that the darnel is to be bound in bundles and burned.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about this?

(edition: January 28, 2025)

Matthew 13.³¹⁻³², Mark 4.³⁰⁻³² & Luke 13.¹⁸⁻¹⁹— questionnaire 18 in the series

matthew

³¹Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: ³²Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”

mark

³⁰And he said, “Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? ³¹It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: ³²but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”

luke

¹⁸Then said he, “Unto what is the kingdom of God like? And whereunto shall I resemble it? ¹⁹It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.”

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionaries, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus’ ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously

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1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores a second parable of the kingdom, this one the parable of the mustard seed. All three synoptic Gospels possess this parable.
 - ? What are the similarities and differences in the parable between the three Gospels?
 - ? What similar principles to the parable of the wheat and tares does this parable teach?
 - ? What new information concerning the kingdom does this parable add to the parable of the wheat and tares?

2. The principal elements found in this parable are:
 - a sower
 - a field
 - a mustard seed
 - a mustard tree
 - a flock of birds
 - ? What is the symbolic meaning of each of these elements?
 - ? If we understand Jesus as the sower, the field as this world, and the mustard seed as Jesus' teachings concerning the kingdom and the principles upon which it exists, what is Jesus saying when he likens his teachings and the, then, state of the kingdom to "the least of all seeds"?
 - ? In all three Gospels, birds "lodge in the branches" of the mature mustard tree. What is this saying about the kingdom of God?
 - ? Mark's recording of the parable is slightly different in that he has the birds "lodge under the shadow" of the mature mustard seed. What does this tell you about the kingdom?
 - ? How does the kingdom of God on earth serve as a place of refuge and safety?

(edition: January 28, 2025)

Matthew 13.³³ & Luke 13.²⁰⁻²¹— questionnaire 19 in the series

matthew

³³Another parable spake he unto them; “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

³³He shared another parable with them. “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman procured and mixed into a bushel of flour until it was thoroughly activated (author’s translation).”

luke

²⁰And again he said, “Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? ²¹It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the nineteenth in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus’ ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the

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here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens' ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; and 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact.

1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores a third parable of the kingdom, The Parable of the leaven. The elements to this parable are:

- a woman
- yeast
- flour

? What is the symbolic meaning of each element?

? What additional information about the kingdom do you learn from this parable?

2. We have suggested repeatedly in our previous questionnaires in this series that as Jesus conceived of it the kingdom of God was something to be experienced in this life and not only or even primarily something to be experienced in a future "eternal life."

? Does this parable support this suggestion and point to a kingdom of God that is experienced, at least in part, in this life as well as a future? Why do you answer as you do?

3. In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus emphasized the small, humble beginnings of the kingdom. In the parable of the wheat and tares, the kingdom again began with a small seed.

? How does Jesus again emphasize the small, humble beginnings of the kingdom?

? Why, do you think, does Jesus keep coming back to this?

? How does Jesus emphasize the huge impact the small and humble beginnings can have?

? What is the role of waiting and patience in relation to the kingdom?

(edition: January 28, 2025)

Matthew 13.⁴⁴— questionnaire 20 in the series

⁴⁴Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the ground, which a man, discovering it, hides; and out of happiness he goes off and sells everything he possesses, and buys that land (author's translation).

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus' ministry as one focused on "the kingdom of heaven," but says that "from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven." In introducing Jesus' ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." We might translate, "preaching the positive proclamation about God's kingdom." All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus' teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God's rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus' ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others,

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certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens' ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; and 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact.

1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores a another parable of the kingdom, The Parable of Hidden Treasure. The elements to this parable are:

- A man
- A piece of land
- A hidden treasure
- The man possessions

? What do each of these elements represent and/ or teach?

2. In both the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and Tares we could reasonably interpret the man (sower) as Jesus, Jesus presenting something new into the world.

? Can we interpret the man in this parable as representing Jesus? Why do you answer as you do?

? If the man is interpreted as Jesus, is there a way in which Jesus discovers in the principle of the kingdom of God something previously hidden or that others previously underappreciated? What might Jesus have learned/ discovered/ appreciated about the kingdom that had been previously unknown, underappreciated, or unappreciated?

? What is the significance of the treasure/ kingdom of God being hidden?

? How is the kingdom of God like hidden treasure? How is it like a treasure?

3. We can also reasonably interpret the man as ourselves or as every individual who becomes aware of the existence of the kingdom of God

? What do you learn when the man is understood to represent you?

? What do you think and feel when you consider that the man sold everything he possessed in order to possess/ enter the kingdom of God?

? Is this required of you and I? Why do you answer as you do? What does it look like to give up everything for the kingdom of God?

? Does Jesus teach this sort of self-denial for the kingdom of God in other ways and places? If so, where?

? How does the following story relate to this parable of the hidden treasure?

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?’

And he said unto him, ‘Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’

He saith unto him, ‘Which?’

Jesus said, ‘Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’

The young man saith unto him, ‘All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?’

Jesus said unto him, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.’

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Mt. 19.¹⁶⁻²²).

? How about these passages?

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6.¹⁹⁻²¹).

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6.³³).

? How will you apply Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God as found in this parable in your own life?

(edition: January 30, 2024)

Matthew 13.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶— questionnaire 21 in the series

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: ⁴⁶who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

⁴⁵Once more, the kingdom of heaven is like a man, a merchant seeking fine pearls, who, finding a single very expensive pearl, went off, sold all that he possessed, and purchased it (author's translation).

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus' ministry as one focused on "the kingdom of heaven," but says that "from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven." In introducing Jesus' ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." We might translate, "preaching the positive proclamation about God's kingdom." All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus' teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God's rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus' ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God is of the highest value and should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by

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violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens’ ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan’s influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; and 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact.

1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores a another parable of the kingdom, The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. The elements to this parable are:

- Pearl merchant
- Expensive Pearl
- Merchant’s possessions

? What is the significance of each element?

? We can easily understand the pearl merchant to represent all of us who encounter the kingdom of God as Jesus imagines it. But can it also represent Jesus, himself? Why do you answer as you do?

? How is Jesus like the merchant?

? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus discovered the kingdom of God, its principles and its unmatched value, and gave up everything to devote his life to preaching it?

2. The parable does not deny the existence of many fine pearls, but does assert that there is one more valuable than the rest.

? What less valuable pearls do we often devote much of our life, our time, efforts, imagination, etc., to possessing?

? What lesser pearls stand in the way of your obtaining the most prized one?

(edition: February 2, 2025)

Matthew 13.⁴⁷⁻⁵⁰— questionnaire 22 in the series

⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁴⁸which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁴⁹So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the twenty-second in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; and 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact.

1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores a another parable of the kingdom, The Parable of the Net. The elements to this parable are:

- A fishing net
- Good and Bad fish

- ? What is the meaning and significance of these elements?
- ? How is the kingdom of God like this net?
- ? How and why does it take in both the good and the bad?
- ? What is the meaning of being "good" and "bad" in this parable?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the "good" as those who live by principles of the kingdom and the "bad" as those who refuse to live by the principles of the kingdom?
- ? At this stage of our survey of Jesus and the kingdom of God, what would you say are the principles of the kingdom?

2. In offering commentary or explanation of the parable, Jesus speaks of the "wicked" being "severed" from the "just" and being "cast... into the furnace of fire" where there is "wailing and gnashing of teeth."

- ? How do you feel about this intense language and the reality that it depicts?
- ? How does this language and the final state of the wicked that it depicts jive with your normal thoughts about Jesus? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How do you feel when you think of Jesus saying and feeling such things?

(edition: February 10, 2025)

Matthew 18.¹⁻⁵, Mark 9.³³⁻³⁷ & Luke 9.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸— questionnaire 23 in the series

matthew

¹At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³and said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.”

mark

³³And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?” ³⁴But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. ³⁵And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

³⁶And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, ³⁷“Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”

luke

⁴⁶Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. ⁴⁷And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, ⁴⁸And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

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that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus' ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God is of the highest value and should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens' ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; and 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact.

1. As Jesus and his disciples traveled in Galilee, Jesus' disciples argued about "who should be the greatest (Mark), or, more pointedly, "which of them should be greatest (Luke). Matthew has them actually bringing the argument to Jesus in a revised form, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
 - ? How do you feel about the disciples' question?
 - ? How do you feel about the disciples?
 - ? How is the question inappropriate and a demonstration that the disciples misunderstand Jesus, who he is, and the nature of the kingdom of God as he envisions it?
 - ? How does their question reveal the reality that they are not prepared to accept or enter the kingdom of God as Jesus envisions it?
 - ? How and why is the very concern about status, let alone the striving for higher status than others incompatible with the kingdom of God?

2. In response to the disciples' argument and question, Jesus warns, "If you are not changed and become like a young child, then you can absolutely not enter the kingdom of heaven" (author's translation). We should note that Greek, *país*, is a common word for "child." The word used here, *paidíon*, is a diminutive of *país*. *Paidíon*, then, is "a very young child."
 - ? What difference does it make that Jesus uses "a very young child" as his example rather than just "a child"?
 - ? How does Jesus' response to his disciples' question reveal that they are not prepared to accept or enter the kingdom of God as Jesus envisions it?
 - ? What qualities does a very young child possess that are appropriate to the kingdom of God?
 - ? More specifically, how do very young children think of, relate and respond to social status and superiority?
 - ? Why is a very young child's relation to concerns about social status and superiority an essential element of entering the kingdom of God?

3. In Mark 1.15, Jesus had taught that in order to enter the kingdom of God hearers of his message about the kingdom must “transform your views and actively believe this positive proclamation” (author’s translation).
 - ? How does Jesus’ admonition to “transform your views [change your world view]” relate to his warning to be “changed” into something more like a small child?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate Jesus’ assertion that “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven”?
 - ? What role does status play in the thought, feelings, and behavior of small children?
 - ? How can we duplicate this thought, feeling, and behavior about status in our lives?

(edition: February 16, 2025)

²³“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.’ ²⁷Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

²⁸But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me that thou owest.’ ²⁹And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.’ ³⁰And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

³¹“So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. ³²Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, ‘O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?’

³⁴“And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

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Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In previous questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God’s rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one’s perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus’ message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus’ ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously

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out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God is of the highest value and should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens' ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact; and 15) those who would enter the kingdom must renounce all thoughts and strivings for status and superiority within the kingdom and be as uncaring about status and superiority as are children.

1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores another parable of the kingdom: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, or The Unforgiving Servant. The elements to this parable are:

- A king
- A debtor and his debt
- A debtor to the first debtor
- Debtor's prison
- Peers of the two debtors

? What is the significance and meaning of each element?

Here is the context for the parable, or the question that drew the parable from Jesus.

“Then came Peter to him, and said, ‘Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?’”

Jesus saith unto him, ‘I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, until seventy times seven’” (Mt. 18.²¹⁻²²).

? How, if at all, does this context alter or enhance your understanding of the parable and each of its elements?

2. In discussions and commentary on this parable, focus is often placed on the king and the extravagant mercy he shows the debtor, as he forgives an unimaginably huge and unpayable debt.

? How do you feel about this focus?

? Why was the debtor forgiven?

? Whose “goodness” made the cancelation of the debt possible—the debtor's or the king's? Why do you answer as you do?

? What is the significance of the fact that it was God's “goodness” rather than the debtor's that made forgiveness possible?

? While Jesus might have been happy to teach how merciful God is, is this, do you think, the principal purpose and meaning of the parable? Why do you answer as you do?

- ? If God’s merciful nature is seen as a principal purpose and meaning of the parable, how does it relate to the kingdom of God, as introduces it with, “the kingdom of heaven likened unto...”?
 - ? If God’s merciful nature is seen as a principal purpose and meaning of the parable, what does the parable say about the nature of the kingdom of God?
3. In the parable, the forgiven debtor refuses to forgive another who is indebted to him. What’s more, in the parable Jesus portrays the forgiven debtor as having “laid hands on him, and [taking] him by the throat.” Then the forgiven debtor “cast him into prison.”
 - ? How do you feel about the forgiven debtor’s treatment and attitude toward the one indebted to him, especially the violent nature of his attack and the finality of his treatment of his debtor?
 4. In the parable, because of the forgiven debtor’s treatment of his debtor, the king “delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him” which was his original sentence. Then Jesus offered his only commentary on the parable: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” In the finale to this parable, then, God is not so merciful to the original debtor after all, refusing to forgive his debt, sentencing him to suffer the original punishment, and suffering the consequences of his new sin: the refusal to forgive.
 - ? How do you feel about the king’s final treatment of the debtor originally forgiven of his debt?
 - ? How does this final treatment of the original debtor comport with and stand in contrast to the earlier portrayal of God as immensely merciful and forgiving?
 - ? When we use this parable to teach God’s boundless and extravagant forgiveness, seemingly without consequence, what do we do with the finale in which God does not forgive the unmerciful debtor but allows the original consequences to follow?
 - ? How do you balance these two somewhat contradictory responses of the king to offense committed by the first debtor—his original offense against the king, himself, and the second offense against a debtor like himself?
 - ? What does this finale suggest about the kingdom of God?
 5. Consider Peter’s question—“Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?—that caused Jesus to utter this parable. Consider too, the forgiven debtor’s unwillingness to forgive another’s debt. Consider too, that Jesus identifies the parable as a parable of the kingdom of God.
 - ? What do all these considerations suggest about the principal point Jesus was making in the parable?
 - ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that the principal point of the parable is that those who enter the kingdom of God are those who ask for forgiveness, are forgiven because of God’s goodness, and then imitate God by forgiving those who ask their forgiveness, though those who beg forgiveness may have no goodness of their own?
 - ? What do you think and feel when we put this another way and say that Jesus’ principal teaching in the parable is that the kingdom of God is a place of forgiveness and only the forgiving can inhabit it?
 - ? How is the forgiven debtor’s behavior toward his debtor a betrayal of the kingdom of God and the ideas and values of that kingdom?
 - ? What are we to make of the fact that in the end, the one who refuses to forgive is not, in fact, forgiven, or, at least, is made to suffer torment as a consequence of his error?
 - ? How is the refusal to forgive and the holding on to offense themselves a form of torment?
 6. In another related passage found in Luke, Jesus gave the following advice about forgiving others.

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, ‘I repent;’ thou shalt forgive him.”

The disciples responded to this exacting advice with, “Increase our faith’ (See Lk. 17.³⁻⁵).

- ? Why, do you think, did the disciples respond as they did?
 - ? Does the finale of the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor, and the punishment suffered by the unforgiving debtor also cause a level of dismay and concern? Why do you answer as you do?
7. In the final analysis, the parable that started out looking like a most comforting lesson on the expansiveness of God’s forgiveness, ended on a rather alarming note about the exacting expectations of God and His response when His expectations go unmet and flouted.
- ? How do you feel about this response to the parable?
 - ? After considering the entire parable, which do you come away feeling most: comfort due to God’s mercy, or anxiousness over God’s exacting expectations when it comes to our practice of forgiveness to others? Why do you answer as you do?

(edition: February 21, 2025)

Matthew 19.²³⁻²⁶; Mark 10.²³⁻²⁷ & Luke 18.²⁴⁻²⁷ (part 1)— questionnaire 25 in the series

matthew

²³Then said Jesus unto his disciples, “Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

²⁵When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁶But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”

mark

²³And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”

²⁴And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, “Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

²⁶And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

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luke

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intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he always intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become a lived experience in human history; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus' ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God is of the highest value and should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens' ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact; 15) those who would enter the kingdom must renounce all thoughts and strivings for status and superiority within the kingdom, being as uncaring about status and superiority as are children; and 16) the kingdom of God is a place of radical forgiveness and only those prepared to forgive radically can abide in it.

1. Here is the context for this saying concerning the kingdom of God.

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”

And he said unto him, “Why callest thou me good? There is none a good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”

He saith unto him, “Which?”

Jesus said, “Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, honor thy father and thy mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The young man saith unto him, “All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”

Jesus said unto him, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Mt. 19.¹⁶⁻²²).

? How does this context impact your understanding of Jesus' saying?

? How does this context impact your understanding of the kingdom and entrance into it?

2. After declaring that the wealthy only enter the kingdom of God with difficulty, Jesus utilizes imagery to describe just how difficult it is: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” Interpreters have often understood the “eye of a needle” to refer to the small, security conscious gate of a city's fortified wall. There is, however, no

evidence for the existence of such a gate during Jesus' time. If it existed at all, it was of later invention. Therefore, many have considered the translation, "camel," to be faulty. The Hebrew and Aramaic root, gml, can mean either "camel" or "rope," depending on the vocalization of the root.

- ? How do you feel about Jesus' statement that it is easier to thread a needle with a rope "than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"?
- ? How likely is it that a rope can be threaded through a needle's eye?
- ? Even if one accepts the traditional reading with the imagery of unloading the camel to enter the city, how many wealthy people shed, not bits and pieces of it, but all their wealth (as Jesus asked the young man to do)?
- ? How does the young man's refusal to "sell that thou hast, and give to the poor" relate to Jesus' saying about the near impossibility of the wealthy entering the kingdom?
- ? What does the young man and Jesus' statement about the eye of a needle tell you about what is required of the wealthy to enter the kingdom?
- ? How do you feel about the kingdom requiring the wealthy to "sell that thou has, and give to the poor"?

(edition: February 24, 2025)

matthew 19.²³⁻²⁶; mark 10.²³⁻²⁷ & luke 18.²⁴⁻²⁷ (part 2) — questionnaire 26 in the series

matthew

²³Then said Jesus unto his disciples, “Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

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1. Matthew reports that Jesus' disciples "were exceedingly amazed" when they heard his statement about the eye of a needle. Mark says that the disciples were first "astonished," and then "astonished out of measure." Having reported the disciple's reaction, all three synoptic gospels report their asking, "Who then can be saved?" as if they felt that if the wealthy couldn't enter the kingdom, no one could.
 - ? Why, do you think, were the disciples so astonished at Jesus' assertions?
 - ? What does their astonishment tell you about the disciples' feelings about wealth, the wealthy, and about the "spirituality" or "righteousness" of the wealthy?
 - ? How do you feel about the disciples' apparent assumption that wealthy people were a shoe in to enter the kingdom of God?
 - ? To what degree do you find Jesus' assertions surprising, and find yourself sharing the disciples' positive attitude toward wealth, the wealthy, and spirituality/ righteousness?
 - ? How does this passage give the lie to "prosperity gospels" in which it is claimed that wealth is a blessing granted to "the righteous" and that the righteous can be identified by their blessings and wealth?

2. In Jesus' initial proclamation of the kingdom of God as found in Mark, Jesus had required that those hearing his proclamation "transform your views," or change the way they look at the world, their worldview.
 - ? How does the disciple's reaction show that they had yet to change their worldview?
 - ? In light of this passage, how must the disciple's world view change?

3. Jesus warns, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” When the disciples express their astonishment, Jesus responded with, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!”
- ? What is the difference between the two statements?

We might explain the difference in different ways.

- We might read the second statement as a clarification or even modification to the first as if Jesus is suggesting that, actually, what he meant to say and what he means is that one can “have” riches and enter into the kingdom as long as they do not “trust in” riches.
 - On the other hand, the second statement might be expanding on the first, indicating that “having” riches is pretty much the same thing as “trusting in” riches because the former is impossible without the second creeping in.
- ? Which of these two explanations for the difference in the two statements seems most likely to you? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How likely and common is it for those who “have” riches to not come to “trust in” their riches?
- ? What does it mean to “trust in” riches, anyway?

(edition: February 27, 2025)

¹For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. ²And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴and said unto them; ‘Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.’ And they went their way.

⁵“Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, ‘Why stand ye here all the day idle?’

⁷“They say unto him, ‘Because no man hath hired us.’

“He saith unto them, ‘Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.’

⁸“So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, ‘Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.’ ⁹And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. ¹⁰But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

¹¹And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, ¹²saying, ‘These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.’

¹³“But he answered one of them, and said, ‘Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? ¹⁴Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. ¹⁵Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?’

¹⁶“So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

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that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; 4) the kingdom of God was linked to Jesus' ministry of physical healing and spiritual exorcism as a demonstration of the kingdom of God and His ability to take control of things previously out of control and rule in a way that benefits all, thus demonstrating the reality and desirability of the kingdom of God; 5) the kingdom of God is based on very different principles than the kingdoms of this world, including the rejection of violence as a means of resistance and the maintenance of power; 6) the poor, those financially and economically destitute and beggarly, are the very kind of people that constitute the kingdom of God in the here and now and for whom it was created in the distant, future, post-mortal time and place; 7) those who desire the kingdom of God and to live by its principles become targets of persecution; 8) the plea that the kingdom of God come and that people be ruled by his principles in the here and now should be a regular and integral part of the disciple's prayers; 9) the kingdom of God is of the highest value and should be our first priority, even above the acquisition of life's necessities; 10) those who enter God's kingdom as those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens' ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan's influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact; 15) those who would enter the kingdom must renounce all thoughts and strivings for status and superiority within the kingdom, being as uncaring about status and superiority as are children; 16) the kingdom of God is a place of radical forgiveness and only those prepared to forgive radically can abide in it; and 17) in addition to giving up all thought of status and reward, those who would enter the kingdom must transform their view of wealth, give up wealth and the desire for wealth to provide for those less fortunate.

1. Jesus often uses parables to teach. This questionnaire explores another parable of the kingdom, The Parable of the Laborers. The elements to this parable are:
 - Landowner
 - Five groups of laborers
 - Payment for labor
 - ? What does each element of the parable symbolically represent?
 - ? The chapter/ parable begins with "For," translation of Greek *gar*, a connecting particle. What does the "for" tell you?

2. The "for" informs us that this parable about the kingdom is to be understood in terms of what preceded it. Having seen a young man turn away from Jesus because he could not give up his riches to benefit the poor, Jesus uttered the famous saying that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle [or to thread the eye of a needle with a rope] than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." This astonished his disciples (see Mt. 19.1⁶⁻²⁶). After further instruction, Peter said, "We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore" (Mt. 19.27). In response, Jesus finally seems to promise that those who have forsaken all "shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." He then ends with, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19.29-30).
 - ? How does this context impact how you understand and interpret the parable?
 - ? What does this parable have to say in response to Peter's concern about his and the other disciples' reward?
 - ? How does Peter's question suggest that Peter was like the laborers who "supposed that they should have received more," and then became upset when they did not?
 - ? What does this parable have to say about the kingdom of God and the concern for reward?

3. In the parable, some laborers “wrought but one hour,” as those who labored all day complained. But the landowner “made them equal”—both groups of laborers, even though those who labored all day had “borne the burden and heat of the day.”
 - ? How do you feel about the landowner’s treatment of the hardest and longest working laborers? Of the laborers working the least and shortest?
 - ? How do you feel about the landowner making them all equal?
 - ? What does this suggest about the kingdom of God, not only or even primarily as it will exist in heaven, but as it exists on earth in the here and now?

4. The Doctrine and Covenants consistently calls for economic equality in the kingdom of God on earth, maintaining that economic inequality creates spiritual inequality and even the diminishment of the Spirit.
 - ? How does this parable relate to the calls for equality as found in the DC?

5. As noted above, immediately before the parable, Jesus had announced, “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” The parable ends with, “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” It is as if this is the parable’s main point about how the kingdom of God operates.
 - ? What do you learn about the kingdom of God from this enveloping structure and saying?

(edition: March 3, 2025)

Matthew 21.²⁸⁻³²— questionnaire 28 in the series

²⁸But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, “Son, go work to day in my vineyard.”

²⁹He answered and said, “I will not:” but afterward he repented, and went. ³⁰And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, “I go, sir:” and went not. ³¹Whether of them twain did the will of his father?

They say unto him, “The first.”

Jesus saith unto them, “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. ³²For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

In this series of questionnaires entitled, “Jesus and the kingdom of God,” we examine Jesus’ sayings about the kingdom of God. What did the kingdom of God mean to him? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did he hope and intend to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on the kingdom of God? What sorts of people inhabited the kingdom of God? We explore these and other questions in this series of questionnaires. This questionnaire is the twenty-seventh in the series.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God³ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as one focused on “the kingdom of heaven,” but says that “from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven.” In introducing Jesus’ ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.” We might translate, “preaching the positive proclamation about God’s kingdom.” All this suggests that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus’ teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

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kingdom are those who do His will; 11) disciples are called to preach the kingdom of God in the same manner as did Jesus; 12) the kingdom of God can be and has been overcome by violence—the violence of others, certainly, but perhaps also its own citizens’ ungodly urge to violence; 13) under Satan’s influence, the kingdom is infiltrated by those whose attitudes and actions are inconsistent with and undermine the kingdom. These are allowed to mingle with those whose attitudes and actions are consistent with and help propagate the kingdom until the final judgment; 14) the beginnings of the kingdom are small and humble but will ultimately have a huge impact; 15) those who would enter the kingdom must renounce all thoughts and strivings for status and superiority within the kingdom, being as uncaring about status and superiority as are children; 16) the kingdom of God is a place of radical forgiveness and only those prepared to forgive radically can abide in it; and 17) in addition to giving up all thought of status and reward, those who would enter the kingdom must transform their view of wealth, give up wealth and the desire for wealth to provide for those less fortunate.

1. In verses 28-31, Jesus presents a parable. Even though it is not introduced with the traditional “the kingdom of God is like...,” Jesus’ statement after presenting the parable, “the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you,” seems to justify including it in our survey of Jesus’ thoughts and teachings about the kingdom of God.
 - ? What do you learn from this parable about who enters the kingdom of God?

2. We find the following characters in this parable.
 - A father and vineyard owner
 - A son who at first refuses to work in the vineyard, but then accepts to work in the vineyard
 - A son who says he will work in the vineyard, but then neglects to do so
 - ? Who do each of these characters represent in Jesus’ interpretation of the parable as found in verses 31 and 32?

3. Just as the first son, at first reluctant, ended up “doing the will of his father,” it was the “publicans and the harlots” that believed John and did his will--and thus entered the kingdom.
 - ? As you understand John the Baptist’s message, what was it that he asked his audiences to do?

Consider the following.

In Matthew 3.², John asked his audience to do what we read Jesus ask his audience to do: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” or “transform your views” or “your world view,” believing that “the kingdom of heaven is imminent.”

In Mark 1.⁴ and Luke 3.², John “preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,” or a baptism that served as a sign of one’s acceptance of new and transformed views that then brought an end to the sins of this world.”

In Matthew 3.⁸, John asked his audience to “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,” or “Bring forth fruits consistent with a transformed world view.

When John’s audiences--common people, tax collectors, and soldiers-- ask him what fruits were consistent with repentance or the new and transformed views that he called for, He replied, 1) “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise, 2) “Exact no more than that which is appointed you, and 3) Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (See Luke 3.¹⁰⁻¹⁴).

- ? How does consideration of these points of summary of John’s message, alter or expand

your earlier answer about what John asked his audience to do?

4. Through his parable and then his interpretation of it, Jesus teaches that it is those who believed and followed John's teachings who entered the kingdom of God.
 - ? What do you learn from the points of summary of John's message about what is required to enter the kingdom of God?
 - ? In considering fruits that are consistent with repentance, or fruits that are consistent with a new and transformed world view, how do you feel about the fact that John's advice to his audiences was that they transform their economic outlook and behavior--impart one's "excess" to the disadvantaged, don't extract from others more than is fair, and don't use violence or fraud to earn more, but be satisfied with what you have?
 - ? How do you feel about the fact that a new and transformed perspective concerning temporal, materialistic, and economic matter is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God?

(edition: April 23, 2025)