

KINGDOM REALITY

Matthew 5:1-10

We tend to associate the beginning of a new year with the possibility of new and good things. That anticipation is tempered by our recognition that we have to work to realize many of the good things we hope to see. As we move into 2021, I want us to consider Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, to look back to his teaching to help us move forward into the new year. We will, over the next few weeks, consider three messages from the Sermon on the Mount that will hopefully compose a perspective that will guide us throughout this year and help us realize the good things God wants to be part of our lives. We begin in this lesson by considering the reality of the kingdom Jesus talked about in his sermon, which focuses us on an important message – *we live in the present as representatives of Jesus' kingdom's future arrival.*

The expected, unexpected kingdom

- Jesus, Matthew wrote, began his ministry by preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”¹ (*Matthew 4:17*), a message that formed the centerpiece of his efforts (*Matthew 4:23*).
- Matthew, who composed his gospel thematically rather than chronologically, followed his description of Jesus' message with his record of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, an intentionally placed, lengthy section of teaching that outlines Jesus' description of the “kingdom of heaven” anticipated by the Jewish people.
- Jesus' teachings about the kingdom, however, did not fit the anticipations of his countrymen – **Jesus portrayed the kingdom in a way that challenged Jewish understandings about God's kingdom while remaining consistent with God's purposes** (*cf. Matthew 5:3-10, 17-19*).
- Consider, therefore, some of the things Jesus' Sermon on the Mount reveals about the kingdom:

*The kingdom is populated with unlikely people
(Matthew 5:3-10, 20)*

*The people in the kingdom have the responsibility of representing it through their
behavior
(Matthew 5:13-16; cf. 7:15-20)*

*The kingdom's full arrival is tied to obedience rather than military, political, or
economic activity
(Matthew 6:10)*

¹Matthew 5:3. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



*While the kingdom has arrived, it has not yet fully entered the world
(Matthew 4:17; 12:22-28; 6:10)*

- Jesus' teachings about the kingdom point to an important point – **we live in anticipation of the kingdom's full arrival while working in the present to facilitate its coming through our obedience.**
- Jesus' revelations about the kingdom and the disconnect that existed between his teachings and peoples' expectations raises the question – "What exactly is 'the kingdom of heaven?'". Consider the following insights:
 - While God rules everything by virtue of His sovereign identity as creator (*cf. Revelation 4:1-11*), the "kingdom of heaven" refers more narrowly to His rule over a kingdom properly submitted to His authority (*cf. Matthew 6:10*).
 - God gave Jesus authority so that he could defeat His enemies and resubmit the creation to Him (*1 Corinthians 15:20-28*).
 - John's revelation pictures Jesus' successful mission when an angel announced, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (*Revelation 11:15*).
 - In seeking to resubmit the creation to God, Jesus works to reestablish God's union with humanity because "the dwelling place of God is with man" (*Revelation 21:3*).
 - Jesus commissioned the church to serve as a vanguard of the coming kingdom, attracting people to the kingdom through its kingdom-shaped lifestyle (*cf. Matthew 28:18-20; John 13:34-35; 17:20-23*).

Applications

- We must not allow the evils and conflicts of our present world to distract us from this important truth - **Jesus' kingdom is real and citizenship within it should be prized.**
- A large, important goal motivates us in the present – **Jesus expects us to live in ways that evidences the reality and blessings of his kingdom.**
- Fulfilling the goal Jesus gives us requires us to not allow the present to define our thinking (*Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:1-2*).

Jesus has entrusted us with the important responsibility of representing the reality and goodness of his kingdom in the world. Let's therefore commit to living in ways that identifies us with his kingdom by embracing the thinking and behaviors that defines his kingdom.

