

Authenticating the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven

Call to Worship: Psalm 104:1-24

1st Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-2:4

2nd Scripture: Matthew 4:23-25

Hymn Insert- *Still, My Soul Be Still*

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

Hymn Insert- *In Christ Alone*

Introduction

Having given us a brief summary of the calling of our Lord's first four (soon to become) Apostles, once again, Matthew provides us with a general, descriptive summary of our Lord's ministry in Galilee, before bringing us to consider His lengthy discourse on the mountain; what we would generally call the "Sermon on the Mount." And again, we find in all of this (as I've sought to show last time), a great emphasis on the "Kingdom of God/Heaven," which will be the great subject matter of the "Sermon on the Mount," defining the inner virtues, which must and will, fill the hearts of all who truly enter into (and are part of) this Kingdom.

Recall again, what was the central focus of John the Baptist's preaching (3:1-2)? How about our Lord's preaching (4:17)? And here again, we find that same theme driving Matthew's Gospel testimony to the Jews (4:23). It is no wonder, as well, then, that the very first beatitude, speaking of a clear virtue that directly contradicts the heart of the Pharisees and modern Judaism, speaks of the foundational heart quality that is maintained by those, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (Read 5:3). Finally, notice as well, our Lord's sobering words, found in Chapter 5:20, which would have certainly gripped the consciences of His Jewish audience. Needless to say, the "Kingdom of Heaven," and the only Gospel that brings one into this Kingdom (which is why Matthew here calls it "the Gospel of the Kingdom"), is the central theme of Matthew's overall Book.

All of that said, there is a critical part that our Lord's miracles played, as signs, which served to authenticate His message about the Kingdom of Heaven. If our Lord is going to tear down the weighty, but empty, foundation of Pharisaical Judaism (no small task), and replace it with the biblical Gospel of the Kingdom of God, there must be authenticating signs, affirming the divine approval of this teaching, which brings us to our text for this morning.

I. Authenticating the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven

And so, once again, Matthew provides us with a general description of our Lord's ministry in Galilee, which includes a summation of the kinds of signs and wonders that accompanied His teaching. And by this means, He obtained a large following from many different regions in the land (albeit, not insinuating that this large following had true faith in Him; in fact, many didn't), but this further sets the tone for the Sermon on the Mount, where our Lord instructs His disciples in the presence of these large multitudes of people.

And so, consider again the general description of His ministry. In verse 23, we are told, "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people." And so, in a general sense, Matthew describes Jesus's ministry as involving teaching in the synagogues, which centered upon preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and was accompanied by healing miracles, whereby our Lord healed all kinds of sicknesses and diseases among the people. Let us then consider the purpose of His ministry in these regards.

1) Teaching in their synagogues: First, we note the primary locations, within which, our Lord taught; namely, in the synagogues. While the Temple was at Jerusalem, it is important to understand that, following the Jewish return from the Babylonian Captivity, these synagogues were built all over the place, as a means of providing *local* places of worship for the people of God. Now, sacrifices would not have been offered in them (sacrifices had to be offered at the Temple), but regular worship services, and especially teaching and preaching, were conducted at these local synagogues, where the people of God could conveniently gather together. And generally, rabbis would lead the worship services at these synagogues. In many ways, you can say, that synagogues are like the churches of our own day.

And these synagogues, not unlike the churches of our day, were dispersed all over the place. And so, Jesus spent much of His time traveling from synagogue to synagogue, throughout all the cities of Galilee to teach and preach. This was important, because, by conducting His ministry in this public way, He was not trying to solicit a following, by underhandedly and stealthily going into the homes of the people, so as to sway them away from the teachings of the religious leaders. No, He taught publicly. He had nothing to hide and He was willing to accept

and deal with any challenges that were brought about, against His teaching. In fact, at His arrest and mock trial, He even stated, as it were, to His accusers, “Look, why do you arrest Me privately? Everything I did, I did publicly. I had nothing to hide. And yet, you now deal with Me privately, out of the public eye, because you have something to hide, in your motives.” And so, here, we find that our Lord conducted His ministry with the utmost integrity and transparency. He taught the people in their places of worship; in their synagogues.

2) He was teaching, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom in their synagogues:

We’ve considered the primary sphere of His ministry, and here we are also given the primary description and content of His ministry. He taught. As the Rabbi’s would generally seek to do, Jesus opened up the Word of God for them. He expounded the Scriptures, but especially, showing what they had taught about the Kingdom of God, and how this Kingdom had now arrived in His own coming. He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. That is, He presented the true nature of the Kingdom of Heaven; what it is, and who the subjects are that occupy that Kingdom, while presenting Himself as the Messiah and the only way into this Kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount, which we will be coming to next time, Lord willing, will give us a sense of the content of such preaching. And so, this kind of teaching and preaching summed up the content of His ministry.

3) And finally, we find that He had healed all kinds of illnesses and diseases, as an accompaniment to His preaching ministry, as He travelled throughout the cities of Galilee. And brethren, it is extremely important that we recognize two factors surrounding these healings, which are often ignored by many of the alleged “faith healers” of our day. There was a specific *revelatory* purpose attached to these healings, which complimented the teaching/preaching aspect of our Lord’s ministry, which significantly contradicts the phony “faith healers” of our day, who isolate healings as an end unto themselves.

a- These healings were given, as a means of authenticating the specific teachings of our Lord, as He sought to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, while ushering in the New Covenant. The Old Covenant, brought about through Moses, was becoming obsolete, and was about to be wholly replaced by the New Covenant. Such a profound, radical transition, required these miraculous signs, affirming God’s stamp of approval on the Messianic authority of Jesus.

That is why, as we read in our first Scripture reading, the author of Hebrews states in Hebrews 2:1-4:

*“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, **God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?**”*

And so, these miracles (along with those that later accompanied the ministry and time of the Apostles) were signs and wonders, which God used to affirm the authority and teaching of our Lord.

b- And then secondly, these miraculous signs and wonders, in keeping with the Kingdom of Heaven theme, provide a foretaste of the glory of the resurrection, where our bodies, which once broke down, would be resurrected unto incorruptibility and perfection in Christ. By these miracles (healing of the blind, deaf, lame; the cleansing of lepers; the raising of the dead...etc), we have the certain affirmation that Jesus, the Messiah and King of God’s heavenly Kingdom is able to perfect His people, both inwardly and outwardly, unto eternal life! And so, while these bodies decay in the present; while the outward man presently perishes, the inward man is already being renewed day by day, and at the final resurrection, everything that once broke down, will be healed, perfected and made everlastingly unbreakable! Such a reality sends martyrs boldly into the flames, to the chopping block and unto all manner of executions for their faith! Because our God, and our Christ, is able to completely fix, all that is broken under the remaining curse of this world, unto life eternal!

And so, this was the general summation of our Lord’s ministry. It was public and in the synagogues. It consisted of biblical preaching, especially as it came to fulfillment in the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Gospel that brings one into this Kingdom. And it was accompanied by miracles, authenticating the authority, ministry, calling and power of Jesus, the Messiah and rightful King of God’s Heavenly Kingdom!

And as Matthew has unveiled a general summary of our Lord's ministry, he further reveals the effects of this ministry in verses 24-25: "Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan."

Especially, as word began to spread regarding the miracles of our Lord, He wound up accruing a very large following. People began to bring out those who were suffering from all kinds of illnesses, diseases, torments, demonic possession and any kind of debilitating illness, so as to see them healed. And this word spread all throughout Israel, so that, people from every direction began to gather around Him. Now, as we know from John, Chapter 6, many of these people, while witnessing the glory of Christ's power, never came to have a saving faith in Him. They saw the signs as ends in themselves, and failed to recognize the purpose of those signs, as indicators meant to drive them to have a saving faith in the Christ. Such is the age old danger, which still permeates our day, of presenting Christ as One who can make your life better *in this* world. That said, our Lord still sought to teach them the truth, as He does in the next Chapter, and of course, some do come to believe.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Let us see, brethren, that the central message which governed our Lord's ministry was the message of the Kingdom of Heaven; including the way into this kingdom (the gospel), and the nature of the Kingdom itself. And I want to suggest to you this morning that this ought to be the central message which governs our hearts, lives and ministries today.

It is too easy to get sidetracked by so many other things in life, and even the minutia of particular aspects of deep or peripheral theology. And brethren, we are ever prone to losing sight of what matters most to God, and that which is most profitable for the salvation of the lost, and for our own personal sanctification. Let us strive to remain on track, daily, by keeping the Kingdom of Heaven, ever in focus. That means giving far less attention and time over to politics (where there is very little comfort and edification for the soul, to be found). That means giving

far less time over to sports and hobbies and pastimes and events that hold no eternal value. That means giving far less time over to attempting to plummet the depths of deep theology, concerning matters that are either peripheral, non-essential or curiosity stroking. And it means, meditating upon, discussing and giving most of our time over to preparing ourselves for the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven, of which, we are now citizens.

If you find yourself regularly frustrated, angry, depressed, anxious or dissatisfied, it is worth examining the possibility that just maybe you are losing sight of the Kingdom of God, of which, you are part. Brethren, we are part of something beyond huge; a glorious salvation, given to us freely in Christ, which finds its completion in a Kingdom that is undefiled, incorruptible and which does not fade away...ever! Nothing can change the path which we are on! Indeed, we are kept on this path, by a faith, which has been given to us by God, and which has, as its object, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has already defeated death for us, and who ever lives to make intercession for us, at the right hand of God! That can't change! But, we must continue to prepare ourselves for that great day, ever pursuing holiness in the fear of God, and ever pleading with those on the outside, to enter into the narrow way, before it is too late for them!

2) Are you truly a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven? If not, then understand that absolutely nothing else matters or has any lasting value in your life. Let me ask you this, friends. What good is the summation of what presently defines your life, if there is a grave that soon awaits your company, and a judgment to follow? What is the value of all of your life investments, if you know not God in truth? Don't you see how fast time is flying right by you? None of this means anything, and none of this matters in the end, if it is not done unto the glory of God and His Son. Life has a purpose and it is not defined by accumulating wealth, possessions, power, popularity or anything else. You have to stop, and consider the fact that the cycle of life, which you are presently caught up in (with the rest of the world), is spinning fast, and it's circling a drain the whole time. And only Christ can pull you out and deliver you into His eternal kingdom. This world is fading, and it's fading quickly. Don't go down with it. Seek the Lord Jesus Christ, now, before it is too late for you! Call upon Him! Turn from your sins and lay hold of Christ, as your only hope. The Gospel!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25