

## What is the Kingdom Like: Part 2

We have started our venture towards understanding what the Bible says about the Kingdom of God. We started by seeking to understand what the Kingdom of God is like. It is so important that we understand what it is like because God intends for us to live in the kingdom, here and now, for the Kingdom of God is at hand. And if we do not understand the character and nature of the Kingdom we will most likely live in delusion thinking we are living in and for the Kingdom when in reality we are just living in and for ourselves and for the kingdom of this world. Here are the things we learned last week about the kingdom:

- It will have no end, it is an eternal Kingdom.
- The citizens of the Kingdom are also eternal and will have no end.
- The Kingdom will be given to the true citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- For now it is an unseen Kingdom that lives within the souls of its citizens.
- It is not of this world.
- It cannot be shaken or moved.
- It is a Kingdom of ultimate power.
- It is a Kingdom that is marked by mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness.

Before we move on, I would like to say something very important about the fact that the Kingdom is marked by mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness. The common thing about these four characteristics is that in and of themselves they require no relationship with the person who has hurt or offended you. These

are unilateral expressions. This is very important for you to understand because I believe that the enemy has already tried to place a burden on you that the Lord has not required. God the Father had mercy upon us and upon all of mankind. He did not require mankind to be in a reciprocal relationship with Him before He would show mercy. He just showed mercy and refused to judge us as we deserve. In this mercy, He provided redemption through His Son (***Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:14***). Jesus paid the price for the sin of all mankind and became the Savior of the world, showing compassion and forgiving the sin of all (***John 3:16; 4:42; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 9:12, 15; 1 John 4:14***). Yet, He did all this without demanding or requiring anything in return. In fact, most people have no clue that He extended to them mercy, redemption, compassion and forgiveness. It was completely a unilateral act.

Further, the extension of His mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness did not by default create an ongoing relationship or a responsibility with anyone. As we know, each person has to choose whether or not they want to be in a relationship with the Father; and there is only one way for that to take place, they must choose the Son (***1 John 2:22; 5:11-12***). However, God forces relationship on no one. The point being is that you can extend mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness towards others in your life and it be a unilateral act requiring nothing of the other person. In the same way, your extension of mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness does not by default create an ongoing relationship or any ongoing responsibility. In fact, they don't even need to know that you have forgiven them. Mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness is all about you choosing to be like your Father in heaven, and He requires it of us because He wants us to know freedom and not bondage. As we discussed last

week, unforgiveness locks us in a dark prison that is next to impossible to escape; but God wants us to live free from the burdens, shackles, and the darkness that comes with unforgiveness.

Now, it is an entirely different thing if you are the one who needs to seek forgiveness from others that you have hurt. In that case, you must involve the other person. That is not something you can do on your own. But even then, repenting for the ways you have hurt a person does not in and of itself demand an ongoing relationship with that persons or any ongoing responsibility (it all depends on what God is asking of you).

I wanted to make sure we addressed this because I know the enemy was twisting things and putting a relational burden on you which the Lord does not require. With that said, keep in mind that if you extend mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness towards a person, and it is truly an act of your submission to the Father, it will change your attitude towards that person. You may still never have a real relationship, or you may, but either way, it will alter the dynamic of your interactions. Instead of hostility and rejection you will be able to have mercy even when they do not do it right. But once again, the extension of mercy does not demand relational responsibility; don't confuse the two. We are told that even Jesus did not entrust Himself to people, for He knew all men, and He Himself knew what was in man (***John 2:24-25***).

Whether or not you have an ongoing relationship or responsibility with another person has everything to do with what God is asking of you. For example, with the Beloved, we are commanded by Jesus to love as we have been loved. Therefore, mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness is to be the norm in our

relationships with the Beloved; and love earnestly desires, but does not demand, relationship. But we do have a responsibility to the Beloved. But in terms of the “not” Beloved, you must seek the Lord to know if He even wants you to be in relationship; and, if so, when and to what extent that relationship should be forged. These are not things you should ever assume or take on yourself. Never forget **1 John 5:19**: “And we know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the evil one.” And “lies” is rendered in the *present middle indicative*. Thus, it is the reality right now (*present*), they have dug down deep in their soul and rejected God and by default chosen the evil one (*middle*), for as we know there are only two kings and you serve either one or the other; and this is a statement of fact (*indicative*). And this truth is why the Spirit tells us:

### **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Along with **1 John 5:19**, this should frame for you the nature of relationship you are to have with the “non” Beloved. You are in no way to be bound to them. Therefore, you have to carefully seek out the wisdom which God has for you in terms of all your relationships with those who are bound to the evil one. It is no small or silly matter; it is an issue of great consequence. Remember, there is no middle kingdom of man, there are only two kingdoms: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Likewise, there are only two kings: Jesus Christ who is the Lord our God Almighty—the Great King over all—and Lucifer, whom Jesus has allowed a temporary rule over this earth. People live in one or the other kingdom and are ruled by one or the other king. And don’t forget, some of the most religious people who seem to call on the name of the Lord actually abide in the kingdom of the evil one (**Matthew 7:22-23; 8:41-47**). It is not the words that prove out ones allegiance to the one true King, but their deeds. Only those who do the will of the Father are truly those who abide in the Kingdom of God (**Matthew 7:21; 12:50**).

Let’s move on to the next aspect of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is **inside out and upside down**; in other words, it does not follow the natural intuition or the wisdom of man. There is a series of passages in **Matthew 19:13-Matthew 20:16** that uses four different scenarios to explain this point. We will go through each one of these to understand the upside down and inside out nature of the Kingdom. These four scenarios seem unrelated at first, but they are all part of the same line of thought in terms of the upside down and inside out nature of His kingdom.

The first scenario: You must be absolutely dependent upon Him.

***Matthew 19:13-15***

Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

The first point the Lord makes is that no one can earn the kingdom of God—no one. Let me explain. Jesus sternly says, “...do not hinder them (the “little” children) from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” The Greek makes the point that these were little children, some babies even, who obviously cannot provide for themselves. Little children are dependent completely on their parents for all things pertaining to life. Parents feed, clothe, comfort, teach, nurture, and love them. They, on their part, receive all these wonderful blessings simply due to the fact that they are their parent’s children. They do not have to earn any of it; in fact, they cannot earn any of it. The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these—those who come to God completely dependent knowing they can do nothing for themselves and can earn nothing from Him. All they can do is receive all the goodness He has for them simply due to the fact that they are His children. This is how He wants us to live. Hence, His statement in ***Matthew 5:3*** “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Blessed are those who are literally beggars with nothing to offer God, but come to Him based on their understanding of their complete impoverished need for all that He is.

Please understand; we cannot earn His favor; we cannot earn His blessing; we cannot earn His reward; we cannot earn His care; and we cannot earn our place in

the Kingdom of God. Rather, all He wants is for us to come to Him like little children completely dependent upon Him for all aspects of our life. And I think this is where most people stumble and why guilt and shame are still such a big deal in the lives of the Beloved. They want to be good for God, but they can't. So they try harder and harder until they reach the point of frustration where they just eventually quit and live in failure exasperated that they just can't get it right. Shame overcomes them and well the rest is simply tragic; they live a life of compromise and deception.

We know the truth that we are dependent upon God for all things, but we don't live this truth. Our spirits are not beggarly, completely impoverished, waiting upon Him for every last bit of help, hope, and provision. Why? I believe our pride, personal goodness, and our humanity is in the way. This is in part because we don't make the practical connection between the things we get in this life by our hard work and our smarts with the provision which comes from God. But even our ability to work, to think, to act, and even our sanity, is a gift from God. All things are from Him (***Romans 11:36***). But because He imparts them into our being, we tend to think we are the ones who are capable, and so we don't live with a beggarly and impoverished spirit like a little child who looks to their daddy for everything. Yet, the Kingdom of God belongs to those who understand their absolute and desperate need for **ALL** things and come to Him for all things. And those who live this way are easy to recognize. They live in thanks for everything they have received from Him—everything—and they live a life where they are constantly and continually seeking Him. They take nothing for granted.

Scenario two: You must be absolutely dependent upon Him.

***Matthew 19:16-22***

And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "you shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

You have to understand that this whole scenario would have flipped the disciples minds upside down and turned them inside out. From the start, you can get a feel for the ethic of the culture. "Teacher, what **good** thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" The people of this day literally believed that if a person was rich that they must be "good" and practically deserve the right to enter the kingdom of God, since they were obviously so blessed by God. To them, material blessing was a sign



of reward and it provided people power, authority and the deference of others. Riches was a sign of righteousness whereas poverty was a sign that one was a sinner and forgotten by God. And this young man was so arrogant and so confident in himself that all he needed was to know that one thing which he could go “do” so he could assure his entry into the kingdom.

The cultural ethic of the day was all based on works and the lie of personal goodness. That is why Jesus was very curt: “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good.” The point is clear. Man cannot even dream of being good, only God is good (**Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; Romans 3:10-18**). This reiterated the point Jesus had just made about little children. The reality is that man is completely dependent upon God for all things, especially the goodness that only comes from God. Man is not good and can never be good; he must come to God completely dependent, beggarly and impoverished, and simply receive his goodness from the Lord.

Jesus then makes the spiritual point using the man’s physical riches. He essentially tells this young man to give it all away and become poor and impoverished and follow Jesus, for that is the pathway to becoming “complete.” Clearly this man wanted another answer. Giving up his riches was too much to ask. After all, people would think he was a sinner. He would lose his cultural power and authority and people would no longer defer to him. This was simply too much to ask because this man was living for the kingdom of this world and not the Kingdom of God. Accordingly, Jesus said: “It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus was not actually speaking

of men with riches or camels and needles. Rather, He was making the spiritual point about our need to live understanding that we are impoverished and beggarly completely dependent upon Jesus for all things no matter what we have in this world. Worldly riches is used as a metaphor for self-sufficiency. After all, if you are rich who do you really need to depend upon? And it is next to impossible to get a self-reliant man to know and accept his neediness.

Not understanding the spiritual significance, the disciples, having been totally flabbergasted by this whole encounter, asked: "Then who can be saved?" And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Men cannot earn the righteousness and goodness of God; it is impossible. They have no power to turn what is thoroughly corrupt and diseased by sin into something good. But with God, all things are possible; He can help even the most self-reliant man to understand his inherent poverty. But this man will still have to let go of those personal riches (all the ways they find provision in themselves) to receive the goodness of God. This is why we must live absolutely dependent upon Him for all things.

Scenario three: Rewards are not proportional to your effort.

### ***Matthew 19:27-30***

Then answering Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the

twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.”

Answering Jesus statement about the rich, and not really grasping what Jesus was saying, Peter wanted to know what is in it for him, for them, for us. Peter obviously thought that since they were the first to give it all up that they should get the biggest reward. Peter was stuck thinking he deserved something great for what he had done. He did not realize that in reality he was an unworthy slave doing only what he ought to have done (**Luke 17:7-10**). Nevertheless, the Lord comforted him by saying there will be reward for sure, but take note, “...many who are first will be last; and the last, first.” Once again Jesus scrambled the mind of His disciples. Let me make a quick note about the reward and then we will focus on this statement: “...many who are first will be last; and the last, first.”

There is real reward for the children of God—for those who have followed Him and left behind their dependency upon things of this world: houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or farms. To follow Jesus is to be dependent upon Him for all the things in which we would otherwise naturally find our comfort and provision. And He promises that He will provide over and above what we have lost, both in this life and the life to come. **Mark 10:29-31** says, “...there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake (by the way, **Luke 18:29** includes “wife” as part of that list), but that he will receive a hundred times as much now **in the present**

age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.” If we truly follow Him, He has our backs covered. We will not go unrewarded, unfulfilled, or fail to be provided for in every way that we need; but He wants our entire provision to come from Him and not from what we try to take hold of in this life.

Next, there is this bizarre statement about sitting on twelve thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It says this will take place at the time of regeneration (or in the Greek, “rebirth”), when the Lord sits on His throne (which took place at the time He ascended into heaven). **Mark 16:19** says He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God; accordingly, this passage is not talking about some time of the end (**Ephesians 1:20-21** confirms this). Now what is interesting is “shall sit” on the twelve thrones is in the *future* tense, but judging the twelve tribes is in the *present active participle*.

First, Jesus was talking to the disciples before the regeneration, before He brought to them the rebirth (essentially before His resurrection). So He spoke of our sitting on these thrones in the *future* tense. But that is now something that has happened. **Ephesians 2:4-6**, says “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” And “seated” is in the *aorist active indicative*. So it is a statement of fact regarding our reality; we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms; that is our privilege of having left all things and finding our dependency upon Him.

Second, in terms of judging the twelve tribes of Israel, being in the *present active*

*participle*, it was happening then and it is continuing to happen in our now. The lives of the disciples, and our very lives, brings judgment on the twelve tribes of Israel for their rejection of the Messiah. It is all bizarre spiritual stuff, but this judgment is part of our reward which is experienced even in our now. I believe we are told about this judgment because God wants us to understand and completely internalize our true spiritual identity since it is a lofty and privileged position to sit in the seat of judgment. Jesus wants this truth to help us understand who we are in the overall scheme of things so we will understand our neediness for all He provides to us—all His glory and wonder. There is no possibility for us to earn the right to sit with Him in the heavenly nor to sit in judgment over Israel. Our rewards, our glory is great, but it comes from Him and not because of what we have done.

Now let's get back to the statement: "...many who are first will be last; and the last, first." It is clear from this whole dialogue that Peter thought that he and the disciples should be given extra credit because they were the first ones to follow. Jesus assures Peter that he will be taken care of but turns his thinking upside down and inside out. Many who are last will be first and the first will be last.

Scenario four: Rewards are not proportional to your effort.

### ***Matthew 20:1-16***

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; and to those he said,

“You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.” And so they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day long?” They said to him, “Because no one hired us.” He said to them, “You go into the vineyard too.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.” When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, saying, “These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.” But he answered and said to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am good?” So the last shall be first, and the first last.

This gives us perspective on God’s mind. He simply does not reason the way we do. We still think everything, including our reward, is based on our effort. Therefore most of us have an emotional reaction to this story; we just do not believe what happened is equitable. It does not sit well with us. Nevertheless, this story drives home the point that our promised reward is not in payment for our good deeds and for faithfully serving the Lord. Our reward is based only on the fact that God is

good. This is why I believe Jesus told the following story:

***Luke 17:7-10***

Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come immediately and sit down to eat”? But will he not say to him, “Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink”? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, “We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.”

Jesus makes the point that there is no reward tied to doing what you should be doing anyways; it is just what we ought to have done. Accordingly, I want you to understand, we do not have to work to get the prize, to get the reward, to obtain the blessing. We already have all of it. He freely gave it to us before we ever did or said a word (***Ephesians 1:3-14***). We are told that He has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. It has been done. We don't have to work for it or earn it. He has freely and graciously provided it to us. Our ability to experience it however is another thing all together; and this brings up this issue of what we have to do to experience it.

Well, let me make it clear that according to the Biblical *Design Point* there is no such thing as what we have to do; it is a misnomer. Our attempts to “do” good for God will fail because only God is good. Thus, only He can do good; it is just that He

is willing to do that good in and through our lives when we give Him access. All else, all that we “do” for God, is just religion and it is meaningless. This is why the *Design Point* of **Galatians 2:20** clearly declares that as we die to our self, as we set aside our *Old Sinful Nature*, as we let the fire and the knife have its way with us, Jesus will take over that territory in our soul and He will do the Father’s will in and through our lives. We will just be the vessel, the Temple so to speak, in which He operates (**1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19**). This is why Jesus said that if we ask anything in His name, He will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son (**John 14:13-14**). He will literally be the one doing the will of the Father (what was asked in His name) in and through our lives.

Thus, our rewards are not proportional to our effort. Our rewards are based on the effort of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. He did the work; now we just get to experience life with Him and have the wonderful blessing of being used by Him to fulfill the Father’s work here on earth. It is a remarkable privilege and it is intended to take the pressure off of our lives so we do not have to live in failure and shame. We do it wrong by definition, which is why He does not expect us to do it right. He does it right. All He expects is for us to believe this to be true and thereby give Him the room in our soul to do it right. He just expects us to stop trying to be good, trying to earn our way, and stop trying to be self-sufficient and receive what He has done for us and will do in and through us. This is why He could say in **Matthew 11:29-30**, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

The Kingdom of God is upside down and inside out from all that we, in our



humanity, would expect. And this is why we must be fully, completely, wholly dependent upon Him for all things. This is why we must be impoverished in spirit—completely beggarly—and come to Him like a little child needy for their daddy for every part of their lives. This is how the Kingdom of God functions. Is this how you live? If not, then it is time to let go of your control and your wrong belief and rest in who you are in Christ. He has already given you every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. Now it is yours to enjoy!

Let's Pray