

HOW TO BUILD A KINGDOM

MATTHEW 16:13-17:8

**Pastor Andrew B. Pigott
Chinese Christian Church of New Jersey
January 27, 2002**

Jesus Christ came to provide salvation so people could become a part of the Kingdom of God. His main work was to build a Kingdom. In this sermon I want you to notice two things Jesus had to do in order to build His Kingdom. The first thing He had to do was to get people to acknowledge the fact that He was the King. The second thing was to persuade people to submit to His authority.

Let's take a moment to think, first of all, what Jesus did to help people realize that He was the King of Heaven. And after we do that, let's take another moment to consider what Jesus did to help people submit to His authority as King. This is the two-step process Jesus used to build His Kingdom and it the same process He continues to use today. Thus, in learning this process, we are actually learning how to build a kingdom. And if we imitate Christ in using this process, then we will actually participate in the work of building God's Kingdom here upon this earth.

So the first question we will now try to answer is, "What did Jesus do to help people realize that He was the King of Heaven?" The events recorded in our scripture lesson take place at the beginning of Christ's third and final year of public ministry. For two years prior to these events Jesus had been teaching and performing miracles. Think about the time Jesus calmed the storm and walked on the water. And remember the times He fed the crowds of people with just a few fish and a few loaves of bread. Marvel at His power and authority over all the forces of nature. And then add to that all the times He demonstrated His power over the spiritual forces of evil when He cast demons out of people. What were all these miracles intended to do? What truth were they trying to convey? Jesus did not perform these miracles just to impress people. His goal was that, through the miracles, people would recognize who He was. He wanted people to understand and believe that He is the One who had been anointed King of Heaven.

That is what the word "Messiah" means. Messiah is a title which means "the anointed One;" that is, the One who has been anointed as King of Heaven. The word "Christ" is simply the Greek translation of Messiah. Jesus wanted people to understand and believe that He was the Christ. This was the first thing He wanted people to do. And Jesus spent two years of time convincing His disciples before we come to the events recorded in today's scripture reading.

MATTHEW 16:13 says that, while Jesus and His disciples were walking to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is? Or, as Mark 8:7 records the question, "Who do people say I am?" We must appreciate the importance of this question. All the miracles Jesus performed were meant to help people answer this question. And how did people answer the question? Verse 14 indicates that, among the crowds of people who witnessed the miracles, some said that Jesus was John the Baptist who had come back to life; while others said Elijah; and still others said that Jesus was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Of course, none of these answers was correct.

So Jesus turned to His inner circle of disciples and asked them the same question. And, in verse 16, Peter gives the answer Jesus is looking for. He says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Just think of all the time and work required in bringing Peter to the point where He could answer this question correctly. How sweet it must have been to the ears of our Lord to hear His servant say, "You are the Christ." Jesus knew at that point that half of His mission had been accomplished in this man. The first thing needed to be done in order for the kingdom of God to be established in the life of this man had just been accomplished. He had confessed that Jesus was the King of Heaven. And such a confession is the foundation upon which God builds His kingdom.

In MATTHEW 16:18-19 Jesus said to Peter, "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." These words drive home the point that confessing Jesus as King of Heaven is the first step needed in order to establish the kingdom of God. It is the rock foundation upon which the King of Heaven will build His Church. The Church is the New Testament

equivalent to the Kingdom of God. Through His Church, God will reveal to the rest of the world how it is possible to enter into the Kingdom of God. In this sense, the Church holds the keys to the Kingdom.

As holders of the keys, how do we unlock the doors of the hearts of people so they can recognize that Jesus is the King of Heaven? Do people still need to see miracles happen to become convinced? When I was in college, every Tuesday night a group of Christians met together to publicly share their testimonies. The meetings were held in an open area and often attended by students who had not yet believed but who were seeking an answer to life's problems. Tuesday after Tuesday students seeking for a deliverer would become convinced that Jesus was the King of Heaven after they heard the miraculous stories of how the Messiah changed people's lives. Yes, miracles are still needed, and as the ones who hold the keys, we must somehow reveal Christ to people in a way that they can actually witness the miracles.

The average person will not be convinced through debate. I am not saying it is wrong to carry on debates with non-Christians about certain moral issues; however, the average person will not be convinced that Jesus is Christ through such debate. They need to see the miracles take place in people's lives. That is what will convince them. One of the visions I have for the small groups that are developing is to create an atmosphere where seekers can hear and see the miracles happen in the lives of other people. But whatever format we decide to use—small group meetings or large group meetings or one-on-one—we should do our best to convince people that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of mankind. Such a confession is the first step needed in the work of establishing God's Kingdom on this earth as it is in heaven. The second step is submission to the authority of Christ.

After Jesus convinced His disciples to believe He was the King of Heaven, His work was only half done. He now had to persuade them to submit themselves to the authority of the King. The act of submitting oneself to the authority of the King of Heaven is not easy. It is made possible only through self-denial. This means that a person has to sacrifice his pride, and this is a very difficult thing to do. The powers of hell work hard to persuade people to hold on to their pride. Only the power of heaven can overcome the power of hell. Only by trusting God to rid us of our pride can we submit to Christ's authority.

I think that Peter may have been willing to follow the orders of the King if the King had asked him to use his sword to fight for the Kingdom. But to agree to a plan of self-denial and self-sacrifice is a much harder thing to do. However, that is exactly the kind of submission Jesus wanted and still wants today.

The King of Heaven wants us to take a stand against everything that is evil and unfair, but He wants us to do so in a way that requires sacrifice on our part. I have counseled teenagers who tell me about the unfair way they are treated by their parents. My advice is always the same. Even if they are treating you unfairly, you must still submit to their authority unless they are telling you to violate one of the moral laws of God. Even when the things they say make you mad inside, you must still love and honor your parents. Even when they seem to be living a double standard, telling you not to do things they themselves do, you are obliged to obey. Oh, that is hard to do. We want so bad to argue and fight and use our own strength to make things right.

And it is not just teenagers who have this struggle. Much of the friction between husbands and their wives comes because one person doesn't like the habits of the other person. We become impatient when our efforts to change our spouse fail. It bothers us to think that the person might never change, and we might have to live the rest of our lives with a mate whose habits drive us crazy. But that is exactly what love requires us to do. We must humble ourselves, take up our cross and continue to love the person even when it causes us suffering to do so.

When the Bible was written, slavery was an accepted practice. The advice the Bible gives to slaves seems unreasonable to many Americans. The Bible tells slaves to obey their masters even when the masters treat them cruelly. For a slave with a keen sense of justice, such submission required a great deal of self-denial.

Martin Luther King Jr. encouraged black Americans to stand up for their civil rights. He told them to speak out against injustice. But he also told them to be willing to suffer as a result. Violence was never part of his agenda. He told people to follow the example of Christ.

Jesus knew that the concept of self-denial was foreign to Peter and to everyone else. For two years Jesus had concentrated on the first point of building His Kingdom; namely, getting people to understand and believe that He is the Messiah. Now it would require more time and an ultimate sacrifice on His part to get people to understand the

second part.

It would be very dangerous for the disciples to go out and tell everyone that Jesus was the Messiah, the King of Heaven, without first learning the lessons of submission. People would easily misunderstand. They would impose their false notions of the Kingdom upon Jesus and follow Him for the wrong reasons. They would view Him as a political or military King who would free them from the bondage of the Roman Empire. In MATTHEW 16:20, Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. It was too early for them to do that. They needed to learn first what it meant to submit to the King of heaven.

Jesus did not teach His disciples anything that He Himself was not willing to do. PHILIPPIANS 2:8 says that Jesus Christ "...humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" In order to obey His heavenly Father, Jesus humbled Himself, took up a cross, and died for the sins of mankind. What He did not only provides us with an example, but it also gives us the power to do the same. Through His sacrifice, we can find both the example and the power to deny ourselves and take up our cross of sacrifice. Jesus told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

When Peter first heard this, he could not accept it. But Jesus knew the cross is the only way for the Kingdom of God to be established, so He rebuked Peter's rejection of the method. Then, according to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus called the crowds over so that they, too, could hear this new teaching. As the disciples listened, Jesus taught the crowds the need of self-denial and self-sacrifice. There is no other way for us in our own strength to submit ourselves to the authority of the King of Heaven. Our prides are too strong. They must be denied their right to rule. They must be sacrificed so God can take control.

Then, in MATTHEW 16:28, we find a difficult statement to understand. In that verse, Jesus says to the crowd, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." The statement is also recorded in MARK 9:1. There, we read Jesus saying, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

Notice that Jesus did not say that some people would see the Kingdom of God coming in its perfect and final state before they died; rather, he said that some would see the Kingdom of God coming with power before they died. When Jesus returns at the end of the world, He will establish a final Kingdom that will be perfect and glorious. This has obviously not happened yet. But this is not what Jesus was talking about when He said that some would see the Kingdom coming in power before they died. The demonstration of power that Jesus was talking about is the power of humbleness and self-denial and self-sacrifice. And some of the people Jesus talked to that day saw this power demonstrated before they died.

They saw it when Jesus humbled Himself and prayed to God, "Not as I will, but as You will." They saw the power when Jesus went to the cross and, on the cross, defeated the powers of hell. They saw the power when Jesus was raised from the dead and later sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. All this was the power of the Kingdom of God, and it came because Jesus denied Himself, took up His cross, and sacrificed Himself for the sins of people. And the power of the kingdom of God still comes today when people deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Jesus by submitting themselves to the authority of the King of Heaven.

There will come a day when the Kingdom of God is seen in its final, perfect, and glorious state. Three disciples had a chance to get a preview of that glorious condition of the Kingdom when Jesus took them to the top of a high mountain. MATTHEW 17:2 tells us that Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. So three of the disciples got a glimpse of the King in His glorious state.

But when the King was on top of that mountain, He held a meeting with two who had already passed into glory. LUKE 9:30-31 says, "Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about His departure, which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." The topic of the meeting was the very thing Peter had just rejected. They talked about the whole process of Jesus going to Jerusalem, humbling Himself to the point of death, and dying on the cross. They talked about establishing the kingdom by way of the cross. Peter was there along with James and John. They heard what was said. Peter had rejected this method. But after the meeting was over, a voice came down from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

Peter had objected when Jesus spoke. But there is no record of him saying a word of objection to the method of using the cross here. I am sure that he still did not understand the method, but he was not going to protest.

Wow, what a way to learn a lesson! But what an important lesson to learn! In order for the Kingdom of God to be established, people must submit themselves to the authority of the King of Heaven, and the only way to do that is by way of the cross. There must be self-denial.

The next time we pray to God, "May Your Kingdom come," let us remember the two things needed before God's Kingdom can come. People need to confess Jesus as the King of Heaven and they need to submit to His authority. These are the lessons from today's scripture reading, and we must pass them on to others. The keys of the Kingdom have been given to us. We hold the keys. Jesus spent His time on earth teaching these lessons to people, but now we must do the teaching. The keys to the Kingdom have been entrusted to the church.

I think the saddest thing recorded in our scripture reading is the fact that only "some" would see the kingdom of God come in power before they died. This means that some, and perhaps many, did not see the kingdom of God come in power. For instance, Judas never saw the Kingdom come in power.

You see, there is an attitude of the heart that cuts a person off from seeing the Kingdom come in power. It is an unwillingness to let go of pride. People who hold onto their pride will not see the Kingdom of God come in power even if they attend church meetings their whole lives. So may God help us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus. May we share in His sufferings so that, through us, the Kingdom may come in power.

* * *

Application Question: Sharing the miracles of how Jesus saved us and changed us will help convince people that Jesus is the King of Heaven. Submitting ourselves to the King's authority will help convince other people to do the same. Please consider sharing a miracle that God has performed or is performing in your life. Or, perhaps you would consider sharing about the cross of suffering you are now carrying as you submit to the King's authority.