

## The Church In the Synoptic Gospels

Matt. 16:18

### Introduction:

1. After Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church."
2. The word church ("ekklesia") is only used here and in Matt. 18:17 in the synoptic gospels. I find that rather amazing in light of Jesus' plan to build His church.
3. And yet, the concept of the kingdom is frequently addressed.
4. There is a strong connection in Matt. 18:18 between the church and the kingdom. Christ says He will build His church and then give the keys of the kingdom to Peter. It is much like saying, "I am going to build a house and give you the keys to it."
5. What relationship does the kingdom bear to the church as the Christian community? This is the question that we will address in this study.

### Discussion:

- I. The concept of "kingdom" in the teaching of Jesus seems to center on Christ and not the disciples (as those who would constitute the Christian community).
  - A. John's preaching of the kingdom at hand was a prelude to Jesus' coming to prominence, not the formulation of a Christian community.
    1. John was not preaching the establishment of the church, but the coming of the King.
    2. He preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).
    3. He quoted Isa. 40:3, "Make ready the way of the Lord" (Matt. 3:3).
    4. He said, "He who is coming after me is mightier than I" (Matt. 3:11).
    5. This is the kingdom that John's father, Zacharias, had spoken of when he said, "God has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant" (Lk. 1:69). Cf. 2 Sam. 7:16.
    6. This is a prominent theme in the O.T. In 1 Sam. 8 when Israel demanded a king Samuel thought they were rejecting him, but God said, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them" (7). The gospel accounts call for a return to acceptance of God as King.
    7. John preached repentance, i.e., turning to submit to the King's rule.
  - B. The rule of God seems to be the primary focus rather than the people over whom God rules. And yet it is people's hearts over which God rules. So there is an interrelationship between God's rule and the Christian community.
  - C. This is consistent with O.T. usage of the concept of the kingdom. See Psa. 145:10-13. The emphasis is not so much on the domain over which God reigns as much as the reign itself. Cf. Psa. 103:19.
  - D. The N.T. links the coming of the kingdom with doing God's will (Matt. 6:10).
  - E. The presence of the kingdom is evidenced by Jesus' kingly power (Lk. 11:20).
  - F. The emphasis is on God's activity of ruling rather than on the area or realm over which He rules.

## II. Matt. 16:18ff emphasizes Jesus' authoritative power.

- A. "I will build **My** church."
- B. "The gates of Hades will not **overpower** it."
- C. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom."
- D. "Whatever you bind shall have been bound in heaven." It is interesting that it is the power of heaven that is behind this. It is not that Peter has binding and loosing authority himself, but heaven. Flesh and blood did not reveal who Jesus was but "My Father who is in heaven."
- E. The acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of God implies recognition of Him as Ruler and Lord (1 Tim. 6:13-16). Cf. Matt. 27:11ff.
- F. It is this confession that is critical to membership in the kingdom, but it is submission to His Kingship or rule in one's life that is being confessed.
- G. It is not so much about identity with the kingdom as submission to Jesus as Lord and King that is critical.

### Summary:

1. The great confession now takes on real meaning. No longer is it a mere statement made before baptism. Confessing Jesus as King is equivalent to accepting His Lordship. Cf. Jn. 18:33-37. This is what many of the Jews rejected. This confession now becomes the rock upon which the church/community is built.
2. Individuality of our relationship to the King now becomes central—not just the group that we are associated with. We are not saved on the basis of community identity, but individual identity. Names are in the book of life not the group (Rom. 16:13; Rev. 20:15).
3. Christ's authority in the church has to do with submission to Him as King (Matt. 28:19-20).
3. Those humbly submissive are greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18:11). Those without status, but who serve are the greatest (Matt. 20:20ff).

## III. The church finds its origin in the kingdom.

- A. Several of the sayings of Jesus about the kingdom have the idea of the disciples entering the kingdom (Mk. 9:47; Matt. 7:21; Lk. 16:16).
- B. The Pharisees prevented people from entering the kingdom (Matt. 23:23; cf. Lk. 11:52).
- C. Matt. 16:19 refers to the "keys of the kingdom," thus using an image that involves entrance.
- D. People have the opportunity to enter the kingdom.
  1. This is accomplished as one submits to the rule of God in their life.
  2. Those who submit to God's rule in their life come to constitute the church, the Community, the group of citizens that are identified with the kingdom.
- E. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come." If the kingdom coming has reference to "God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10) then it is **His rulership** that is primary.

1. It is “he who does the will of My Father” (Matt. 7:21-23) that enters the kingdom.
2. The church constitutes the community of those who do the Father’s will, those who submit to His leadership and rule as King.
3. To pray for the kingdom to come in this sense is legitimate. Some have missed the point by saying it is inappropriate to pray for the kingdom to come. They identify the coming of the kingdom as equivalent to the establishment of the Christian community (the church) and argue that once the community exists it is inappropriate to pray for it to exist. This is not a prayer for the kingdom to exist, but a prayer for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven.
4. By placing emphasis on that aspect of the kingdom represented by God’s rulership and our submission the emphasis changes from simply being identified as a member of the church to submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
  - a. It is not identification with the group that is primary. It is submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Lord of lords and King of kings.
  - b. Submission to his kingship then results in our identification with others who constitute the community of those who submit to the King.
  - c. Some may be in association with the community who do not submit to the King (cf. 1 Cor. 5).
  - d. Emphasis must be placed on submission to the King rather than identification with the community (cf. Matt. 7:21-27). Submission to the King is the rock upon which the church is built. Cf. Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4ff.
- F. Conversion is not about “joining the church” but about submitting to the King! We need to concern ourselves less with “joining the church” and “coming to church” and more about **submitting to the King!**

IV. The kingdom consists of all those who submit to the Kingship of God, past, present and future.

- A. In the past, these are represented by those who Israel who submitted to God as King (1 Sam. 8:7-8; 12:12ff).
- B. In the present, these are represented by those who constitute the church, for they are those people who submit to God as King (Matt. 16:18). Submission to God’s Son is submission to God.
- C. In the future, it is those who submit to God as King that constitute the heavenly kingdom. 2 Tim. 2:11-12 refers to our reigning with Him. We will reign with Him in the new Jerusalem, the capital city. Note Rev. 21:5ff. Note that it is He who sits on the throne that says these things. The second death has no power over these.
- D. We have come out of the kingdom of darkness and been transferred into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13-14). Cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18. Therefore what manner of persons ought we to be in holy conduct and godliness (2 Pet. 3:10ff).

Conclusion:

1. If you have not submitted to the King would you do so?

2. Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).
3. The King will forgive you!
4. If you have done this, but have turned away from submission to Him, then turn back before He returns. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
5. Is He delaying His return waiting for your repentance?