

PRESSING INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Two Aspects of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew and Luke present two aspects of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the manner of entering into it. Matthew's version states,

Key Bible Readings

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” Matt 11:12.

In Matthew's translation the accent is on Satan's opposition to the kingdom of God, and how vehemently he endeavours to hinder those seeking to enter into it. He expresses the view that seekers will have to engage in spiritual warfare to cast down all strongholds and oppositions that prevent them from receiving its blessings.

Luke's translation of this reading is probably more meaningful to those on a long path of refinement, where their carnal nature is being eliminated by the Spirit, thereby making way for the Kingdom of God to be formed in them.

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.” Luke 16:16.

What is meant by the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is present wherever God reigns. The titles, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ are synonymous, all meaning the places or areas where God reigns. God has a manifestation of His kingdom in His creation, in the Church, in individual Christians, and in the Bible. The Bible is a revelation of the Kingdom of God in expressing His will in His commandments, and providing an example of its working in the life of Jesus Christ. The words in the bible are not like the words in any other book. God watches over His Word, and gives it power by the Spirit to convict and minister to the needs of earnest seekers.

ALL OF GOD'S KINGDOM IS BEING VIOLENTLY OPPOSED

In all areas, the Kingdom of God suffers violent opposition from the satanic trinity of Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet. We are in the midst of worldwide spiritual conflict, where Satan and his confederates are attempting to dismantle the kingdom of God in all of its areas, and draw people into Satan's own kingdom. On the other hand, **“the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”** 1 John 3:7.

Jesus came to be the Saviour of mankind, in order that people might be delivered from the kingdom of Satan, and transferred into the kingdom of God. This spiritual battle reaches its climax at the end of the age, where it is called “The Battle of Armageddon.”

The stakes are high. Many people believe that their existence ceases when they die, and that there is no more. Of course they have been deceived, for the disturbing truth is that everyone will have an eternal existence either in Satan's kingdom in hell, or God's kingdom in heaven, according to the choices they have made here on earth.

Violent opposition to the Church

The Church has suffered violence and persecution from many areas throughout the centuries, with millions being martyred rather than renouncing their faith.

Because of the Church's disobedience in her compliance to worldly standards, and accepting the deceptions of Antichrist instead of the truth of the Scriptures, **"It was granted to him [Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them."** Rev 13:7.

In Revelation 17, we are told that Antichrist and the 'Ten Kings,' or financial controllers of the world, share a common aim of destroying all religions to set up their own world domination, and form an alliance to make war with the Lamb and His 'called, chosen, and faithful' On this front we are assured of the Lord's final victory.

"These [the ten kings] are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast [Antichrist]. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." Rev 17:13-14.

OPPOSITION TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS

The Kingdom of God in Believers

Jesus plainly said that the kingdom of God is within every Christian. **"Nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."** Luke 17:21.

Before we were saved, we were children of the world, captivated by the desires of the flesh, and worldly temptations. God could only reign through our consciences, and keep us for salvation by His angels. **"Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"** Heb 1:14. Paul made this comment about the former lives of the Corinthian believers, who were more under the control of Satan than of God.

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor 6:9-11.

When we were saved, we were baptised into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who now dwell in us. **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** Gal 3:27.

Jesus prayed, **"You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us..."** John 17:21. The point is that from the moment we were saved and the Godhead indwelt us, the kingdom of God began to be formed in us. When we are convicted of the need to forsake self so that Jesus Christ can live and reign in us, God's kingdom is gradually formed in us, like the mustard seed in Christ's parable.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." Matt 13:31-32.

In the parable, “**the birds of the air come and nest in its branches**” is a picture of the mature Christian, who is able to nurture those who come to him in need. The more the carnal-self diminishes, the more that it can be replaced by the kingdom reign of Christ in us.

Another parable likens the kingdom of heaven to leaven, “**which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.**” Matt 13:33. This parable tells us that the kingdom of heaven has the capacity to infiltrate every area of our lives.

The growth of God’s kingdom in us is hotly contested by Satan and his spirits, and those who seek fulfilment in the Spirit are subjected to continual spiritual warfare. It becomes necessary for us to engage in offensive and defensive spiritual warfare.

On the defensive side, Paul exhorted us to “**Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;**” Eph 6:14-16. Notice that putting on the armour is in reality putting on Jesus Christ, and all the blessings He has procured for us on the cross.

On the offensive side, we may use the spiritual weapons at our disposal, as we are led by the Spirit. “**For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...**” 2 Cor 10:3-6. Some weapons that we may use are the blood of Jesus, the word of our testimonies, the Scriptures, the name of Jesus, and our authority to bind or loosen. It is important to realise that the battle is the Lord’s, and that He alone can defeat Satan. Our position is to be still and only engage in offensive warfare that is initiated by the Lord, and empowered by the Spirit.

Opposition to the Bible

The veracity of the bible has been opposed throughout the history of the Church, particularly in the Nineteenth Century, when academics engaged in what is called ‘the higher criticism,’ to question the bible’s historical and literary accuracy. Jude exhorted believers to contend for the faith, that is, to always be open to being used by the Spirit for that purpose. “**Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**” Jude 3-4.

PRESSING INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke’s translation of the Key Bible Reading presents the necessary heart attitude needed to receive fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. Whereas Matthew’s version stresses the need to use our spiritual weapons to contest opposition from Satan, Luke emphasises the need for consistent determination to press into the kingdom of God.

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.” Luke

We have an example of how Satan opposes people entering this pathway and pressing through to fulfilment in the parable of the sower. Some seeds of truth fell on the path, and Satan snatched away the truth before it could be digested. Some fell among thorns, and the cares of their worldly life choked them. Those on the stony ground were destroyed by continual opposition and tribulation. Only those who had a heart desire to know and walk in the truth, no matter the cost, could receive the rewards of the implanted seed of truth. So it is with the quest for fulfilment in the kingdom of God.

The two main enemies that Satan exploits in opposing our quest for fulfilment in the Spirit are the enticements of the flesh and the world. When we embark on the path of the cross and consign these two enemies to the death of the cross, the Holy Spirit begins a refining work in us to put to them death. On the other hand, Satan unleashes an array of enticements and temptations that attempt to inflate fleshly desires, and draw us further under the control of the world and the flesh. The problem is that the Holy Spirit can only proceed with His work in breaking the power of the flesh and the world over us, when we are willing in our hearts to completely forsake them. It is only then that the Holy Spirit can put to death the carnal man, and it is only death that leads to new resurrection life in Christ Jesus. How far need we go to press into the fullness of the kingdom of God? Jesus said, **“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”** Luke 14:33.

“Pressing into it” indicates a continual course of action that does not deviate from the intention of laying self-life on the cross so that it may be replaced by Christ reigning in us.

Unfortunately very few Christians have pressed on until they have received fulfilment in the kingdom of God. Either this teaching has been lost or watered down, or people go as far as they want to go, and they are not prepared to pay the full price for ‘the pearl of great price.’

SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matt 6:33-34.

For those who have embarked on the path of the cross where their carnal natures are being put to death by the Spirit, their overall desire is for Christ to have a complete reign in every part of their being.

Paul’s pressing into fulfilment in the Kingdom

In the Third Chapter of Philippians, the apostle Paul describes how he was pressing on into fulfilment in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. First he describes how he chose to forsake all for the sake of knowing fulfilment in Christ.

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

He then goes on to say his willingness to share Christ’s death to self that he might experience the power of His resurrection, that is, the power of Christ’s risen life being manifested in his mortal body.

“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

Paul is not talking about his physical death and resurrection, for he is pressing on to know fulfilment in this life here on earth.

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil 3:13-14.

In the following passage, Paul describes his union with Christ in His death, in order that the life of Jesus might be manifested in him, and be transmitted to others.

“But we have this treasure [the life and kingdom reign of Jesus] in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us... always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus [union with Jesus in His death], that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death [death of the self-life] for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.” 2 Cor 4:7-12.

It is only when we embark on this path of the cross, that the power of the self-life is put to death, thereby allowing Jesus to establish His life and kingdom in us. And it is only when Jesus has a complete reign in us that He can use us in His confrontation with Antichrist in the Battle of Armageddon. The path is difficult and not without suffering, but by continually pressing on, looking forward to fulfilment in Christ is the nature of pressing into the kingdom.