

## WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE KINGDOM - ITS MEMBERSHIP

Taken and adapted from 'The Red Bits – A Study Guide' by Michael Button)

**1. Entry to the Kingdom.** We have seen that the members (or subjects) of the Kingdom are those who obey the Lord – who give their allegiance to Him. In several places Jesus described what this involves. As we read through the list, please note that this is not so much a 'check list' of entry conditions, as a description of what it means to give the Lord our allegiance.

- (i) Repent and believe (*read* Mark 1:15). This must be the first step. None of us have obeyed God's rule from the start (*for all have sinned Rom 3:23*) so we need to *turn* from following Satan's rule to the rule of God. This is the meaning of *repent*. Hand-in-hand with repentance we must *believe* the Gospel (good news) that Jesus is Who He says He is and He will do what He says He will do. Without such faith in Jesus, we shall not give Him the commitment that is needed to be a member of the Kingdom.
- (ii) Do God's will (*read* Matt 7:21-23; Matt 21:28-32). A true member of the Kingdom gives real obedience to the King, not lip-service.
- (iii) Make it the first priority (*read* Luke 12:29-34).
- (iv) Give anything to enter (*read* Matt 13:44-46).
- (v) Do not let anything come between you and entry to the Kingdom (*read* Mark 9:47). The shocking imagery Jesus uses serves to emphasise the importance of ensuring we are in the Kingdom. Our eternal destiny outweighs any other consideration in this life.
- (vi) Give unrelenting commitment (*read* Luke 9:62).
- (vii) Childlike faith and humility (*read* Matt 18:3-4 & 19:14). Albert Barnes' comment on this is, 'Children are to a great extent destitute of ambition, pride and haughtiness. They are characteristically humble and teachable.'<sup>1</sup> Such characteristics are in contrast to the Scribes and Pharisees who vehemently opposed the teaching of Jesus. They were proud, had only the appearance of righteousness and were unteachable.
- (viii) Determination (*read* Matt 11:12 & Luke 16:16). The passage in Matthew is difficult to understand. William Barclay wrote what is perhaps one of the clearest explanations of this: 'Only the man in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter it.'<sup>2</sup> There will always be opposition to those who want to enter the Kingdom, and it takes a forceful determination to overcome the violence of opposition from within and without''.

<sup>1</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes on the Old Testament, Vol 1*, page 184<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Matthew, vol 2*, page 8<sup>b</sup>).

- (ix) A spirit of forgiveness. When Peter was asking Jesus about how often he should forgive others, Jesus told him the parable of a king's servant who has been forgiven a debt by the king but would not forgive another who owed him a far smaller debt (Matt 18:21-35). The parable teaches that we needed to be forgiven much to be counted worthy of entering the Kingdom and our gratitude for God's forgiveness should create a readiness to forgive others.
- (x) Be born again (*read* John 3:3-5). Though we have left this until last, it is in some ways foundational to all the others. Since the nature of the Kingdom is spiritual, we need a spiritual nature to be part of it. Additionally, without the Spirit of God, available only to those who are born of the Spirit, we shall be unable to live up to everything else that is on this list and to be fit for the Kingdom. Those who enter the Kingdom need a righteousness that is above that of the feigned righteousness shown by the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. Such a righteousness comes only to those who, by faith in Christ, are born again (James 2:23).

D Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes: 'The man who has been born again, and who has the divine nature within him, is a man who is righteous and his righteousness does exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.'<sup>3</sup>

Activity 1: Which of the following are true?

- (a) Only those who are perfect can enter the Kingdom.
- (b) Everyone is a member of the Kingdom of God unless they are cast out.
- (c) God made it easy to get into the Kingdom.
- (d) No one is really fit to be a member of the Kingdom, but God makes it possible through Christ.
- (e) We do not need to repent as long as we believe.
- (f) It does not matter how we behave once we are in the Kingdom, since God forgives us our sins.
- (g) To be in the Kingdom should be a high priority.

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, and in other teachings, Jesus describes the behaviour expected of those who are in the Kingdom. We shall look at these in future studies. For now, we shall briefly consider two that refer directly to the Kingdom of Heaven:

Activity 2: Which two Beatitudes (in Matthew 5:2-12) refer to the Kingdom of Heaven, and who receive it?

Verse \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_

Verse \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_

**2. A Gift from God.** All of the above seem to suggest that the cost of entering the Kingdom is very great and difficult to attain. However, you may have noticed

<sup>3</sup> D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol 1*, page 208).

when you read from Luke, Chapter 12 a short while ago, that Jesus told us not to fear the cost, because *It is your Father's good pleasure to **give** you the kingdom* (v32). However, it is a gift that not everyone will accept, as the *Parable of the Wedding Feast* reminds us, for in the Parable many who were invited made excuses not to turn up (Matt 22:2-14).

Yes, we have to want to be in the Kingdom enough to be willing to give everything to enter it, but we cannot buy our way in by money or by good deeds. Membership is a gracious gift of God – a gift to be received by faith (see para.1 i). The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, in which labourers working a short time receive the same pay as those who worked all day, reminds us that no-one has any special claim to the Kingdom by virtue of his or her own merit (Matt 20:1-16).

3. **A Citizen's Status** (read Matt 11:11). Jesus is here comparing the old order with the new. John was the forerunner of the Kingdom. He represented the last days of the Old Covenant, the Covenant of Law. Jesus ushered in the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace (read John 1:17). Those in the Kingdom belong to the New Covenant.

Several suggestions have been made by Bible Scholars as to how those in the Kingdom are greater than John. The most common three suggestions are:

	<i>The Old Covenant (The Nation of Israel)</i>	<i>The New Covenant (The Kingdom of God)</i>
Status	Human birth	Spiritual Birth
Privilege	Look forward to the Kingdom	Belong to the Kingdom
Power or Ability	Human	The Holy Spirit

William Barclay wrote about this comment of Jesus, 'The Kingdom is something which by its emergence has put everything that went before it out of date.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus*, page 56