

## Study # 14

### The Kingdom of God = A Kingdom of Cruciformity

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins". (Col. 1:12-14)

The "kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of Heaven" refers to the reigning of God or the realm in which He reigns. According to the author's understanding, these terms also refer to "the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13), being a spiritual kingdom now within the human hearts of Christians on earth in a measure and some day in a perfect form under the complete authority of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This "measure" is limited by our understanding of the kingdom, by lack of faith in what the King can do in and through our lives, and by lack of submission to the King's purpose to establish His kingdom in us.

It is clear that John the Baptist and Jesus both heralded a spiritual kingdom that was to be expressed in the earth, but a very different type of kingdom than the Roman empire, or even the kingdom under King David or Solomon:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him . . . "let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" . . .

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of All. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35-45)

When Jesus taught that willingness to die was a requirement of a disciple, He was declaring that the very essence of His kingdom was cruciformity. His kingdom

was to be governed by humble, sacrificial love; and leadership in the kingdom was to establish such cruciform love in all its subjects. The “gospel of the kingdom” was the good news that men could live a whole new life style by entering this spiritual kingdom, a life style which included having the same cruciform love he had — even for His enemies. Initially entering the kingdom requires a person to be “born from above” (John 3:3-7), and then living in the kingdom, to be committed to become His cruciform disciple.

Since the kingdom of God means the ruling of God, His will is done in His kingdom. In Studies #2 and #8, it is concluded that God’s will is for us to be conformed to the cruciform nature of His Son. Thus it is clearly a fundamental characteristic of those who are truly experiencing the kingdom of God to be totally committed to this process of being conformed to the paradigm of the Cross. Further, to do God’s will, we all must give it high priority to be committed to do whatever is possible to help others become likewise committed to cruciformity.

Many miss much of the present reality of God’s kingdom by relating *seeing*, *entering*, and *inheriting* the kingdom mainly to entering heaven after death. Our eyes need to be opened to *see* more and more of this spiritual kingdom; we need to *enter into* much deeper into this cruciform kingdom and to *inherit* now more of the power to transform us into Jesus’ cruciform nature and power to spread His kingdom of cruciformity to others.

With the understanding that cruciformity is the very basis and atmosphere of the Kingdom, Jesus’ parables about the kingdom take on fuller meaning. For instance, the majority of people today, like most of Jesus’ audience, do not understand what the kingdom of God really is and thus have hearts like the hard ground in the Parable of

the Sower where “the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” (Matt. 13:19) One reason for the lack of understanding is extreme dispensationalism that causes people to believe that such parables of the kingdom do not apply to us now. Other teachings that cause lack of understanding and hardening of the heart are teachings that do not emphasize the cruciformity of discipleship and thus do not teach the true nature of the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the weeds, the “good” seed are those who contain the cruciform life of Christ; weeds, those who only look as if they do. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven reflect the powerful potential in cruciform discipleship. In the parable of the net, the kingdom collects many who are not “real fish”, who say they are disciples, but are not really committed to cruciformity.

Study #16 presents the exciting future establishment of God’s kingdom throughout the whole earth, but our main concern today must be to focus on all the possibilities that the kingdom of God can become now and to seek out all the ways that we can experience and enlarge the kingdom. Anything that hinders us from entering now into more and more of the reality of the kingdom of God is the work of the enemy to hinder the expression of cruciformity of Jesus in the earth today. “[S]eek first his kingdom and his righteousness [cruciformity] . . . .” (Matt. 6:33)

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