

## Red Letters Class: Kingdom of God – Part II

[lights out] Today's red letter class is the Kingdom of God – Part II. As I mentioned last time, Jesus used the word “kingdom” often - approximately 120 times in the gospels – 50 times in Matthew alone – and so I thought we needed a second class on this topic. [next slide]. By way of introduction, I thought we would look at some great monarchs of history. [next slide] Cyrus the Great – founder of the Persian Empire – the greatest of the ancient Mesopotamian Empires. [next slide] Augustus Caesar – founder of the Roman Empire - lasted 500 years. [next slide] Charlemagne – shown here being crowned by the Pope – founder of the Holy Roman Empire. [next slide] Elizabeth I – during her reign England became a world power [next slide] Louis XIV – the Sun King – greatest king of France [liked to wear tights];[next slide] Queen Victoria – ruled the British Empire for 60 years at the height of its power. These are all generally considered effective rulers. Yet their kingdoms were all kingdoms of this world. Built on power and wealth. They lived in palaces. Oppulent crowns – Barbara and I saw Queen Victoria's Imperial Crown in London. Impressive stuff. [next slide] This man also founded a kingdom. He did not wear fancy clothes or live in a palace. His crown as a little different, as you can see. Yet his kingdom has outlasted them all and continues today. As he told a governor of the Roman Empire, his kingdom is not of this world. His kingdom has far greater significance. It is a spiritual kingdom. An eternal kingdom. The kingdom of God. A kingdom we have the privilege to be part of. [lights on]

Turn to Mat 4. We are going to review a couple of things we looked at in my first class on the kingdom and then dive into some new stuff today. In Mat 4:17 Jesus begins his public preaching with a simple message – *the kingdom of heaven is near*. As we talked about last time, “near” means “close to you” “in your presence” “at hand” “you can reach out and touch it”. Jesus is saying he is the king and he has brought the kingdom. The kingdom begins with him; not Pentecost. 4:23 Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom. For Jesus, the good news, the gospel, was not “being saved.” It was the kingdom of God. He, the Messiah, had come and was founding his kingdom. That included salvation but was more than that. It also meant creating a group of people who would do God's will. God's kingdom on earth – where God reigned. Turn to 6:10. The kingdom of God is not exactly the same as the church. It is wherever the will of God is done – on earth or in heaven. That's what Jesus preached about. That's what he came to do. Found a kingdom of people who would do God's will on earth. We should pray for this kingdom to “come” more and more in our lives and in the lives of others.

Turn to Mat 11. In this passage, JB is in prison and send his disciples to ask if Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus points to the evidence of his Messiahship in his ministry and sends them back to encourage John. Let's pick up in verse 11-15. Jesus clearly tells us here the era of the OT ended with John and the new era, the era of the kingdom has begun. Jesus cites Malachi's prophesies and says JB was the herald of this new kingdom, the messenger, the Elijah who was to come and prepare the way for the Messiah. He says no one is greater than JB, none of the prophets or kings of old, but

anyone in the kingdom of heaven is greater. The kingdom is something better than anything God did in the past. The kingdom something new. Something exciting. Jesus is telling them the kingdom has come; he is the Messiah, he is the king, if they are willing to accept it. Anyone with ears should listen up!

Jesus also tells us the kingdom suffers violence. JB was arrested and would be killed. The same thing would happen with Jesus. Later the apostles. The world doesn't like the kingdom. Satan opposes it. That's part of the package. The NIV translation here is wrong. The passage does not say the kingdom forcefully advances or that forceful men enter it. Look at any other translation and you will see this. During the ICOC years, we taught the kingdom should be forceful and led by forceful men. That is not what this passage teaches. The kingdom of God is powerful, the kingdom of God changes lives, the kingdom of God spreads and grows, the kingdom of God is exciting. But we are not called to be forceful; we are called to be gentle. We need to have strong and deep convictions, men need to lead their families and be spiritually strong. But all of these things must be done with gentleness and respect not overbearing or bullying.

11:28-30. We are called to be like Jesus, to follow his example. We must be gentle and humble in heart. We must proclaim the kingdom of God and do so with great excitement and enthusiasm like Jesus did. But what we are offering people is rest. Jesus says it twice. Jesus will free people from the yoke of slavery. He will help people with their weary burdens. His yoke is easy and his burden light. The kingdom of God is good news. It is relief from the world. Rest for our souls. Brothers and sisters, do you need rest? Are you weary? Feeling burdened? Frustrated by sin? Feeling stressed? Tapped out? Do you have too much to do? Too many responsibilities? Too many bills to pay? Too many demands on your time? Too many expectations from everyone around you?

Can I be real with you this morning? I think this is a big issue in our church right now. I appreciate Richard's State of the Church message on Thursday. Many good things have happened in the last 5 years. I also agree with the things he said we need to improve. #1 on his list was the need for us to grow spiritually. To become more what Jesus wants us to be. And I think what holds us back is this feeling we are tapped out. Our dance card is already full. Too much to do; too little time. We want to grow spiritually. Grow in our marriages/our parenting/our relationships/more willing to serve in the church/more evangelistic. But we don't see how we can do it. We feel tapped out. Maxed to the limit. We can't take on more responsibility. We have our jobs, our bills, our families, other demands on our time. Just getting to church regularly can be tough. We don't even have time to keep up with all the emails. Taking on more seems like a burden. I think that's what holds us back. Keeps us from growing. Like the seed among weeds in the parable of the sower, we are choked by the cares of this life. But in Mat 11, Jesus offers us rest. A light yoke and easy burden. That's what Jesus wants us to have. Jesus doesn't want us to feel stressed out. Overburdened. Tapped out.

Turn to Isaiah 40. Back in Mat 3 when JB first proclaims the kingdom of God, Matthew cites Isa 40's prophesy about a voice crying in the wilderness. The prophesy of Isa 40 was fulfilled when JB proclaimed the coming of the kingdom. Let's look in Isa and see what we can learn about the kingdom of God that JB proclaimed, Jesus established and Matthew wrote about. :1-11. v.3 is the prophesy about JB; the rest of the passage is prophesy about the coming of Jesus. V.10 says God is establishing his rule, His kingdom on earth. What is the theme of the passage? Comfort. The time of slavery is over. Mercy and forgiveness. Seeing the glory of the Lord. Proclaiming good news (twice in v.9). Rewards. Gifts. The shepherd protecting his flock. Carrying them in his arms. Gently leading us. This is what the kingdom of God is about. This is what Jesus offers us. [pause] Are you getting this from Jesus? Are you getting comfort from him? Do you feel protected? Carried in his arms? Is his kingdom good news to you? Is that how it feels to you? So often we think of being more spiritual in terms of more commitment. I have to do more. Certainly Jesus expects us to be committed to him and obey him. Why do you call me Lord Lord and not do what I say. But the kingdom of God is not just about sucking it up and doing more. The kingdom of God is good news. Jesus offers us rest. Come to me all you who are weary laden and I will give you rest.

Turn to Mat 18. Brothers and sisters, if we are feeling tapped out, we need to tap back into Jesus. Find the rest he offers us. Let the kingdom of God come again in our lives. The kingdom of comfort, protection, help. The kingdom of good news. It is Satan who wants to run us ragged not Jesus. Satan who burdens us with the cares of this life. Satan who wants us to think serving Jesus is a chore. So how do we tap back into Jesus? How do we find the rest he offers us? Jesus tells us. :1-4 The same way we entered the kingdom. We became humble like a child. We were willing to change. Eager to learn. We let Jesus and his word affect us. We have to do this again. Dig into the Bible. Listen to His word. Hear what He is saying to you. Store it up in your heart. We also have to pray. Cry out to him. Pour out your heart. Cast your anxieties on him. You may need to repent of some things. Get rid of sin. Make some changes. You may need to simplify your life. Cut out some things in your schedule. Throw off the burdens the world puts on you. Find more time for God. More time to do His will. We did this to become a Christian; we can do this again to grow and become great in his kingdom.

The kingdom of God is near. Not far away. Close to you. You can reach out and touch it. It is within your grasp. All you have to do is take hold of it. James 4:8. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. The kingdom of God is good news. Jesus offers us rest. A lighter yoke and easier burden. Comfort. Mercy. Protection. Peace. Hope. Joy. Love. This is what Jesus offers us in the kingdom of God. If we will accept it. If we will reach out and take it. Let's get excited again about the kingdom of God. Let's find the rest and comfort Jesus offers us. Tap back into Jesus through prayer and the word. Make whatever changes we have to make. Let's close with a prayer:

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name  
Your kingdom come! Your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.