

Christ's Teaching on the Kingdom of God

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Part I: His Teaching

(Summary from Ladd, *A Theology of the NT*)

1. Judaism and Jesus

A. Kingdom of God: Central to Jesus' Ministry. General continuity with the OT and Jewish thought

B. Judaism

1) Goal: Israel, victorious, in the land, under the rule of God

The Jews held the cessation of prophecy because the Law was all that was needed. It was final and complete. "God is no longer acting in historical events. One mighty act of God remained in the future when God would manifest his kingly power to destroy his enemies, redeem Israel, and establish his reign effectively in all the world." (Ladd, 364)

2) Variety of the Kingdom of God

| Temporally (When?) | Historical realization | Eschatological realization |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Method (How?) | Active: By force: Zealots | Passive: By God's supernatural intervention |
| Person (Who?) | Nationalistic-Messiah Political | Divine king Prophetic-apocalyptic tendency |

C. Jesus

"The gospel of the Kingdom is essentially the same as the gospel of grace; but the former from the perspective of before the resurrection, the latter, after." (Ladd, 33)

According to the OT, all that holds for the divine king, also holds for the Messiah-King, the Redeemer-King of David's house (Ridderbos, Kingdom, 6).

Daniel is the background for Jesus' preaching. In opposition to Nebuchadnezzar, God's reign is eternal and infinite (Dan 3:33). He will at last deprive the worldly rulers of their dominion and give it to 'a Son of Man' (Dan 7:9ff) and "the saints of the Most High" will share in His reign (Dan 7:18) (Ridderbos, Kingdom, 7).

1) Discontinuity (Ridderbos, 14-15)

He does not appeal to these, but to the OT Therefore, what He means cannot be determined only by appeal to the apocalyptic sector of Judaism (contra-Weiss).

2) Gospels as the Source

- a. Message: How Jesus preached
- b. Hermeneutics: How He used the OT
- c. Context:
 - a) Historical context of His preaching.
 - b) Particular nature and the novelty in the preaching.

3) Meaning of the kingdom of God

- a. Rule or sovereignty of God; Kingship, Kingly power.
- b. Point of departure of the gospels.
- c. It is a Semitic idiom [Synecdoche].

It was not preserved in the gospels which were intended for Gentile audiences (cf. Ridderbos, Kingdom, 18-9).

2. Two ages: Continuity from the OT and Judaism

Difference between the present age and the age to come.

A. Transition of the Age to come: Resurrection or the parousia

B. Two ages: Contrast, even opposition

Parable of wheat and weeds, four soils, entering the strong man's house (Mt 12:29)

1) This Age: Satan still reigns.

Satan opposes redemptive purpose of God.

Human weakness, mortality, sin

Broken fellowship with God

2) Age to Come: Realization of the reign of God -->Resurrection to eternal life (Judaism: Here on earth, but transformed.)

Destruction of the devil and his angels.

Formation of a redeemed, holy society

Perfect fellowship with God.

C. Two ages overlap.

Casting out demons: Arrival of the power of the Age to come in this age.

3. Two kinds of the Kingdom of God

A. The Eschatological Kingdom of God:

1) Three meanings, kingship/dominion/kingdom (Ridderbos, Kingdom, 24)

a. Kingship: The coming of God's kingly rule.

It is 'dynamical.' The spatial is secondary.

b. Dominion:

The realm in which it is enjoyed, i.e., inheriting eternal life means entering into the kingdom of God in the Age to come.

c. Kingdom: The coming involves

a) Destruction of the devil and his angels.

b) Formation of a redeemed, holy society.

c) Perfect fellowship with God.

2) Beneficiaries: Discontinuity

a. In the OT and Judaism: Israel

Israel, with some blessings enjoyed by Gentile proselytes.

b. Jesus: Believers

The true "sons of the kingdom" are those who respond to Him. The Jews rejected Him.

B. The Present Kingdom of God:

Discontinuity: New Concept to the Jews

1) Jesus as fulfillment of the OT eschatological kingdom

Jesus said Isa 61:1-2 and Isa 35:5-6 was being fulfilled in Himself.

2) Exorcism of demons: Evidence that the Kingdom was here already (Mt 12:28)

a. Victory won

Jesus has defeated Satan, each time He casts out a demon.

b. Binding of Satan

a) Already: The war is won. (Cullmann, Christ and Time, 84; Ladd, 68)

The strong man has been bound for now.

In the meantime, men can be delivered from his power (demons can be cast out by the seventy disciples.).

b) Not yet: But the war continues.

He will be destroyed at the eschaton.

In the parable of four soils, Jesus makes it clear that Satan is still able to cause trouble on earth. Therefore, binding does not mean he is powerless.

3) Discontinuity

| | OT | NT |
|------------------|---|---|
| Worldview | Political view | Cosmic view |
| Enemy | Hostile, evil nations | Spiritual powers of evil |
| View of this age | Pessimistic view: Under the power of evil. God has withdrawn from the scene | Optimistic view: God has invaded history and defeated evil. Though final deliverance is later the kingdom is already in their midst |

4) Mystery: Problem of delay

Why can this be won only on the plane of history?

It has something to do with the fact that the fate of men hangs in the balance.

4. Kingdom of God: The Age of Salvation: Soteriological

A. The Kingdom as Gift

1) Life and Salvation

Another original element in Jesus' message.

a. Present Age

Not only to be enjoyed in the Age to Come, but in this old age.

a) Parable of treasure and pearl of great price.

b) Kingdom sought here and now (Mt 6:33).

c) Gift to be received like a child (Mk 10:15).

d) Gift to be received by the humble, both now and in the Age to Come (In the Beatitude).

e) Parables of lost sheep/coin/son are primarily concerned with present salvation (Lk 15).

f) Predominantly in the concept of salvation in Jesus' preaching, He expresses the reality of the kingdom of God as already fulfilled. To what John the Baptist preached, Jesus adds "the time is fulfilled." (Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, 47-8)

b. Coming Age:

Salvation is primarily eschatological.

a) Deliverance from mortality.

b) Perfected fellowship with God: Parables of

1. Gathering the grain into the barn.

2. Sheep, apart from goats, brought into the fold.

3. Table fellowship. Jesus with His disciples, men from all corners of the earth, a wedding feast, a banquet.

Metaphor of wedding feast was known to Jews as a symbol of the kingdom of God (Ladd, 70).

c) Contrast to "lost"

1. Current state of "dead" is to be under the threat of eternal destruction.

c. Healing: Evidence of Present Messianic Salvation

a. A pledge of eschatological immortality.

b. Agent:

Not universal, but only where mediated by Jesus and His disciples.

c. Priority of salvation

The gospel of salvation was more important than the healing.

2) Forgiveness of Sins

a. A deeper aspect of salvation

b. Discontinuity

a) Judaism: Jews did not expect messianic forgiveness to be free.

b) Jesus: So did Jesus offend them.

Jesus did not tell people how to be forgiven.

1. He forgave them and thereby saved them.

2. The present experience of the promised kingdom of God.

c. The eschatological judgment will be based on a prior experience of the gifts of forgiveness (Parable of forgiveness; Mt 18:23-35).

3) Righteousness

a. Discontinuity

a) Judaism: Obedience to the Law and acts of mercy outweighing the bad.

b) Jesus: Much higher standards. Matter of heart. In fact, impossible.

He granted to those who renounce pride and receive it (Parable of publican and Pharisee at prayer).

b. Fulfilled in the present, but consummation awaits the age to come.

B. Practical meaning for believers: Radical obedience in present

1) The power of God is at work, demands a powerful reaction.

a. Continuity

Rabbis taught that one should take the yoke of the Kingdom (the Law).

b. Discontinuity: Radical obedience

Jesus said this was not enough. The reaction to God's own work must be radical.

a) Negative aspects

1. Cut off your sinful hand/eye (Mk 9:43, 47).
2. Hate your own family (Lk 14:26).
3. He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (Mt 10:34).

b) Positive aspect: Images of 'violence'

Jesus says the kingdom of God is coming violently and men enter it violently (Mt 11:11-13; Lk 16:16).

2) Those who receive Jesus' word enter the present realm of blessing.

5. God of the Kingdom: The Kingdom of God is theocentric.

| God of the Kingdom | Judaism | Jesus |
|---|--|---|
| Seeking One (Parable of the lost sheep/coin/son) | No longer active; aloof | 1. He takes initiative to save the lost, those who know they need a physician. 2. He is visiting. The kingdom is present. |
| Inviting One (Parable of the wedding feast) | Depends on the initiative of the sinner. | 1. He invites us to a banquet. 2. All that is needed is a favorable response. |
| Father | 1. Concerns covenant relationship. 2. Originally for all Israel. 3. When they were unfaithful, it was reserved for the | 1. Not universal His messianic sonship was different from that of His disciples. He never applied the category of sonship to any other than His |

| | | |
|-------|---|--|
| | remnant. | disciples. |
| Judge | 4. In Post-canonical literature, it was for certain individuals only. | 2. Primarily eschatological, but with a present aspect to the relationship. 1. Puts man in a predicament. Since an invitation and visitation is present, man must respond. 2. Present reaction to the call determines man's eternal destiny. |

Part II: Mystery of the Kingdom of God (Ladd, 91ff)

1. Introduction

"Our central thesis is that the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history. It is precisely this background which provides the setting for the parables of this Kingdom." (Ladd, 91)

A. Canons of Interpretation

1) Parable is not the same as allegory.

| | Allegory | Parable |
|------------|---|---|
| Definition | Created by the speaker as a teaching medium | Story drawn from everyday life |
| Control | Details are under his control | Details are not controlled, so are not important. |
| Meaning | Every detail has meaning. | Teaches only one truth. |

2) Interpretation: It must be understood in their historical setting, which is Jesus' ministry.

a. Not the life of the church

- a) They are not prophecies of the church or its mission.
- b) It is admitted they may have an application to the church.

b. Sitz im Leben: Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Dodd).

- a) Consistently Eschatological View

Jesus speaks of the certainty of the future kingdom.

b) Ridderbos

1. The parables must be understood in accordance with the general contents of Jesus' preaching, i.e., as illustrations of the Kingdom of heaven proclaimed by Him.

2. They are very closely connected with the special redemptive-historical character of Jesus' mission and preaching.

c. Key: Eschatology in process of realization (Jeremias in Ladd, 93)

a) Jeremias: Problem of the "having come" and "to be expected" dialectic. Mk 4 and Mt 13.

1. Speaking in parables both reveals, and veils; thus it involves grace and judgment.

2. In this age, this key can only be discerned by faith, that is, by the grace of God. In the eschaton, everybody will see it.

b) Argument

1. However, this assumes they must be understood in the context of Judaism.

2. This does not allow for Jesus' creativity. He went beyond Jewish ideas.

B. The Mystery of the Kingdom

1) "Fulfillment without Consummation"

Several parables of Mk 4 and Mt 13 illustrate the mystery.

a. "The future, as it were, penetrates into the present."

This is the mystery of the kingdom, "The Kingdom will start before the time of the great judgment, the time is fulfilled before 'the end of the world.'" (Ridderbos, Kingdom, 55)

b. Only Realized Eschatology in the Kingdom of heaven (Dodd)

But this is untenable. (Ridderbos, Kingdom, 40)

c. Only Future Realization (Schweitzer)

But this too is insufficient (Ridderbos, Kingdom, 123).

2) What was not the secret (the Jews already knew this):

- a. The Kingdom was coming.
- b. It would come in apocalyptic power.

3) The Secret

a. It "entered into the world in advance in a hidden form to work secretly within and among men." (Ladd, 94)

b. In the NT , the mystery is proclaimed to all men, but only some understand and believe.

C. Parable of the Four Soils (Mk 13:3-33)

The Kingdom is coming the way it was expected.

- 1) It was expected to destroy evil with unresistable power.
- 2) It comes like a farmer sowing seed and may not have any (permanent) effect on certain people.
- 3) It is working quietly, secretly among men.
- 4) It does not force itself. It must be received.

D. The Tares (Mt 14:24-30, 36-43)

1) A Further Illustration of the Hidden, Unexpected Presence of the Kingdom of God.

2) The O.T. and Jewish Apocalyptic

- a. Coming of the Kingdom ends this age and brings the Age to Come.
- b. It uproots society by destroying the unrighteous.

3) Jesus: Discontinuity

a. It comes in the midst of the present age with its mixture of good and bad.

b. It is an event before the coming of the Son of Man and the glorious manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

c. The powers of the Age to Come have entered into the world to create "sons of the Kingdom" to enjoy its power and blessing.

d. Society is not uprooted. This is the mystery.

4) Those who will be "gathered out of His Kingdom," were not in it.

a. It actually means they will be prevented from entering it.

b. At the eschatological coming of the Kingdom, this separation will take place.

5) The New Truth revealed is this:

a. The Kingdom can come into the world and create sons, without effecting the eschatological judgment.

b. Yet, the eschatological judgment will surely come.

E. The Mustard Seed (Mt 13:31-32)

1) Meaning

"The Kingdom, which will someday be a great tree, is already present in the world in a tiny, insignificant form" (Ladd, 97).

2) Church?

It does not merely speak of the growth of the community of Jesus' disciples. The slow growth of a community would be better illustrated by an oak, instead of the fast-growing mustard plant.

3) The focus is the tiny beginning and the large end (Ridderbos disagrees)

a. The question was how the Kingdom could be so small as Jesus and His poor little band of disciples.

b. The Jews expected a great tree, under which the nations could shelter (Ezekiel).

c. Jesus' answer is first the tiny seed, then the great tree. The relative insignificance of what is happening does not preclude the presence of the Kingdom.

F. The Leaven (Mt 13:33)

1) Same basic truth as the mustard seed: "that the kingdom of God, which one day will rule over all the earth, has entered into the world in a form that is hardly perceptible." (Ladd, 98)

2) Other interpretations

a. The slow but persistent process of permeation and penetration.

a) This is how the Kingdom grows.

b) It is not apocalyptic, but gradual.

b. Dispensationalism

Leaven is evil doctrine permeating the apostate Christian church.

3) Arguments

a. The slow, gradual process of change is an evolutionary idea, foreign to Jesus and His audience.

b. Leaven was not always a symbol of evil in Hebrew and Jewish thought.

4) In Jesus' Setting

a. Emphasis on the Contrast

The small, hidden start: The absurdly small bit of leaven

The final form: the mass of more than a bushel of meal.

b. Emphasis on the Consummation: Distinctiveness

Unlike the parable of the mustard seed, here the consummation is emphasized, the permeation of the meal, which is the total sovereignty of God.

c. Emphasis on the Irony

Jesus was explaining that at the beginning, nothing seems to be happening, the leaven seems engulfed by the meal, but eventually the meal is completely transformed.

d. How or when the future Kingdom will come is not part of the parable.: The gradual nature was not emphasized, and is an unmeaningful detail.

a) Since it is foreign to His hearers, Jesus would have had to explain it over and over again.

b) He did so with the idea that the Son of Man had to die.

c) he did not do so here.

d) In fact, other parables contradict any notion of gradualness.

G. The Treasure and the Pearl (Mt 13:44, 45)

1) Main thought

- a. The Kingdom is of inestimable value.
- b. It is to be sought above all else.
- c. It is worth paying everything one has.

2) Point in Jesus' Setting

- a. The above point is what Jews had long awaited.
- b. But they did not expect such a one as Jesus to preach it.

a) Legalism

Pharisees expected observation of the Law in a way that brought prestige.

b) Political

Certain Jews looked for insurrection against Rome.

c) Sinners?

Association with publicans and sinners did not seem to have anything to do with the Kingdom.

3) Participation in the Kingdom

Jesus is saying that, contrary to appearances, to be His disciple is to participate in the Kingdom.

H. The Net (Mt 13:47-50)

1) Ladd' Interpretation

- a. Similar to the wheat and the weeds, but it adds an element.
- b. They must be understood in the setting of Jesus' ministry, with its messages.
 - a) Of the Kingdom coming into the world without effecting the eschatological separation of good and bad.
 - b) Thus, the Kingdom is to work in a mixed society.
- c. No Pure community

This adds that even in the community created by the working of the Kingdom in the world, it will not be a pure community until the eschatological separation.

2) Historical Situation: Jesus explained the type of people Jesus attracted.

a. Prophecies: The Messiah would gather together a holy people (Psalm of Solomon 17:28, 36).

b. Jesus: Did not do so.

a) He said He came to call sinners.

b) When the invited guests declined, loiterers were invited off the streets.

c. The Answer: Some day, such a community will be created.

a) In the meantime, the invitation goes out to all men.

b) All who respond are accepted into present discipleship in the Kingdom.

J. The Seed Growing by Itself

(Mk 4:26-9; omitted by the other Synoptics)

1) This illustrates the supernatural character of the Kingdom.

2) This is not an allegory. Ignore the details.

3) Ladd's Interpretation

a. The consistent eschatological school found the key, though their interpretation must be modified.

a) The Kingdom is "an eschatological event, which is utterly independent of all human effort."

b) It must be added that there is a unique element in Jesus' message, the presence of the Kingdom in His own mission.

Jesus is not just making an advance announcement. If so, He would not be saying anything new. The Jews already expected the eschatological event to be supernatural.

b. Connection between sowing and harvest

a) Ministry of Jesus provided the "seed." There would come the harvest.

b) Both events are manifestations of God's Kingdom.(Seedtime and harvest)

1. Both are the work of God.

2. Both are supernatural.

4) The Supernatural Nature of the Kingdom is seen in the words found in association with it (Ladd, 103).

a. In Jn 18:36, Jesus says His Kingdom is not of this world, i.e., it comes from God.

b. It is related to men, and works in and through men, but it never becomes subject to men.

c. Note that the Kingdom does not "come" as men receive it; it is in Jesus that it has come into history. This is the ground for the demand that men receive it.