

The Fundamental Conception

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' teachings, emphasizing the importance of God's rule and reign in human life.

Scripture: Matthew 4:17, Matthew 6:9-10, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 10:7, Matthew 11:3-5, Matthew 11:12, Matthew 12:28, Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9, John 3:2-5

Topics: "The Kingdom of God", "Jesus' Teachings"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teachings and actions, illustrating that the Kingdom was fundamental to His ministry. He highlights that Jesus preached repentance and the nearness of the Kingdom, urging His followers to seek it first. Morgan explores the significance of the Kingdom as both a rule and a realm, asserting that it encompasses God's authority and the results of His reign. He also addresses the misconceptions surrounding the Kingdom and the Church, affirming that both concepts are unified in Christ's mission. Ultimately, the sermon calls believers to recognize the Kingdom's importance and their role in realizing it on earth.

Transcript

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10).

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7).

"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:3-5).

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

"The kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matthew 12:28).

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

"The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9).

"The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:2-5).

"Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25).

THE vastness of this subject will at once be recognized, and its immediate interest conceded. To deal with it exhaustively is not my purpose, but rather to survey the teaching in outline, by grouping and considering the actual words of our Lord.

Some of the aspects with which I shall deal will be:

The fundamental conception;

Some different phases of the one fact, as they are unified in Himself;

His view of the existing anarchy;

The redemptive processes which He revealed,

The Cross,

The Church,

The Conflict,

The Crisis of the second Advent; and

His revelation of final realization.

We commence, then, with the fundamental conception.

The subject is one of immediate interest. The attention of many is being turned to the Kingdom of GOD, and much that is of very great value has been written thereon during recent years. In this process of reconsideration and restatement certain things have been said from which personally I should very profoundly differ, while I respect those who have said them. There have been those who have declared that we must return to the teaching of JESUS concerning the Kingdom of GOD, and abandon the apostolic teaching concerning the Church. The idea of the Kingdom and that of the Church have thus been put into opposition to each other. It has been affirmed that the conception of the Church, as we know it, is Pauline, and that Paul in some measure departed from the ideals of JESUS; and we have been urged, in the light of that interpretation, to get back to CHRIST.

Now our present line of study will not bring us to the consideration of the alleged difference between Paul and CHRIST; but we shall see where CHRIST placed the Church in regard to the Kingdom.

That is only a passing illustration. The interesting fact is that at the present hour there is a new interest in the subject; a new enquiry, a new criticism, a new attempt to restate. What is meant by the Kingdom of GOD? How far are we responsible for it? How far are we realizing it? How far is it possible to realize it? My desire in thus indicating the atmosphere of the moment is to emphasize the immediate interest of our theme.

The fundamental conception will be considered in two ways:

First, by observing that the Kingdom of GOD, - whatever may be meant by the phrase, - was most evidently fundamental to the doing and the teaching of JESUS; and

Secondly, by attempting to discover the idea that was central to His mind as He used the term.

First, then, the Kingdom was fundamental in the doing and the teaching of our Lord.

This hardly needs proof. Whether we consider the teaching that was public, of private, the teaching that was systematic, or incidental; we find running through the whole of it, like flashes of light, this word Kingdom and its cognate phrases. To summarize mathematically and briefly: in the Gospel according to Matthew I find the word Kingdom recorded as passing His lips forty-seven times; in Mark, thirteen; in Luke, thirty-one; and in John, five.

In this connection it should be remembered that John used another phrase, which is really the equivalent of Kingdom. His phrase was "eternal life," a phrase emphasizing the power and result of the Divine Kingship, as the other phrases indicate its fact, and deal with its applications. It is impossible for us to cover all the ground; but there are certain outstanding facts at which we will glance.

These we will group around the words; have already borrowed from the second treatise of Luke, the doing and the teaching of JESUS. I shall of course deal especially with the teaching, but must also make a brief reference to the fact that His doing was equally based upon this fundamental conception.

The first recorded teaching of JESUS which can be at all described as systematic is found in the Gospel of John. It was given to an individual, Nicodemus. A ruler among his people, he came to JESUS and said, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

To him the Master said, "Except a man be born again [anew], he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

When in amazement the ruler replied, "How can a man be born when he is old?" our Lord explicitly replied, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:2-5).

The first account of our Lord's coming face to face in personal dealing with an inquiring soul records His assumption of the Kingdom of GOD as the matter of supreme moment. The moment He began to deal with one man who was inquiring for the final light, His recognition of the importance of the Kingdom of GOD is manifest.

Then observe that when He commenced His more public, definite, and systematic teaching in Galilee, both Matthew and Mark declare that this was the key-note of His preaching. "From that time Jesus began

to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

His call was to repentance, and the immediate reason was that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

Matthew and Mark, in chronicling that key-note to the ministry of our Lord, used different phrases. Matthew reported Him as saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand"; while Mark recorded the words thus, "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

Thus at the very commencement of our study, we are brought face to face with these two phrases, and to base any particular doctrine upon the difference is entirely unwarranted. The phrase our Lord most commonly used was that of "the Kingdom of heaven," and Mark's change is a revelation of the simple and natural way in which these stories are told. It is certainly true that our Lord did use the phrase, the Kingdom of GOD. In our study of His teaching we shall make no difference between these two phrases. They are mutually interpretative.

Presently He commissioned and sent forth twelve men; and yet later, seventy. In each commission the principal work allotted to them was in the interest of the Kingdom; "Preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7); "Say unto them, the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9).

In the parabolic teaching of the Lord, the fact that this conception was fundamental is strikingly revealed. We have twenty-nine parables recorded in the New Testament. Of these, seventeen definitely mention the Kingdom of GOD, and are declared to be in exposition of it. Those in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, - the Sower, the Darnel, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the hidden Treasure, the Pearl, the Drag-net, and the Householder specifically deal with the subject. And beyond those, we have the parables of the unmerciful Servant, the Laborers in the Vineyard, the Two Sons in the Vineyard, the wicked Husbandmen, the royal Marriage Feast, the ten Virgins, the Talents, the Seed growing secretly, and the Pounds; - all of them definitely and explicitly parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of GOD.

If we turn to the other twelve we find, although the word Kingdom may not occur in them, in more than half of them the context reveals the fact that they are related to the thought of the Kingdom; and in the whole of them the Kingdom conception is the master idea. Whenever He uttered a parable, in His own mind there was the vision of the Kingdom of GOD.

The same is true of the great systematic discourses of JESUS. In that which we call the Sermon on the Mount, the Manifesto of the King, the ethic is patently that of His Kingdom.

Those parables of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, which He delivered partly to the multitudes and partly to His own disciples, are a revelation of the processes of the Kingdom through a certain period. In the great prophecies uttered on Olivet the master thought is still that of the Kingdom.

In His last conversation with the disciples in the upper room, before the agony of Gethsemane and Calvary, when He instituted the new ordinance, He said, - it was but an allusion, but it is significant, - "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25).

Thus it is seen that the final realization of all things, towards which He looked under the shadow of the Cross, the light and the glory that lay beyond, was the coming Kingdom of GOD. When we turn from the Gospels themselves to the last paragraph of history concerning Him ere His ascension, in the first chapter of the Acts, we find that after His resurrection He was seen for many days, during which He was giving His

disciples instructions concerning the Kingdom of GOD. So that from the first note of systematic teaching, through all methods, - parabolic, systematic, incidental; to the last hour of anticipation, the Kingdom of GOD was in His mind.

His doing was a further revelation of the fact, which may now be dismissed by three references.

When John was cast into prison he was puzzled and perplexed by the method that JESUS was adopting, and he sent his disciples to Him, asking, "And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:3-5).

As they departed to bear His message He said to the people, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

The connection of His declaration with the message He sent to John must be patent. John looked for the Kingdom, but he could not understand the method of the King. He seemed to be doing nothing. He was gathering no army. He was making no proclamation. He was calling together no parliament of men. He was simply walking about, healing a few, speaking to individuals and companies of men.

When the disciples of John came asking Him if He were the King, or were they to look for another, He said in effect, Go and tell John that these things are the things of the Kingdom.

I am at work in the interests of the Kingdom.

I am manifesting the powers of the Kingdom.

I am preparing for the coming of the Kingdom.

Then to the multitudes He declared that only men who do violence to their own prejudices will enter that Kingdom. Thus He revealed the fact that all the works of healing and mercy were works of the Kingdom, and works for the Kingdom.

When the Pharisees declared that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, He said, "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matthew 12:28).

It was but an incidental reference, yet it revealed the fact that when He cast demons out, He realized that He was making possible the Kingdom of GOD in the case of the individual, and of society.

Again there came a day when the people of Siloam brought their children to JESUS, and the disciples bade them depart. He rebuked the disciples, and He did it angrily. Mark tells us quite definitely that He was moved with indignation. But what was His argument for permitting the children to come? "Of such is the Kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).

So that whether He accounted for His works to a perplexed prophet, or defended His method to the critical and unbelieving Pharisees, or welcomed the children, the reason underlying everything in His own mind was the Kingdom of GOD.

Thus it is patent that the Kingdom of GOD was His chief concern, His constant inspiration, His abiding purpose, and His all-sufficient power. Follow Him through all the days of His public ministry, listen to every

word that fell from His lips, accompany Him upon every journey that He took, watch every action of beneficence or of judgment; and in the light of the things He Himself said it becomes apparent that the reason for all speech and all action, for all journeys and all tarryings, for all pity and all anger, was the Kingdom of GOD. It was the master passion of His life, the fundamental conception of all His teaching and all His doing.

So we may pass to our second enquiry.

What was this idea which was so patently central to His mind as He taught and wrought? The terms, Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of GOD, were in common use in our Lord's day in the Rabbinical teachings. These terms, or their equivalents, are found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore when our Lord made use of these terms, men were very familiar with them. We are familiar with them because to-day they are peculiarly Christian terms.

The idea of the Kingdom of GOD, crystallized into a term, emerges in Exodus.

Its first appearance in the Old Testament Scriptures is when GOD said, through Moses, to His ancient people, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6).

It appears again in the second book of Samuel, in the story of David's desire to build a temple (II Samuel 7:12, 13).

We find it again in the books of the Chronicles twice over (I Chronicles 29:11; II Chronicles 13:8).

The term is found in the books of the Psalms six times (Psalm 22:28; 45:6; 103:19; 145:11-13).

It is mentioned by the prophets Isaiah (9:7), Micah (4:8), and Obadiah (21), and it is the very burden of that strange and wonderful book of Daniel.

So that the terms our Lord made use of were familiar in Rabbinical teachings, and by reason of the fact that they were incorporated in the Scriptures; but to neither Rabbinical teaching nor Old Testament Scriptures must we go for interpretation of His meaning. The Rabbinical teachings He largely contradicted. He did not contradict the teachings of the Old Testament, but He corrected misinterpretations of them, and He fulfilled them.

When therefore we desire to know what our Lord really meant, we have but one court of appeal, His own teachings. The very last story to which I have made reference, the first paragraph in the Acts, reveals the fact that after crucifixion and resurrection His disciples were in entire ignorance of all the deep content of the phrase with which they were so familiar, and it was necessary that He should give them their immediate work, and leave them waiting for fuller explanation after the Pentecostal effusion.

Let us then first take the terms which were so often upon the lips of our Lord, and quite simply look at them; the two terms, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of GOD. While, as we have seen, no clear-cut distinction must be made between them, and while in all probability His own term was most often the Kingdom of Heaven, there can be little doubt that He used them both.

The phrase "the Kingdom of Heaven" is only to be found in Matthew; but in Matthew we also find the phrases "the Kingdom of God" and "His Kingdom," and that in most remarkable circumstances.

Let us first consider the word Kingdom, which is found in both phrases. Everyone is supposed to know what kingdom means. Nevertheless one of the first things necessary to our understanding of the teaching of our Lord is that we should carefully examine this, because our common understanding of the word is partial.

In order to an interpretation of the true meaning of the word let us make use of three very simple words:

Rule,

Realm,

Result.

Rule the abstract meaning of Kingdom. The Kingdom of GOD is the rule of GOD. That is the deepest note.

Realm is the concrete fact of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of GOD is the sphere in which His rule is exercised.

Result is the realization of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of GOD is the result realized within His realm through His rule.

The Kingdom of GOD is the rule of GOD.

The Kingdom of GOD is the realm over which GOD rules.

The Kingdom of GOD is the result produced in the realm of GOD as the result of the rule of GOD.

All these values are in our word, and we must watch for them. As we study, we must be careful lest when we read of the Kingdom of GOD we simply think of a territory, and largely neglect the first and fundamental fact that give value to everything else, that of the rule of GOD.

Modern writers are employing another word, the reign of GOD. Now in certain applications that word is of enormous value but it leaves a good deal out, and the actual word Kingdom is better; for the reign of GOD is not the territory over which He rules, but the exercise of authority over it, while the word Kingdom includes both ideas, and more.

The Kingdom of Heaven is at once the authority of Heaven; the territory over which the Heavenly order prevails; and the results produced within that territory because the Heavenly order prevails. These are the values of the word, and the truths which we must keep in mind.

Let us now consider the phrase, "of Heaven." A remarkable fact, perhaps a small one apparently, and yet full of significance, is that wherever we read "the Kingdom of Heaven" we more accurately express what is actually written if we read, "The Kingdom of the Heavens." The word is plural. The value of that may be discovered by a reference to the Lord's Prayer. To read it a little more literally, as to its first half: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10).

A doctrine of GOD is included in the invocation: "Our Our Father which art in heaven." This method of address suggests the omnipresence of GOD. In the final clause, "in earth, as it is in heaven," the word is singular; and the reference patently is to that Heaven which is the place of the supreme manifestation of

GOD. Thus the prayer is that the Heavenly order may be established in the world.

So that the phrase, "Kingdom of Heaven," reveals the pattern of the true Kingdom on earth. The idea of the term is that in this world, the laws of Heaven should be observed; and by that; do not merely mean the laws Heaven makes for earth, but the laws that Heaven obeys. How little we know of the Heaven that lies beyond, of all that wonderful region, place, locality, where are unfallen angels and the spirits of the just men made perfect.

But CHRIST taught us to pray that the laws that govern them, the reason for the things they do, the master-passion of all their activity, may become the laws, the reason, the master-passion governing the affairs of this world of ours.

The phrase, "of God," with a sublime brevity brings us face to face with the central authority, for the Kingdom of the Heavens is the Kingdom of GOD.

We are not at present dealing with applications. We shall come to some of them; for our Lord believed that flowers are in that Kingdom, and that the King clothes them; that birds are in that Kingdom, and that the King is with the dying sparrow; that children are in that Kingdom, and that "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

Thus we return in conclusion to the central idea of JESUS when He used these phrases. That idea was that of the rule of GOD. The rule of GOD in His mind was at once a fact; a claim in the presence of human will; and a purpose, the master-passion and inspiration of all His own ministry.

The clear vision shining through all clouds and darkness, illuminating every hour of His patient, sorrowful life, making even the mists about the Cross purple with the joy that was set before Him, was that of the authority of GOD, the rule of GOD, the reign of GOD.

His mission in the world was to proclaim that authority, to insist upon it, to explain it, to reveal it, to woo men towards it, to warn men against neglecting it. The mighty passion that bore Him up through all sorrows and misunderstandings, that bore Him at last to Calvary, was His passion for that Kingdom of GOD.

We have never yet begun to see the exquisite mosaic of these four stories, nor have we caught the majestic harmony of their varied tones, until we have realized that the Kingdom of GOD, in the thinking and the purpose of our Lord is the key to the mosaic, and the dominant chord of the music.

His passion in this world of ours, in this human history which is but a part of GOD's great whole, was for the restoration of the lost order, the establishment of the Kingdom, and the bringing back of men and things under the beneficent and healing and beauteous sway of the authority of GOD.

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