



War is raging. The kingdom of heaven battles the domain of darkness for the souls of mankind. Already, the Divine invasion of earth has begun. The King of kings Himself has infiltrated the enemy's territory on a daring rescue mission. To save our wicked race, He's paid the price for our treason with His own life. The shedding of the King's innocent blood has transformed slaves into saints. And His triumphant victory over death has transferred the redeemed from utter darkness into marvelous light.

But the fight isn't over. The tide of battle has indeed turned, and the kingdom of God is indeed in our midst. Yet, still we await the second coming of our Lord from heaven and the establishment of His earthly throne forever. Meanwhile, the current ruler of this world does everything within his considerable power to oppose the rightful King. He is determined to keep a firm grasp on his remaining slaves through fear and deceit. And he'd like nothing better than to destroy the saints via temptation and oppression. The kingdoms of this world vie for our love and loyalty, while the ancient dragon prowls and plots our downfall.

Fear not! The Lion of Judah has overcome! Jesus Christ, the King of kings, is greater than any power in heaven or earth. Have you enthroned Him as Lord of your life? In this all-out, cosmic war, where exactly does your allegiance lie? In which domain do you claim citizenship? Are you spending your days on this earth advancing the kingdom of Christ? And are you prepared to take up arms for Him and fight; not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil?

If so, then welcome to the battle. Welcome to the...

Klaskh of the Kingdoms

Speaking Schedule

Kids' Camp 2018

Monday Evening Chapel: The King of the Kingdom
Tuesday Cabin Devotions: The Gospel of the Kingdom
Tuesday Morning Chapel: The Mysteries of the Kingdom
Tuesday Evening Chapel: The Children of the Kingdom
Wednesday Cabin Devotions: The Forgiveness of the Kingdom
Wednesday Morning Chapel: The Humility of the Kingdom
Wednesday Evening Chapel: The Growth of the Kingdom
Thursday Cabin Devotions: The Equality of the Kingdom
Thursday Morning Chapel: The Value of the Kingdom
Thursday Evening Chapel: Preparing for the Kingdom
Friday Cabin Devotions: Praying for the Kingdom
Friday Morning Chapel: The Return of the King

A Note to Guest Speakers

Thank you so much for your willingness to teach the Word of God to our students at Cowboy's Rest this summer! Our staff has been praying for you often throughout these past months, and we will continue to do so as camp rapidly approaches.

As you know, our focus this summer is on Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God. As this was (and is) obviously a topic close to our Lord's heart, there is a wealth of material within the New Testament upon which to draw. To narrow things down, we've decided to arrange our camp program around "the parables of the kingdom." These illustrations of Christ are found throughout the synoptic gospels, but are concentrated mostly in Matthew, particularly in chapter 13. One of our goals with this curriculum was to cover every parable that Jesus used to illustrate His authority and reign. A much more important goal for camp, however, would be for every student to learn what the kingdom of God is; to understand how a person enters into and lives within it; and to know where he or she stands in relationship to it. If one or two of the following parables or Scripture references gets left-out along the way ... well, that's okay.

The lesson descriptions below are provided simply to aide you in your preparation for teaching. We want you to feel free to follow the Spirit's leading as you study for each session. If you sense Him guiding you toward other Scripture references or differing points of application, that's fine. If He grants you insight into how to make these sessions more age-appropriate and interactive, that's wonderful. And if He gives you some crazy, creative ideas for making all this information stick, awesome! We only ask that you cling to the Word.

Finally, just to make sure there's no confusion, you will be responsible for teaching all eight chapel sessions (both morning and evening). The cabin devotions will be lead by our counselors, although you are certainly welcome to participate in those small-group sessions as well.

Thanks again for being part of our summer ministry team at Cowboy's Rest. We are so excited to see what the Lord will choose to accomplish this year, by His grace and for His glory. We look forward to partnering with you in labor for His kingdom!

Godspeed,

The CR Senior Staff

Description of Lessons

Monday Evening Chapel: The King of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Colossians 1:12-23, Philippians 2:5-11

Key Points:

- This opening session gives us the opportunity to share the gospel of the kingdom at the outset of the week, and to introduce unsaved students to Jesus Christ. For the campers who already know Jesus as Savior, this lesson serves as a reminder that Christ must also be enthroned as King in their lives.

- The story of the gospel, or “good news”, really begins when God created the world and ruled over it as King. Mankind was His steward; made in God’s image and responsible for ruling this “**very good**” earth as His representative. (Gen. 1:26-28, 1:31)

- When the first humans sinned, they rebelled against God and His authority over their lives. As a result of their treason, the entire creation was cursed and “**subjected to futility**”. (Romans 8:19-22) Death entered the world, and the fear of death enslaved men. (Hebrews 2:14-15) Satan, the deceiver, became the “**ruler of this world**” and “**the prince of the power of the air**”. (John 12:31, Eph. 2:2) Not only humans, but the entirety of God’s beautiful creation became fallen and marred.

- Throughout the following millennia, God began to lay the groundwork for the salvation and redemption of His fallen realm. He selected the nation of Israel as His chosen people through whom He would bless all the nations of earth. (Gen. 22:18) Through the sacrificial system, He taught them that “**without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**” (Heb. 9:22)

- God also spoke through His prophets to reveal His plans for the future. Many of these prophecies looked forward to the day when the Messiah, or “Anointed One”, would reign over all nations as the perfectly just and righteous King. Passages such as Isaiah 9 and 11 promised that all wickedness and affliction would cease when Messiah’s kingdom was established. Even nature would be restored to harmony and peace. Furthermore, apocalyptic visions like Daniel 7 revealed that the reign of the “**Son of Man**” would be global in scope and eternal in duration. (See Dan. 7:13-14.)

- Of course, it would be impossible for a mere man to accomplish all this. Only God Himself could pay for the sin of the entire human race. Only God could reconcile the fallen creation to Himself. Only God could establish an eternal kingdom of perfect justice and perfect peace. And so God did ... and is still doing. Jesus is God the Son in the flesh. (John 1:1-18, Col. 1:15) He is the Messiah, the promised King, and He came to this earth to redeem and restore His creation.

- Even before His birth and during His infancy, Jesus was recognized as a King. (Luke 1:31-33, Matt. 2:2) Throughout His public ministry, His main message was about His coming kingdom. Mark records Jesus’ “inaugural address” as follows: “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**” (Mark 1:15) Ultimately, when our blameless Lord was unjustly executed, the charge against Him read, “**THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**” (Matt. 27:37) The Kingship of Christ was central to His birth, life and death.

- So what happened? Why would the promised King suffer the death of a common criminal? How could Jesus declare that God’s glorious kingdom was at hand if He knew all along that He was going to be crucified? From an earthly perspective it makes little sense. Yet, Scripture reveals that Christ’s death was the very thing that established God’s kingdom. Colossians 1:19-20 reads as follows: “**For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him [Jesus], and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.**” Jesus’ death made (and is making) peace between God and His fallen realm. For us humans, this means that Jesus paid the price for our sin. He underwent the death penalty that each of us deserves for the treason we’ve committed against our Heavenly King. Colossians 1:21-22 continues: “**And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach...**” Jesus’ death on our behalf can rescue us from the “**domain of darkness**” in which we’ve been enslaved by sin. And,

because of Christ's sacrifice, the Father can now transfer believers **"into His marvelous light"** and **"the kingdom of His beloved Son"**. (I Pet. 2:9, Col. 1:13)

- But what about all the other promises of the kingdom, like a restored creation and an end to the reign of death? Well, in His triumphant resurrection, Jesus provided us with a foretaste of the fulness of the kingdom to come. He is **"the beginning, the firstborn from the dead"** and **"the first fruits of those who are asleep"**. (Col. 1:18, I Cor. 15:20, Rev. 1:5) By virtue of the fact that He conquered death and broke its power, Christ can offer us newness of life now, and the certainty of resurrection in the age to come. (Romans 8:10-11, I Cor. 15:54-58) What is more, God the Father and God the Son have sent God the Spirit to indwell and empower believers. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is also a preview of the coming kingdom. (Acts 2:16-21) In fact, the presence of the Spirit in our lives is the pledge or the "down-payment" of our spiritual inheritance. (Eph. 1:13-14, II Cor. 1:22 & 5:5)

- So ... what does all this mean for students at Cowboy's Rest, 2009? Well, first of all, each of us needs to be certain which kingdom we belong to. Unless, we've placed our faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, then we're still a part of the rebellious domain of darkness. I Corinthians 6:9-11 makes it very clear: **"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."** Each of us needs to ask, have I been "justified in the name of Christ?" Do I believe in His resurrection? And am I trusting in Him as my Savior? (Romans 10:9-10)

- If the answer is "yes," that's wonderful. But we also need to ask ourselves a second question: Do I confess Christ as Lord and King over my life? Am I living for His kingdom? You see, the good news that Jesus preached is that the kingdom of God really is here. God's rule and authority are being applied in people's lives all around the world. Traitors are being forgiven and transformed into children of the King. Now, it's certainly true that God's kingdom has not yet been completely and physically established on this earth. But that shouldn't keep us from living by its law of love, or working to expand its spiritual borders right now. If we've been saved, then we are already citizens of the kingdom of heaven!

- In conclusion, let us be reminded by the words of Philippians 2:9-11 that someday, every created thing will bow before Jesus Christ as the King of kings. We've been given the choice to willingly do so now.

"Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Tuesday Morning Cabin Devotions: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matt. 4:17, 4:23, 9:35, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:43-44, 8:1, 9:11

Key Points:

- The gospel according to Jesus is that **"the kingdom of God is at hand."** (Mark 1:15) In fact, Jesus said that spreading this message was the purpose for which He was sent. (Luke 4:43) How much do we really know about God's kingdom? How does the **"gospel of the kingdom"** apply to our lives? (Matt. 4:23)

Tuesday Morning Chapel: The Mysteries of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 13:1-23

Key Parables: *The Sower and the Soils*

Key Points:

- Since Jesus came to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth, He spent a lot of time teaching His disciples what that kingdom is like. One of His main methods of doing this was through parables. A parable is an earthly

- story with a heavenly meaning. During each of our remaining chapel sessions we'll be examining a handful of these parables to learn more about the awesome kingdom into which we've been adopted.
- Jesus granted that His disciples might know the mysteries of the kingdom. (Matt. 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10) Not everyone will come to understand these "secrets"; only those who follow Christ and heed His Word. In the New Testament, the word "mystery" usually refers to part of God's plan which was hidden from previous ages, but which has now been graciously revealed. (Matt. 13:16-17, Col. 1:25-27) The fact that not everyone would accept His teaching was one of the reasons that Jesus spoke in parables so often. (Matt. 13:13-15)
 - The parable of the sower (or the soils) describes different responses to "**the word of the kingdom.**" (Matt. 13:19) Basically, the four different soils in the story represent four different states of the human heart. Note that only the fourth and final soil received the seed and produced fruit. This should cause us to pause and evaluate our own hearts. Are they open to the gospel of the kingdom? Are we trusting God to help us understand His Word? Is there anything in our lives that might be keeping the seed from taking root? Is the Word of God bearing fruit through our actions and attitudes today?
 - NOTE: Since Jesus taught this parable from a boat, I think it would be fun to replicate that experience with the students. We could have them sit on the shore of the reservoir and listen as the parable is read from a paddle-boat or canoe. One point that could be made is that Jesus obviously understands how sound waves and acoustics work since He created them. Preaching from open water provides natural amplification.

Tuesday Evening Chapel: The Children of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 13:24-30, 13:34-43, 13:47-50; Matthew 25:31-46

Key Parables: *The Wheat and Tares, The Dragnet, The Sheep and the Goats*

Key Points:

- Both the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-30) and the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50) illustrate the fact that not everyone who associates with the kingdom of God is actually a true child of the kingdom. In this present age, the righteous and the wicked live side-by-side, and it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between the two groups, even within God's church. However, Christ knows His own. As the parable of the wheat and tares illustrates, the Son of Man appointed (or "sowed") the sons of the kingdom Himself. (Also see John 15:16.) At the end of this age, when His earthly reign is finally established, Jesus and His angels will sort out the redeemed from the pretenders. The destiny of the wicked is heart-breaking. Yet the future of those who have been declared righteous by the blood of the Lamb is glorious.
- Jesus discusses this day of sorting and judgment earlier in the book of Matthew in 7:13-27. Here He warns that "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter.**" (Matt. 7:21) It's not enough to talk like a Christian, or hang-out with Christians, or come from a Christian family. In fact, it's not even enough to perform miracles or exorcisms in Jesus' name. (Matt. 7:22-23) To truly become a child of the kingdom, we must each enter through the narrow gate. (Matt. 7:13) We must be born anew by the Spirit. (John 3:3-6) In short, we must enter through Jesus Himself, for He alone is the Door and the Way. (John 10:7-10 & 14:6)
- And if we have entered the kingdom, then our lives should prove it. Jesus says that we will be able to discern the righteous (or the sheep) from the wicked (or the wolves) on the basis of their deeds. Just like good and bad trees, the redeemed will bring forth good fruit, while the unrepentant will bear only bad fruit. (Matt. 7:15-20) And Jesus isn't just referring to miraculous deeds here. Rather, when we faithfully listen to God's Word and act on it, our lives will be built upon a sure foundation. Then, even our small works will be consistently pleasing to Him. (Matt. 7:24-27)
- One final passage that illustrates the day of sorting in the kingdom is Matthew 25:31-46. This probably isn't technically a parable since Jesus seems to be speaking quite literally. In a manner similar to a shepherd separating sheep and goats, Christ the King will sort humans from all nations into two groups. Then Jesus will say to those on His right, "**Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**" (Matt. 25:34) Throughout the remainder of the passage it becomes clear

that the earthly lives of these “sheep” proved that they were children of the kingdom. Their fruit was good, and their deeds were selfless. These charitable works did not earn salvation, but the King cites them as evidence of the love of these saints for Him. Perhaps it’s time each of us took a long look at the fruit of our own lives. After all, if we don’t, someday He will.

Wednesday Morning Cabin Devotions: The Forgiveness of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 18:21-35

Key Parables: *The Unmerciful Slave*

Key Points:

-This parable is told in response to Peter’s question about how many times he should forgive his brother. As children of the kingdom, we should remember how much we have been forgiven by our King. In light of that, we should be incredibly merciful and forgiving to our fellow slaves. The Father will discipline us for any unforgiveness in our hearts.

Wednesday Morning Chapel: The Humility of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 21:28 - 22:14

Key Parables: *The Two Sons, The Wicked Vine Growers, The Wedding Feast*

Key Points:

- In Matthew chapters 21 through 23, Jesus confronts the proud, Jewish elite during the week leading up to His crucifixion. In these chapters He uses three parables to illustrate how the religious leadership has rejected their King and missed the kingdom of God. For us, these passages are an excellent reminder that our entry into the kingdom is only through the gracious forgiveness of God. Humble repentance is the antidote to haughty self-righteousness.

- In the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32), Jesus informs the chief priests that “**the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.**” (Matt. 21:31) That is because these “sinners” recognized their disobedience, felt remorse for it, repented of it, and then sought to obey God. The religious leadership, on the other hand, appeared pious and obedient outwardly, but were inwardly full of rebellion and unbelief. God prefers the penitence of prostitutes to the pretend piety of priests.

- In Jesus’ second parable, the rebellion of the Jewish leadership comes into even sharper relief. Here they are pictured as wicked vine-growers plotting to seize control of a vineyard that is not rightfully theirs. (Matt. 21:33-46) Via this illustration, Jesus describes how God’s chosen people have rebelled against Him, how they’ve persecuted the prophets, and how they are soon going to reject and kill God’s beloved Son. As a result of this rejection, Christ tells the chief priests that “**the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it.**” (Matt. 21:43) Based on what we learn throughout the remainder of the New Testament, this “nation” is not one specific geographic area, but rather the worldwide Church, which includes both Jews and Gentiles. (See I Pet. 2:9-10.) Because the Jews rejected their King during His first advent, the kingdom was graciously opened to all nations and peoples. (See Matt. 8:10-12, Luke 13:28-30, and Rom. 11.) This also helps us understand how Jesus could announce that the kingdom of God is here, and yet, why it still hasn’t come in its fullness. (More on that in future lessons.)

- In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus again pictures the rejection of the kingdom by those to whom it was originally promised. (Matt. 22:1-14. See a similar parable in Luke 14:15-24.) The kingdom of God is also pictured as a wedding feast in Revelation 19, which we’ll study later. In the present parable, because of the refusal of those who were initially invited, the king opens up His dinner to anyone and everyone, “**both evil and good**” (Matt. 22:10), and including the “**poor and crippled and blind and lame.**” (Luke 14:21) However, notice that the guests are still expected to be dressed appropriately. Some commentators suggest that wedding clothes were supplied to the common folk at the door. Regardless, the application is clear. Although God has

opened-up His kingdom to all nations, each of us must still be robed in righteousness and clothed with Christ if we are to enter. (Rom. 13:14, Gal. 3:27, Rev. 3:18, 7:14, 22:14.) In the parable, the man who is violently thrown out of the wedding feast must have thought that he was adequately clothed just as he was. If we believe that we're "good enough" to enter God's presence without being cleansed by the blood of Christ, then our self-righteousness is just as wicked as that of the Pharisees.

- So, we've studied three parables illustrating the fact that self-righteousness and pride are incompatible with the kingdom of God. Now we need to examine the positive side of this truth, which Jesus states as follows: "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**" (Matt. 5:3) In this verse, and in the beatitudes which follow, our Lord makes it clear that the kingdom is populated with the gentle, the humble, the selfless, and the formerly persecuted. When the disciples asked Jesus about rank in the kingdom, He told them that the humility of a child was the prerequisite not only for greatness in the kingdom, but also for mere entry. (Matt. 18:1-4) Later, when children were being brought to Him for blessing, Jesus declared that "**the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.**" (Matt. 19:14. Also see Mark 10:15.) We must approach the Father in genuine humility, with childlike faith, and in complete dependence on Christ if we are to dwell in His kingdom. And we must learn to serve one another. A final passage in which Jesus deals with the humility of kingdom-dwellers is Matthew 20:20-28. Here He contrasts the power-hungry rulers of the Gentiles with the humble servant-leaders of His kingdom. Christ concludes His teaching with this statement: "**...whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**" (Matt. 20:27-28) If the King of kings humbly served His subjects, then we ought to selflessly serve both Him and each other. Humility is one of the major marks of a child of the King.

Wednesday Evening Chapel: The Growth of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 13:31-33, Mark 4:26-29

Key Parables: *The Mustard Seed, The Leaven, The Gradually Growing Seed*

Key Points:

- So ... where exactly is the kingdom? Jesus announced that, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...**" (Mark 1:15) Often, He spoke as if the kingdom were already present on this earth. He reasoned that "**if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.**" (Matt. 12:28, Luke 11:20) And, in His most definitive statement on the subject, Jesus told His critics that, "**... behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.**" (Luke 17:21) Yet, Jesus also referred to the coming of the kingdom as a future event. (See Matt. 6:10, 25:34, and Luke 21:31.) And all it takes is a glance at a newspaper to see that God's perfect kingdom of peace and justice has yet to be established on this earth. So, is the kingdom of God a thing of the present or of the future? The answer is ... both.

- When Jesus came to earth, He inaugurated God's kingdom spiritually. His death reconciled us to the Father, and when He rose from the dead He became the "**first-fruits**" of the great, future resurrection. (I Cor. 15:23, Col. 1:17) If we define God's kingdom as *God's reign and sovereignty being applied to His creation*, then we can find the kingdom anywhere on earth that people are submitting to Jesus as King. The kingdom of heaven truly invaded this fallen world two-thousand years ago. And it has been growing spiritually ever since as more and more people are reconciled to God and apply His rule to their lives. This is what some refer to as "The Already" of the kingdom. God's reign is indeed already here.

- Jesus used three different parables to describe the invisible yet inevitable growth of His kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19) illustrates the kingdom's humble beginnings. Though it started small, it is steadily growing into something surprisingly large and stately. The parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33, Luke 13:20-21) pictures the kingdom as something that quietly fills and permeates its surroundings. This could refer to how God's rule fills-up our lives through sanctification; or the parable could be demonstrative of how the gospel is gradually spreading and filling the earth. Finally, the parable of the gradually growing seed (Mark 4:26-29) illustrates the truth that the kingdom keeps on growing, whether or not the world pays it any heed. As saints, we live in and labor for the kingdom, yet even we don't

fully understand its spiritual progression and direction. One thing is certain, however. Someday the kingdom will be full-grown, and then the harvest will come. (Mark 4:29)

- As we reflect upon the growth of the kingdom, it's important to remember that, in the present age, God's reign on this earth is not advanced by military might or political power. This is what Jesus told Pilate in John 18.

When the Roman governor asked Him whether or not He was a King, Jesus answered with the following statement: **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm."**

(John 18:36) So we see that the kingdom of God is NOT advanced through physical battles. Every time Christians have forgotten this fact throughout history, the results have been tragic and despicable. Rather, we are called to assist in the expansion of the kingdom's spiritual borders. As we preach the gospel to all creation, as we make disciples of all nations, as we do justly and love mercy, as we defend the helpless and oppressed, and as we yield every area of our lives to Christ's authority, then the kingdom of God grows, slowly but steadily.

- Of course, one day the King of Kings will physically return to this earth and rule over the nations from an actual throne. Then the reign of God will be fully established, and "The Not-Yet" aspects of the kingdom will be fulfilled. Until then, let us continue to do our part to live under God's authority and help His kingdom grow. And let us longingly pray as Jesus taught us to pray: **"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."** (Matt. 6:10)

Thursday Morning Cabin Devotions: The Equality of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 20:1-16

Key Parables: *The Eleventh Hour Laborers*

Key Points:

- This parable illustrates the basic equality of believers in the kingdom. Each of us receives eternal life, whether we have labored long for the King, or whether we are brand-new Christians. It doesn't matter if we are Jews or Gentiles, slaves or freemen, or even male or female. (Gal. 3:28) We are all sinners saved by grace, we have all been made one in Christ, and we are all heirs of His kingdom. Our religious heritage or history has nothing to do with it. After all, **"The last shall be first, and the first last."** (Matt. 20:16)

Thursday Morning Chapel: The Value of the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 13:44-46, 13:51-52

Key Parables: *The Hidden Treasure, The Costly Pearl, The Householder's Treasure*

Key Points:

- As we study the remaining three parables in Matthew chapter 13, we glimpse something of the incomparable value of the kingdom of God. The parable of the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44) reminds us that the Way of entry into the kingdom is sadly concealed from many people. (See Matt. 7:14.) However, both this parable and that of the pearl (Matt. 13:45-46) also celebrate the fact that the kingdom has been revealed by God and is now discoverable to those who search for it. Furthermore, becoming a part of God's kingdom and living our lives for His reign will actually cost us everything that we have to give. And it is SO worth it!

- In Luke 12:13-34 (as well as Matt. 6:19-34), Jesus spends a good deal of time contrasting the treasures of this world with the treasures of the kingdom. First He tells the parable of the wealthy fool who hoarded worldly goods, but was **"not rich toward God."** (Luke 12:21) When this man suddenly died, all of his accumulated wealth meant absolutely nothing. With this in mind, Jesus encourages His disciples to stop spending so much time worrying about earthly goods, even necessities. (Luke 12:22-31) Instead, He instructs them to simply seek the Father's kingdom. That's it. Pursue God's reign on earth. Submit to His authority in your life. Search for ways to apply His Kingship to every situation. Jesus promises that when we do that, our earthly needs will be met. We won't have to worry or fear, because the Father Himself will give us His glorious kingdom, not to

mention the essentials we need to survive. (Luke 12:31-32. Also see Luke 18:28-30.) In addition, as we seek God's kingdom we'll be storing up true, eternal wealth: treasure in heaven that will never be lost, stolen or destroyed. If we are living for the kingdom of heaven, and if our treasure is there, then that's where our hearts will be also. (Luke 12:33-34)

- Of course, this is one of the areas where the "klash" between the kingdoms becomes so evident. We may truly desire to live for the kingdom of God on the one hand; but on the other ... well, the kingdom of this world just has so much cool stuff to offer. As Americans, most (if not all) of us are pretty darn materialistic. Perhaps we need to reflect on what Jesus had to say about wealthy people entering the kingdom of God. In short, He said that it was humanly impossible for them to do so. (Matt. 19:23-24) This was in response to the "rich young ruler" who desired eternal life but who was unwilling to part with his possessions and follow Christ wholeheartedly. Thankfully, Jesus went on to say, "**With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**" (Matt. 19:26) It is, of course, impossible for *anyone* to enter the kingdom apart from the grace of God. But Jesus seems to think that owning a bunch of "stuff" makes it that much harder for a person.

- And the rest of the New Testament continues to describe this conflict between worldly wealth and heavenly treasure. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus states that "**No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and wealth.**" In his first epistle, the Apostle John commands, "**Do not love the world nor the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him.**" (I John 2:15) He goes on to describe how all of the lusts and enticements of the world will one day pass away, "**but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**" (I John 2:17) And James makes it painfully clear when he writes, "**You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**" (James 4:4) It is clear that we cannot devote our lives to pursuing both the treasures of the kingdom and the treasures of this world. We must choose one or the other. And when the former will last forever and the latter will be completely consumed by flames, the choice ought to be fairly straightforward.

- The final parable in Matthew 13 is that of a householder who brings forth treasures both new and old. (Matt. 13:51-52) Jesus is talking about scribes, or experts of the Mosaic Law, who become disciples of the kingdom, and who understand the value and harmony of both the old and new covenants. The application for us is this: "**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...**" (II Tim. 3:16) One of the most valuable resources we have as kingdom-dwellers is the very Word of God revealed to us. The Bible is full of ancient treasures that speak to us in very modern and very living ways. (Heb. 4:12) Are we taking the time required to dig into its wealth?

Living for the Kingdom

Key Passages: Luke 19:11-27, Matthew 25:14-30, I Corinthians 3:10-15

Key Parables: *The Minas, The Talents*

NOTE: This particular lesson will only be taught to the high school students (due to the longer duration of their camp). If our speakers at kids' camp and junior high camp would like to cover the parable of the talents within the context of the next lesson (which also deals with Matthew 25), then they are certainly encouraged to do so!

Key Points:

- Jesus told two very similar parables to illustrate what our lives should look like as we exist in "The Already, But Not Yet." The main idea behind both narratives is that our anticipation of Christ's second coming should take the form of pro-active waiting, not passive loafing.

- Luke 19:11-27 records the parable of the minas, which Jesus told just prior to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Scripture informs us that the purpose of this parable was to help the disciples understand why the kingdom of God was not going to be established immediately. Jesus is pictured as a nobleman who must travel to a distant land (and presumably a Higher Authority) to receive a kingdom before returning and reigning. Those who reject Christ's rule over their lives are portrayed as rebellious citizens who will ultimately be punished and slain. And, as Christ's followers, we are pictured as slaves who have each been entrusted with the King's resources in order to conduct earthly business and profit His kingdom.

- Notice that in this parable, each of the slaves is given one mina, the same amount as all the others. How each servant invests his mina is left to his individual discretion. This is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul's words in I Corinthians 3:10-15. As Christians, we all start with the same foundation, which is Christ Himself. How we build upon this foundation, and the quality of materials which we use, is up for us to decide. However, we must remember that the Lord Himself will one day judge our work. (II Cor. 5:10) Testing by fire will determine whether we have lived for the temporal or the eternal. (See II Cor. 4:18.) Anything that we accomplish in this life that is of lasting significance (by God's grace!) will translate into rewards for us in the age to come. This relates back to the point in the parable when the servants are given responsibilities within their master's new kingdom (entire cities, in fact!) based on what they did with his resources while he was away. How faithful we are with God's gifts now will determine how much He puts under our charge in the coming kingdom. In the words of General Maximus, "What we do in life echoes through eternity!"

- The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 has much the same message. Jesus related this story as part of the Olivet Discourse just two days before His death. In context, it occurs directly after several commands for us to be prepared for His second coming. The major difference between this narrative and that of the minas is that here, the master gives the slaves varying amounts of money according to their individual abilities. (Matt. 25:15) Some commentators have suggested that these talents of silver therefore represent the spiritual gifts or even natural talents that God blesses His servants with in differing amounts. Regardless, the outcome for the slaves in this story is the same as before. Two invest the master's resources wisely and are rewarded with joy and greater responsibility upon his return. And the third servant, despite his excuse of being afraid, is simply too lazy to bother with advancing his master's realm, so he buries what he has been given. The master is none too happy about this, and he orders that the slothful servant be thrown into outer darkness. The message is clear. Christ expects us to be productive with the resources with which He's blessed us. And *nothing* on this earth should distract us from working for His kingdom. After all, as Jesus said earlier in His ministry, "**No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.**" (Luke 9:62)

Thursday Evening Chapel: Preparing for the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 24:29 - 25:13, Luke 12:35-48

Key Parables: *The Fig Tree, The Faithful Slave, The Doorkeepers, The Ten Virgins*

Key Points:

- The Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24 - 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21) is not the easiest of Jesus' sermons to understand. But it does provide us with a wealth of information regarding His kingship, His second coming and the establishing of His earthly kingdom. Therefore, we'll do our best to approach it in such a way that students will grasp the main points, will desire to conduct further study, and will hopefully *not* be confused when it's all said and done.

- We'll be primarily studying Matthew's account of the discourse, as it seems to be the most comprehensive of the synoptic gospels. Chapter 24, verses 1-28 are probably the most difficult parts of the passage. This is because Jesus seems to be discussing multiple future events including both the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the great tribulation at the end of the age. It's important to remember that Jesus is answering three of the disciple's distinct questions: (1) "**When will these things happen**" (referring to the destruction of the Temple), (2) "**and what will be the sign of Your coming,**" (3) "**and of the end of the age?**" (Matt. 24:3) Our Lord spends time answering all three of these questions. It's just a bit tricky to figure out which answer goes with which event. Anyway, none of this is crucial for our present purposes. We can probably read these twenty-eight verses with the students and then move on without a great deal of discussion. However, there are a few important points in these initial verses that probably shouldn't be missed...

- First, these verses tell us that we can expect things on this planet to get worse, not better, before Jesus returns. Our Lord promised that wars, earthquakes, famines and persecution would be "**merely the beginning of birth pangs.**" (Matt. 24:8) Although we've become children of the kingdom, we still live in a fallen world. And mankind's rebellion and opposition toward God are only going to grow more pronounced as the end draws near. (Matt. 24:9-12)

- However, in contrast to the gathering darkness, Jesus promises that **“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”** (Matt. 24:14) The true Light of the gospel will increase in intensity, and the kingdom’s spiritual borders will continue to expand right-up to the sunrise of the age to come! (See I John 2:8 and Rom. 13:11-12.) If we truly desire to speed our Lord’s return, then we ought to become involved in taking the gospel to the spiritual frontiers. After all, Jesus promised that the good news would be preached as a witness to *all* nations before the end.

- One final point that these verses drive home is that Jesus’ return to this earth is going to be no small event. (Matt. 24:23-37) It’s not something we need to worry about missing. The Master puts it this way, **“For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.”** (Matt. 24:27) When false Christs arise, or even when doubts arise in our hearts, we need only look heavenward and remember that someday soon, every person on earth **“will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”** (Matt. 24:30)

- This leads us into the next section of the passage: Matthew 24:29-31. Here we learn that Christ’s return will be marked by great, astronomical signs. Again, it will be a cosmic event of which everyone on the planet is aware. Note that the great gathering of the children of the kingdom is described in verse 31, an event which Jesus frequently pictured in His parables.

- And that brings us to our first main parable for this lesson: the parable of the fig tree. It’s a simple illustration. Just as new leaves on a tree tell us that summer is near, so the tribulations and woes of the previous verses should alert us to the fact that Jesus’ return is close at hand. In fact, when we see all of these signs, we’ll know that He is **“right at the door.”** (Matt. 24:33) Luke elaborates on this thought in 21:28-31. Here we learn that when the second coming of Christ is near, then both our redemption (Luke 21:28) and the kingdom of God (Luke 21:31) will be close at hand as well. All three of these glorious hopes are bound up in one event. So, we need to know the signs, and we need to be on the look-out for them.

- However, as clearly as the signs will communicate, we still won’t know the exact day or hour of Christ’s return. In fact, only the Father knows that. The next section in Matthew’s account (24:36-44) emphasizes the truth that the world will be caught-off guard by the coming of the King. Jesus uses another brief parable to illustrate this: that of a householder surprised by a thief. (Matt. 24:43) The main point of this section is **“be on the alert...”** (Matt. 24:42) And this theme leads into the next parable...

- In Matthew 24:45-51, Jesus again pictures his disciples as slaves waiting for their absent master. The focus here is on faithfulness. The slave who is found actively carrying out the master’s orders will be blessed when the master returns. In fact, Jesus says that the lord will put this slave in charge of all his possessions. (Matt. 24:47) However, if the master tarries, and the head slave pursues his own desires and mistreats his fellow servants, then that slave will be disciplined very severely. Mark and Luke both include a very similar parable which pictures the slaves as doorkeepers, awaiting the knock of their master. (Mark 13:34-36 and Luke 12:35-38) One striking detail in Luke’s version is that the master will be so pleased when he returns late at night and finds his slaves waiting, that he’ll order them to recline at the table and *he* will serve them! (Luke 12:37) So, Jesus makes this point very clear: He will reward those who are on the alert and serving Him when He returns to this earth.

- The final parable that we’ll study in this marathon teaching session is that of the ten virgins. (Matt. 25:1-13) This illustration also deals with faithful waiting; but in this story, it’s not a master who tarries, but a bridegroom. Note that the kingdom of God is once again described using wedding imagery. Also note that the failing of the five foolish virgins is that they were not prepared to wait long enough. They came with some oil in their lamps, but they had none in reserve. Unlike the prudent virgins, these maidens only expected to wait a short time for the bridegroom. Jesus’ point is that we **“do not know the day nor the hour.”** (Matt. 25:13) His return could be tomorrow, or it could be a thousand years from now. In either case, we should **“Be on the alert”**. It’s easy to get all excited about the coming of the kingdom for a single week of camp. It’s much more difficult to maintain a lifestyle of pro-active, productive, prepared waiting. But that is what our Lord expects of us. We end this lesson with His closing reminder in Mark 13:37: **“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”** (NKJV)

Friday Morning Cabin Devotions: Praying for the Kingdom

Key Passages: Matthew 6:5-15 , Luke 11:1-13

Key Parables: *The Friend at Midnight, The Gifts of the Father*

Key Points:

- When we study the Lord's prayer, we notice that Jesus instructed us to intercede for the timely establishment of His earthly reign. In fact, prayer has a lot to do with anticipating God's kingdom and asking for His authority and influence to be felt here and now. This last cabin devotion should be a time for counselors and students to intercede for each other as they prepare to head back to the "real" world.

Friday Morning Chapel: The Return of the King

Key Passages: Revelation 11:15-19, 19:5-16

Key Points:

- This final session is meant to provide just a glimpse of what awaits citizens of the kingdom of God. Our goal is not to discuss the intricate details of eschatology or dispensationalism. Rather, our desire is to conclude the week with an affirmation that Jesus Christ is King of kings, with a reminder that His earthly kingdom will soon be established, and with a call to worship Him as Lord of lords through the way we live right now.
- The Book of Revelation paints a clear picture of Christ as the Supreme Monarch. One passage of particular note is 11:15-19. Here we find an exhilarating heavenly proclamation after the seventh trumpet has been sounded. **"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."** (Rev. 11:15) It doesn't get much clearer than that. Someday, every authority on earth will be subjected to God the Son, who will in turn submit to God the Father. (I Cor. 15:24-28) The kingdom of God will be the *only* kingdom that endures throughout eternity.
- Revelation 19 presents an awesome description of the day that God's earthly kingdom will be established. And from this passage we learn a few things about our role in that kingdom. Verses 6-9 announce the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride. We know from other passages in the New Testament that this bride is the church. (II Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5:22-32) In other words, as believers, we are a part of the bride of Christ, and we are definitely invited to this marriage feast. Christ has purified His church with His blood, and when He returns, we saints will be clothed with the good works which He has wrought in us. (Eph. 5:26-27, Rev. 19:8, John 3:21) There are several other Scriptures which picture the establishment of the kingdom as a grand feast. (Matt. 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:15-18 & 22:28-30) It is exciting to think about actually eating and drinking with Jesus and celebrating the fact that He will reign forever. It's going to be the most joyful and most righteous party of all time!
- Of course, the main event of Revelation 19 is the second coming of Jesus to this earth; and the description of the returning Christ in verses 11-16 overflows with Kingly majesty. Jesus is pictured judging mankind and waging war in righteousness. (19:11) He wears not just one crown, but many diadems. (19:12) He commands the armies of heaven and leads them into battle. (19:14) He rules over all the nations with a rod of iron. (19:15) **"And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'"** (19:16) Amen! At this point, we could explore a few more soaring references to the Kingship of Christ. (See Luke 1:31-33, I Tim. 1:16-17, I Tim 6:14-16, II Tim. 4:1, Heb. 1:8-9, Rev. 15:3-4, and Rev. 17:14 for starters.) But the main point is this: Jesus Christ will reign as the perfectly just and perfectly righteous King over all humanity forever. As Isaiah prophesied millennia beforehand: **"There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."** (Is. 9:7)
- Three more points concerning Christ's earthly kingdom should be briefly made. The first is that, eventually, creation will be freed from the curse of mankind's sin. (See Rom. 8:19-22.) In Isaiah 11:1-9, we find a description of the incredible harmony that will be restored to nature during our Lord's first one thousand years on the throne. **"The wolf will dwell with the lamb..."** (Is. 11:6), and **"They will not hurt or destroy in all My**

holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (Is. 11:9) Ultimately, after this Millennial reign, God will create a new heaven and new earth where **“there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain...”** (Rev. 21:4) Revelation 22:3 makes it explicit that **“There will no longer be any curse...”** The effects of humanity’s fall will be undone, and creation will be perfected.

- And so will we! When the kingdom of God comes in its fulness, believers will be utterly transformed. Spiritually, our redemption, salvation and sanctification will finally be complete. (Luke 21:28, Rom. 13:11, Phil. 1:6, I John 3:2) And physically, we will be resurrected with new, glorified, incorruptible, immortal bodies! (I Cor. 15:42-44, Phil. 3:20-21) As Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:50, **“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”** Thus, when Christ returns, **“the resurrection of the righteous”** (Luke 14:14), will finally occur, and we will enter His eternal kingdom clothed with eternal bodies.

- Finally, here’s the most amazing part: we will actually reign with the King of kings. The Book of Revelation promises that as redeemed overcomers, we will share in Jesus’ kingdom authority, even to the point of sitting with our Lord on His throne! (Rev. 3:21, 5:10, 20:6) And this pledge isn’t just exclusive to Revelation. (See Dan. 7:18-27, Matt. 19:28, Rom. 5:17, and Eph. 2:6 for example.) It is truly breathtaking and incredibly humbling to think that our God has not only rescued us from the domain of darkness, He has not only clothed us in His righteousness as His bride; but He has also named us His children, His heirs and His vice-regents in His kingdom without end. Revelation 22:3-5 uses the following soul-stirring words to describe our eternal reign with the Almighty God in the New Jerusalem: **“...and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it [the city], and His bondservants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.”**

- As we conclude our week together with that thought in mind, what else is there to say? Just this... **“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”** (Rev. 22:20)