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Alright, so here we are in the book of Matthew 3 with the ministry of John the Baptist. Now we're not gonna get into his baptism tonight, we're gonna talk about that next time we gather together, we're not gonna talk about Jesus' baptism, that'll come along there. We're gonna talk about tonight what the Bible says is at hand and what has been made available, what is being presented to humanity. Why is this important? As we said for the last few weeks, the book of Matthew is a book of transition. It takes us from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It takes us from worship in the temple to the worship as the church of Jesus Christ. It takes us from the old covenant to the new covenant. And so what the book of Matthew does is there is this transition, there is this process of taking concepts and ideas that are rooted in the prophecies and the proclamations of the Old Testament and then begins to unpack them in light of the ministry and ultimately the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So there's this incredible transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Now Matthew 3:1 it says,

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Now that's a phrase that we see quite often in Scripture and one that we have heard a multitude of messages, sermons, Bible studies and such on, but there's a whole lot there that we need to unpack. When you come to the Bible, one of the most important things we can do is found in 2 Timothy 2:15, to rightly divide the word of God. Now what that means is that we need to segment and separate concepts and constructs based on what Scripture says they are versus us taking things that may be contrary or different and forcing them into the same hole, so to speak.

So this concept, this phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," why is that so important for us to understand? That phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," is only found in the book of Matthew. It's not found in the Gospel of Mark, Luke and/or John. There is another phrase we're gonna talk about, "the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is actually mentioned one time in the book of Matthew 6:33 where we are admonished to seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto us, but every other reference to it, is found in Mark, Luke and in John. So remember, in the book of Matthew we have the most quotations from the Old Testament. We have a book that is a transition from the Old

Testament into the New Testament, and from the very beginning the message of John the Baptist is you need to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and what I want to share with you tonight, hopefully in brief, are the distinctions yet the similarities between when the Bible uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" and when it uses the phrase "kingdom of God," because you cannot make them the same thing or you will have opposing constructs claiming both to be true at the same time, alright?

So that being said, I want to begin with a difference in vocabulary. This is very elementary. I understand that. For those of you listening on the radio, I apologize that the outline that I've given has a visual there but we have them on the website if you want to go and download it. I want you to notice that in English the word "God" is different than "heaven." Is that correct? The word "heaven" is not the same as "God," correct? I know this sounds elementary but let's do the basics here. So then I decided, well, you know, the Old Testament is written in Hebrew originally, New Testament was originally written in Greek, so I have given you the Hebrew and the Greek words for the same English words.

So for example, the word "God" in Hebrew is "Elohim." Now I know for those of you that are scholars, there are other words the Bible uses for God but Elohim is the word for just God in general or speaking of God himself, alright. The Hebrew word for "heaven" is "shamaya," alright? That's the heavens and the earth of Genesis 1:1, the shamaya. In Greek, the word "God" is "Theos," alright? So when we talk about theology, that is the study of God, theos, and in Hebrew it is ?? for "heaven." You say, "Well, Jeff, why did you go to all that trouble?" I want you to notice that in English the word "God" and "heaven" are not the same. In Hebrews the word "God" and "heaven" are not the same. And in Greek, the word for "God" and "heaven" are not the same.

So why do we try to make the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven the same thing if the words are not the same in any language? That's important for us to understand. So when it says the kingdom of God and when it says the kingdom of heaven, we are dealing with completely different words in every different language. It's not as if we have the same word and in one context we'll say God and the other we'll say heaven. No, completely different words in every language.

Second thing, the difference in definition. What I'm about to share with you comes straight of Noah Webster's dictionary, alright? I just quoted from his dictionary. God, this is the definition in Webster's, "In Christianity, the Creator and Ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority, the supreme being." That's a pretty good definition, alright? It's a dictionary definition but it's pretty decent. How about the definition for heaven? "The dwelling place of the deity and the blessed dead, also the expanse of space over the earth." Are the definitions for God and heaven the same? No. So the words are not the same and the definitions are not the same, so why would we take these two phrases and make them the same thing?

Different words, different definitions and next, different descriptions. This is where it gets critical. This is where it gets vital to the discussion. The kingdom of God. In John 4:24 it says that "God is spirit and those that worship him must do so in spirit and in

truth." Now that verse needs to be unpacked in its context. In John 4, Jesus is speaking to the woman who was at the well. Remember this is the woman who's had a multiplicity of men in her life. She has a reputation such that when she goes into the neighboring town, interesting that all the men follow her back. Just kind of interesting there. But in the context of her conversation with Jesus, she asked a very evasive but insightful question. In the midst of him exposing her sin and exposing her life, she asked this question, "Where are we supposed to worship, here or somewhere else?" That's important because in Jewish history the southern kingdom worshiped in a different place than the northern kingdom, one was in Jerusalem and one was in Bethel, which by the way, Bethel in Hebrew means "the house of God." So she says, "Okay, if I am to receive you and to worship the one true God through you, then where do I go to do so?" And what is Jesus' response? It doesn't matter the GPS location, God is a spirit and those that worship him must worship him in truth and in spirit.

Now for a difference in description here, here's what I'm telling you: the kingdom of God, when that phrase is used in the Bible, is a spiritual kingdom. One enters the kingdom of God by the new birth. John 3:3-5, this is the famous Nicodemus story where here's a man who was religious, knowledgeable, so well-versed in Scripture Jesus called him a master of Israel, and what does Jesus tell him? "You must be born again." He says, "How can I do that? How can I retreat back into my mother's womb?" And then Jesus begins to unpack all that. The kingdom of God is realized and confirmed by the presence of the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit in you. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. Do you realize the distinction there than what the woman at the well was bringing up with Jesus? She said, "Do we go to location A or do we go to location B?" When you begin to put her story and Nicodemus' story together, Jesus is saying that when you're born again, the temple of God is wherever you are. Whether you're at a "church location," at your home, business, out in a field, it doesn't matter where you are, in the middle of a football field, if you are a saved child of God, the church, the temple of God is right there on the 50 yard line. That's why you see signs across our campus that say, "Don't just go to church, be the church," because you are the church everywhere you find yourself.

Christ is in you and you are in Christ. In fact, Colossians 1:27 says, "This is a great mystery, that not only in the fullness of the Godhead is in Christ but that he can be in us, the hope of glory." And so the kingdom of God, when that phrase is used, when we look at the word, when we look at the definition, when we look at the description, the kingdom of God is that entity that is a spiritual relationship with the Lord that comes through the new birth when one confesses their sinful depraved nature, and calls on the Lord Jesus Christ alone to save them. You are then a resident of, a member of, and you are now a part of the kingdom of God.

So if you today say, "I'm a born again believer in Jesus Christ," guess what? You are a part of a kingdom, the kingdom of God, okay? Now let's go to the next one, the kingdom of heaven. Heaven is physical. John 14, Jesus says, "In my house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go and I will return. I have prepared a place for you and when I come back, I will take you with me." In the descriptions of we know as

heaven, we hear about altars and thrones and streets of gold and rivers of pure water, mansions, pillars, gates, real physical tangible stuff. Why is this important? God is spirit. Heaven is physical. You cannot grasp and contain and touch God, but you can heaven. You will walk the streets of gold one day. You will drink of the river of life one day. You will reside in a mansion one day. You will be in the new heaven, the new earth, the new Jerusalem. Those are physical tangible things.

So for a difference here, the kingdom of heaven, this is where it gets very very important for us. It is a physical, literal, earthly kingdom. Just as heaven is physical, so is this kingdom. It is only found in Matthew's Gospel 33 times because it emphasizes the literal, physical, earthly kingdom fully realized at the Second Coming. Now let me unpack all that for a moment. The kingdom of God, if you're a born again believer in Jesus Christ right now, you're a resident of the kingdom of God, but there is nobody here who's a part of the kingdom of heaven. Nobody. Why? Because it is the literal, physical when Jesus Christ is sitting on his throne and the devil is bound in the bottomless pit for a thousand years. This is so critical to understanding not just the Scriptures but the book of Matthew because when we get to chapter 13, we're gonna find a bunch of parables about the kingdom of heaven, and it's gonna say that the kingdom of heaven can be bought with a great price. Can salvation be bought? No. It's gonna talk about the kingdom of heaven this and that, and what we're gonna see is that all these parables that Jesus is telling is what does it look like the days before his Second Coming, and what does his kingdom look like when he establishes it on earth.

So here in Matthew 3 when John the Baptist says the kingdom of heaven is at hand, is that an accurate statement? Absolutely, because the one who one day is gonna sit on the throne and reign is about to dip into the River Jordan right there, and how many times do we see in Scripture him talking about, "If you believe, then you will receive. If you accept me, then things will take place." And so I want you to understand these phrases, "God" is not the same as "heaven," "heaven" is not the same as "God." Completely different descriptions and utilized different ways, and so if we can learn to divide these concepts, I promise you it's gonna make the fog of some things clear away and Scripture just kind of rise to the forefront of, "Oh, this is talking about salvation. This is talking about when Jesus comes back."

I thought that was me for just a moment. It scared me. That was awfully close. I'm just checking mine just to make sure it's not me. That was awfully close. I thought, "Oh no, I'm the one that left the phone on."

So please understand that. Kingdom of God, salvation. Kingdom of heaven, the reign of Jesus. You can be saved and him not reigning yet, correct? Absolutely, but one day when he does reign, all of the residents of the kingdom of heaven are also members of the kingdom of God. Alright, we'll get to that when it comes.

Now I want to show you some similarities. I've talked about all of the differences. Okay, there are stark differences when you begin. Like it says, there's 33 references to the kingdom of heaven in the book of Matthew alone, none anywhere else in the Gospels,

alright? There's one reference to the kingdom of God in Matthew, all the rest are in the other Gospels. Here are the similarities and I just use KOH for kingdom of heaven and KOG for the kingdom of God. Both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are mentioned as being at hand during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, and that is an absolute correct statement. Why? Because he is not only the author of our salvation, he is the one who one day will reign, and what he offered humanity, and we'll get to this toward the end of Matthew, we had the opportunity to embrace both, but what did humanity as a whole do? Rejection thereof, alright? So salvation became available to any and all that would receive, but his reign will come one day in the future, alright? But they were both at hand because they were both embodied in Christ Jesus as he's walking in his earthly ministry. So they're both at hand.

The second similarity is this, the parable of the mustard seed, there are three parables, I've listed them all here for you, of which both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are addressed as. All the rest of the parables are completely different. So let's think about the mustard seed for just a moment. It is mentioned by Jesus as being a very small seed that over time grows into a very large entity, correct? Well, is that not the body of Christ? Did the body of Christ start out kind of small? I mean, we did, didn't we? There was 120 of us in the Upper Room and now there's 120 million plus just in our current date and time, who knows how many billions of people. So just like the mustard seed, the kingdom of God, salvation, the body of Christ started very small and one day and over time has gotten very large.

Let's talk about the kingdom of heaven for just a moment. If the kingdom of heaven is the physical, real, tangible reign of Jesus Christ, then as the mustard seed, it starts off small too, right? When we study the book of Revelation, remember there's coming a time when Jesus Christ descends to reign, correct? Do you remember how many people lost their life prior to that event? How many people were at the battle of Armageddon to resist him? We see that that literal kingdom on the earth when it is initiated at that moment, is very small in number but what do we discover over time? That over that thousand years of Christ reigning, it grows immeasurably large, and so even though there are two different constructs, one is salvation and one is a reigning, they both start small and grow very big.

The second one is the parable of the leaven. Now leaven in your Bible not only makes bread get bigger but it represents many times the concept of sin. For example, in the book of Exodus 12 when the Israelites are coming out of Egypt and they are to remember the Lord's deliverance through what we know as Passover, they were to make bread without leaven, correct? They were to make sure that there was no representative of sin in their lives. That's why today with what we know as the Passover celebration, it is now more tradition than anything but the family members go through, it is typically done by the dad, they go through and make sure that all of the leaven is out of the home. It is a picture of sin in the Bible.

Well, let's talk about the kingdom of heaven, actually let's start with the kingdom of God. I know I got them in backwards order there. The kingdom of God. What we know as the body of Christ, is the body of Christ perfect? Absolutely not. Does the Bible say over and

over again that as the body of Christ, if we don't address sin within us, what will it do? It will grow just like leaven and yeast and it becomes a bigger problem. That's why in 1 Corinthians 5 there is a man who is living in sin and it says the Apostle Paul leads those believers to remove him from the fellowship of that body. He was not taken out of the kingdom of God, he was removed from the fellowship so that it would not continue to infect the body and grow within it, much like leaven does bread. Just as our men's Bible study is walking through the book of Jude, it says there are certain men there who have crept in and they're starting to turn people's hearts and minds to untruths and it's beginning to grow and get bigger.

So even within the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, leaven, it starts small and it grows bigger, correct? Just like sin can overtake and have some issues. Well, what about the kingdom of heaven? You know, when we talk about that reign of Christ on the earth, I think there is a grave misconception that it is like the garden of Eden before sin entered the world. It can't be like the garden of Eden because the people who inherit the kingdom of heaven are not sinless regenerated people, and we kind of worked through that with our Revelation Bible study, and that's critical because it says that during that time period, they come and they present their sacrifices to the Lord. Why would you offer a sacrifice unless you had sinned? And so when we find these passages about the kingdom of heaven and leaven, it's saying even sin can fester even there with Christ on the throne, which is why the sacrifices were necessary and why when the devil is loosed for a little season, it says he deceives many at the end. Not those of us who are reigning with the Lord, but those who are reigning over those who've inherited the kingdom of heaven.

And the last parable is the parable of the sower, very famous parable, because Jesus said, "If you figure out this one, you get them all," alright? Remember there are four seeds that were sown. The first one was taken very quickly by the birds of the air of which Jesus referred to as Satan himself. The second one sprung up very quickly, looked beautiful but it had no root and it withered when it was hot and dry, kind of like our weather right now, just withering away. The third one was producing fruit but became fruitless because of the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust for other things. And the last one bore much fruit, some 30, 60, 100 fold because it was watered properly and nurtured correctly.

The parable of the sower, Jesus says that what the sower is sowing is the word of God. What it's saying is that the kingdom of God, our relationship with the Lord in salvation, is much like the sower and the seed, it can be rejected or it can manifest itself and even become fruitless within itself and such is the kingdom of heaven as well. We will address that specifically when we get to Matthew 13 because Jesus gives us a playbook for what we know as the Second Coming events where he talks about, "Hey, if you find yourself in this situation wanting to enter the kingdom of heaven, this is what you must do and what you must not do."

Which leads to the final point here and then we'll open it up. You may want to raise your hand and go a different direction, you may explore this concept or whatever. The simple differences, simple differences, what we know as the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of

God as explored in Scripture are contained in very different descriptions, very different words, however, allow me to simplify those differences. The kingdom of heaven according to Matthew 11:12 has been and continues to be taken by force. Now is that how the body of Christ multiplies itself? No. If the kingdom of heaven is a physical, tangible reign of God on the earth, aren't you reading through Joshua right now? Is that not a bloody description? What you're seeing in the book of Joshua in our Bible reading plan is a prophetic word for when Christ comes back, you have the reign of God's instrument, these human beings, taking over a physical land, correct? That's what they're doing. Isn't that what Jesus does at the Second Coming? He descends and he physically takes over the earth as we know it and he reigns.

It is taken by force. That is the mistake that many have made through the years. I'm gonna go back in some pretty unfortunate history because as we discuss and we debate biblical Christianity oftentimes with people who are skeptical, maybe they've been hurt, maybe they've had people in their lives that were very overt hypocrites in their life, maybe you've heard this before, "Well, you know that Christianity, there's been horrible things in history that have been done in the name of Christianity." And they typically refer to the Crusades. Absolutely. Why? Because when you get the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven mixed up, you get a mess is what you get. You cannot convert people with the edge of the sword, only the Holy Spirit can save a soul, and when you make the kingdom of heaven the playbook for the church, then all of a sudden you break out swords and you physically begin to take over entities, properties, lands and peoples. The kingdom of God is won by sharing the truth of Jesus Christ, our need for Jesus Christ, and our willingness to believe on him for the salvation of our souls.

The kingdom of heaven according to your Bible is taken by force. I've read Revelation 19 when Jesus comes back, is that a gentle experience that happens? No, it's a very forceful experience. The blood to the bridle of the horse. The sword coming out of his mouth. His feet as brass. You've seen the bumper sticker, right? Jesus is coming back and, boy, is he mad. I'm that's it. But the kingdom of God is sought with the heart, not the sword.

Now you'll notice on your outline I quoted Matthew 6:33 because it's the only reference to the kingdom of God in the book of Matthew. It comes right in the middle of this famous Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is addressing the birds of the air, and Solomon and their clothing, and their food and their shelter and such, and our natural propensity to be concerned about, to be worried about how are we going to achieve these things in life, and he says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will work out." And what the Lord is saying if we seek him with our heart, if we believe on Christ Jesus for salvation, if we become totally dependent and submissive to him in our lives spiritually, then all the passages as we walk through the book of Matthew, almost every single chapter from now on is going to refer to the kingdom of heaven. We need to get in our mindset here we're not talking about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the repentance and the confession of our sins, we're talking about the physical reign of Christ one day both not only in their future but in ours as well.

When we make our personal relationship with the Lord the same as his one day coming reign, it is going to bring confusion, at times it can bring doubt and much despair into our lives. The kingdom of God is never mentioned as something that can come and go, the kingdom of heaven is. The kingdom of God is always referenced to a single event that changes the future, the kingdom of heaven has an ebb and a flow to it. More times than not when somebody comes into my life and they're questioning and they're asking about can they lose their salvation or is there a point in their life where maybe they've done this or done that and voided the relationship with the Lord, oftentimes they'll say, "But pastor, it says the kingdom of heaven is like," and I have to explain, "You're not in the kingdom of heaven right now, you're in the kingdom of God."

But think about Matthew's audience, his audience was primarily as we read through it, those that were Jewish by background, temple worshipers by faith, who had been given – listen to this – by God through Abraham, confirmed through David, they were given an earthly land covenant that'll never go void. I mean, you go back into 1 Samuel, what does the Lord tell David? This covenant about the land is everlasting, never without end. That's why we're still fighting over that dirt on the other side of the planet, it's because the Lord gave it to a specific people, no matter what entities of this age say. It is a land covenant and last time I checked, in the Old Testament that land was taken by force, and one day when Jesus returns it is taken by force.

So here in Matthew 3, John the Baptist shows up and he says, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Now don't worry, as alluded to in the Gospel of Mark, chronologically at the same time, there is a multiplicity of passages saying the kingdom of God is at hand. It's not as if one had to be rejected for the other one to be received, they were both available to humanity and what we know as the kingdom of God is now available to any and all who will believe, and the kingdom of heaven is one day gonna be a residence of those who now one day believe.

So I understand that was a lot of information in a short amount of time. I believe this is critical not just to understanding Matthew but understanding the Scriptures, particularly in light of our personal relationship with the Lord. If you're gonna base your relationship to the Lord on the parables of the kingdom of heaven, you're gonna spend a lifetime of disillusionment and doubt, okay? So we'll get to that particularly in chapters 13 and 4 but there's a lot coming.