

CHAPTER 1

The Kingdom: Prophet, Priest, King

Before we begin a survey of Matthew's parabolic presentation of the Kingdom of God it will be helpful to arrive at a preliminary understanding of the kingdom. A most simple definition is simply the rule of God in Jesus Christ. In other words it is the messianic reign. To us the word "kingdom" is a material thing. But in the Scripture, in both the Hebrew and Greek the word denotes a dynamic concept of God ruling. As R.T. France says this dynamic sense is "better conveyed by an abstract noun such as 'kingship' or 'sovereignty' rather than by 'kingdom,' which has become in general use a concrete noun." And so, before we examine the kingdom in parable according to Matthew's gospel, we will take a look at this messianic reign in order to better understand the parables themselves.

In the Old Testament God is presented as king. Thus when the Israelites asked for a king so they would be like the other nations they were rejecting Yahweh as king. According to 1 Samuel 8:7-8 this was a culmination of Israel's rebelliousness which began when they came out of Egypt. Yet the kingship established by God and first held by Saul son of Kish was intended to be a type. This type is fully developed in the Davidic dynasty and of course fulfilled in the antitype Jesus Christ. It is interesting that even though the request for a king was sinful God used it for his own purpose (yet another indication that god's sovereign rule cannot be thwarted).

When we come to the New Testament account, John the Baptist is portrayed as a prophet who is proclaiming the kingdom of God. Indeed Jesus Christ himself began his ministry with a proclamation that his listeners should "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Throughout his ministry Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God was a reality contemporary to his ministry. He said that the kingdom of God was within the grasp of his audience ("in your midst" Luke 17:21), and did not limit the reign of the Messiah to some future date. This kingdom that Jesus proclaimed was of a spiritual nature and yet it had ramifications for the material realm. The New Testament makes it plain that citizenship in this kingdom is dependent upon the new birth. At the same time, the imagery surrounding the kingdom and entrance into this relationship with Jesus has an ethical slant. Jesus said that "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). This point of view is emphasized by the apostle Paul as well when he tells the church at Corinth: *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Paul never mentions the issue of faith in this section of the letter; instead he tells the church in Corinth that those who commit sinful acts will not be allowed into the kingdom. Nonetheless, our behavior *is* an issue of faith. As we know from the epistle of James, faith without works is dead. Therefore Paul is simply saying what James says but in a different way. He's saying that if your faith is mere words and not manifest by action then you have no faith at all. He says the same thing in his letter to the church at Ephesus: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Saved by grace yes - but an element of that grace is the predestined good work. Indeed, the good works are built into the new creation and serve to verify the new birth. They are in no way the vehicle for salvation; they are a result of and evidence of that salvation. God brings about the new birth and one of the characteristics of the family line is a particular sort of behavior. Some people say that my sons "have" my eyes. People are supposed to look at a Christian and say "he has his Father's behavior." Thus the duty of every member of the family of God is to cultivate the works that are a part of the new creation. As we cultivate the new creation (work out our salvation - Philippians 2:12-13), we will manifest the good works that are part of the new man.

This is just what Jesus says. The Sermon on the Mount is really all about expressing the new creation. Cultivation of that gift of salvation must manifest itself in how we act. Indeed, this is a

manifestation of - a demonstration of the kingdom of God. This is the expression of the rule of Jesus Christ in our life. That's what the kingdom of God is all about.

We must also be aware that the kingdom of God is not the church. The church is made up of those who are *members* of the kingdom but the kingdom and the church are not one and the same; the reign of Jesus Christ is universal. We see this in Abraham's call to establish a universal house - a command to establish a type of the Messianic kingdom. The Universal House or the universal kingdom was ultimately established in Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean that everyone is saved or that everybody is *in* the kingdom of God; it means that no category or class of person is excluded from the kingdom.

So, the church is not the kingdom - it is a gathering of people who are in the kingdom of God. Indeed, the term that Jesus uses to describe the church (*ekklesia*), is the same word that is used in the Septuagint to describe the people of Israel as the assembly of God. The point I am making is twofold. In the first place, the church is the assembly of God today. In the second place the kingdom has always been bigger than the church whether it be the old covenant Church or the new covenant Church.

Now, the rule of Almighty God in Jesus Christ has three primary elements. Indeed there are three roles that the Messiah plays as he exercises his rule in this universe. I'm sure you have heard that Jesus Christ is our Prophet, Priest, and King. In order to introduce our examination of the kingdom parables I want to look at these three ideas and discuss how they are elements of the messianic rule. In other words these three offices of the Messiah give his reign or his kingdom a particular character.

Before we began I want to make sure you understand that I'm not talking about a civil rule but about the overarching reign of God in Jesus Christ. This is a rule of God in all areas of life. All of the (legitimate), institutions and organizations of this realm must be redeemed and brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This includes the Family, the Church, and the State. Consequently these three separate elements - Prophet, Priest and King - illustrate the rule and reign of the Messiah.

Prophet.

We don't often think of Abraham as a prophet and yet according to Scripture he was (Genesis 20:7). When we understand what a prophet is and what a prophet does it becomes easier to recognize Abraham as a prophet. For instance Abraham was an evangelist. I mentioned last week that Genesis 12:5 should be understood as a notice of Abraham's evangelistic work. In that verse we read that all the people who Abraham had "made" in Haran went with him to the land of Canaan. In other words there were souls "made" in Haran through evangelism. They had heard the truth of God from Abraham and had decided to become followers of Yahweh along with them. This understanding of verse five is reinforced when we read a proper translation of Genesis 12:8. Most translations tell us that Abraham built altars in the land of Canaan and "call on the name of the Lord." However a better translation is that Abraham "proclaimed the name of Yahweh." In other words he didn't simply build an altar for his own personal worship; he built an altar for himself and those who came into the "church" through his proclamation of the Gospel.

They shouldn't strike us as odd. Jesus himself said that Abraham rejoiced to see the truth concerning the Messiah. Thus, Abraham a prophet exercises his role through evangelistic preaching.

In a sense this is how Abraham laid claim to the land. He never actually inherited any of Canaan. That promise was fulfilled in its height in the days of Joshua and even more so by the time of Solomon. And yet Abraham became an influential member of the community in Canaan. Through his evangelistic efforts he became allied with some of the locals and the along with them was able to drive an interloper out of the Promised Land (Genesis 14:13, 24). This prophetic, evangelistic work revealed the long term view of Abraham as he sought to ready the ground, so to speak, for his descendants. In his 175 years the only heart of keen and that he was able to call his own was that part which he had purchased for a family Cemetery.

Closely aligned with this idea of prophetic evangelism is the work of a prophet as a teacher. In Genesis 18:19 we see that one of the reasons God was pleased with Abraham and was determined to bring about his eternal plan through the seed of Abraham was because Abraham taught his children and his household after him. He taught them to "keep the way of the Lord do righteousness and justice, that

the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him” (Genesis 18:19). He commanded to teach is to proclaim the truth as a means of guiding one’s actions. This is different than evangelism in that the teaching would normally follow on the heels of successful evangelistic efforts. To teach is to proclaim truth as opposed to error. And it’s to provide a standard by which followers of the king may recognize right from wrong. To proclaim truth is to make it clear that there is right and wrong and to apply that plumb line of absolute truth in everything in his life.

The final aspect of the prophetic work we want to look at in a life of Abraham is the position of a counselor to God. Abraham is called a “Prince of God” by his neighbors in the land of Canaan. In other words they recognize that he was a friend of Yahweh - that he was a member of the Court of God. We see this exemplified in the exchange between God and Abraham as recorded in Genesis 18:22–33.

In this section of Genesis Abraham arguing a point with Yahweh. Abraham is arguing on behalf of a Lott and his family in attempt to forestall the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham is concerned that God would sweep away the righteous with the unrighteous.

This exchange is much different than what we see from the prophets in Israel many years later. Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah or Amos do not argue on behalf of the people of God but against them. In other words they are like trial lawyers who bring charges against the accused. They are counselors in God’s court but they participate in the trial of God’s people as prosecutors. Yet even in the position of a prosecutor God does nothing without consulting his prophet (Amos 3:7, 7:2-3, 5-6).

In the case of Abraham and his discussion – or argument – with God he is arguing on behalf of lost not against him. In a sense this shows us how close the relationship is. Rather than a “hireling” brought him to the court by God to argue against the defendant Abraham is a friend and personal counselor (so to speak), who discusses the issue with God and eventually convinces Yahweh to spare Lott and his family. And Abraham is successful. True, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by a Lott and his family is spared in the end.

Generally speaking then a prophet is one who proclaims truth as a guide to proper living. The prophet proclaims truth in order to evangelize and in order to teach. A prophet speaks the mind of God and stands against evil. The prophet does so as a member of the king’s court and one who is privy to his counsel.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final prophet. He is one who evangelized, proclaim truth, taught as a means to guide and to expose error. Moreover, he was a member of the Court of God. Indeed, as the Everlasting Son he is very God of very God. In his humanity Jesus Christ was certainly privy to the counsel of God.

We have already mentioned that Jesus began his ministry as an evangelist. Matthew 4:17 says that immediately after his time of testing in the wilderness “Jesus began to preach and to say, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And in verse 23 of that same chapter we read: *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.* (Matthew 4:23)

Like John the Baptist before him Christ preached the gospel in an effort to convert souls. Like Abraham Jesus desired to “make souls” and bring them into the Promised Land - into true relationship with God in his Christ. As a prophet Jesus taught from city to city and in every synagogue. Indeed, throughout the Gospels Jesus is called “teacher” by friend and foe alike.

Jesus made it clear that he was privy to the counsel of God when he said that: *All things are delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son will reveal Him.* (Luke 10:22). All things were delivered to Jesus Christ by the father. No one knew the father except the Son. Later Jesus would tell his disciples that to see him is to see the father (John 14:9). Indeed Christ reaffirmed this intimacy with the father when he chastened his disciples, saying: *Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father*

and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. (John 14:9-11)

Clearly the relationship that Jesus had with the Father transcended the relationship between the Old Testament prophets and Yahweh. Here is a presentation of the mystery of Jesus Christ being true God and true man. When Jesus says that all things are delivered to him by the Father and that no one knows the Father he is speaking as both God and man. Don't think that I am trying to drive a wedge between the God nature and the human nature of Jesus Christ. They are kept separate but we cannot drive a wedge between these two natures of this single person. I am merely pointing out that as God, Jesus Christ is more than a mere counselor or attorney arguing a case in the court of God. As the human offspring of Mary by the power of God he is more than a simple prophet who receives the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ in his humanity is the very Son of God. And the relationship he has with the Father outstrips anything that had ever come before.

Thus, Jesus Christ is the ultimate prophet. He is the one who argues a case against apostates not merely as a representative of God but as God himself. He is one who speaks truth not simply as a reporter but as the Word made flesh. He is the one who applies God's truth not as a mere teacher but as the fulfillment of the law and prophets. Christ is the fulfillment of all prophetic gifting and office.

Thus the kingdom of God or the rule of the Messiah most definitely includes a proclamation of truth and a revealing of error on the part of those who stray from God's ways. Christ as the prophetic antitype brings to bear upon his realm all prophetic activity and applies it as one who is the very mind of God.

We individual Christians are to imitate Jesus Christ in his prophetic office. We are not prophets but we are to be prophetic. This truth was dramatically emphasized with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the day of Pentecost. That event was not an inauguration of a charismatic age but was instead an affirmation that the law had been written upon the hearts of God's people. As a result of that new covenant application of the law all of God's people are prophetic in that all of God's people are to express his truth.

Jesus said that each of us is to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). We are to *go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all things that (Jesus had) commanded* (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore every Christian has a prophetic assignment in that we are all supposed to evangelize and to disciple as we have opportunity.

In a sense each of us is a counselor of God and privy to his thoughts. Paul says that "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Indeed the law written upon our hearts is an expression of the mind of God. All of us have access to his Word and are thereby able to grow in our understanding of the mind of God. This of course will fuel our prophetic work in evangelism and teaching.

And yet it is the corporate body which is the most profound expression of Christ's prophetic activity in this age. That is to say that the Church court has a prophetic ministry. I suppose we can say this is where the emphasis is placed in expressing the prophetic nature of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ.

It is the Church that is to proclaim the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the church that is to evangelize. Now, I know that evangelism takes place as individual members of the Church speak to their friends and relatives but this must take place in the context of the corporate body. What do I mean by this? Well, I happen to agree with the idea that there is no salvation outside the Church in that it is only within the context of the body of Jesus Christ that a person might be saved. It is only within the context of relationship to other Christians that we might learn to cultivate the new creation. Remember, salvation is more than fire insurance. Salvation includes bringing our sphere of influence under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, it is the Church at large which protects and systematizes the truth. If this were not the case then each individual Christian would have to "reinvent the wheel" each time a new generation came on the scene. I have a library full of books which represent the accumulated wisdom of the Church. Those books represent the insights of the corporate body concerning the kingdom of God. It is the corporate body which is the primary expression of Christ's prophetic role in manifesting his heavenly reign here on earth.

It is also within the context of the Church that teaching takes place. And again, I recognize that it is individual teachers who express this prophetic office. After all, I stand before you as an individual. And yet I stand before you as one who is part of the body of Jesus Christ and duly ordained to this role by a recognized conference of fellow Christians. We live in an age when individualism is the norm. We live in a day and age where everybody wants to start their own little house Church. But that runs contrary to this prophetic role of the corporate body. It is the corporate body which must examine and judge teaching of the individual Christian. It is the court to which we must look in order to normalize the teaching which proceeds from the church. Frankly connection to a larger body and to tradition is critically important. I'm not suggesting that tradition somehow trumps the teaching of the Bible; it is something that should enable us to better understand God's Word. For instance, I consider the Westminster confession of Faith a wonderful systematic expression of true biblical doctrine. However, there are a number of points within the Westminster confession with which I disagree. Likewise, I have a deep appreciation for the 39 articles of religion espoused by the Anglican Communion. In fact, we have been using the collect from the Book of Common Prayer this year. But that doesn't mean that we take hold of these traditions lock stock and barrel. It simply means that we recognize that it is the corporate body which has been given the responsibility to stand guard over the truth. From time to time there will arise from within this corporate body of Christ individuals such as Martin Luther who are forced to stand for truth against the crowd. But frankly in the history of the Church that is rare. Normally the corporate body does a splendid job of evangelizing and teaching, in exposing the error and holding the plumb line of God's truth against society. Normally the Church is reliable in exposing false doctrine and in speaking out against deviations from God's truth in our society. Certainly over in the history of the Church the corporate body has stumbled but it is in the combined wisdom of the body of Jesus Christ that the prophetic role of the Messiah in the kingdom is best expressed.

Priest

The second aspect of the messianic reign that I want to examine is that of the priest. In the Old Testament, priestly duties were the responsibility of Aaron and his offspring. The primary realm of activity for the priesthood was that of sacrifice. If the children of Israel lived in obedience to God's law, then the priests would stand at the altar sacrificing all day long. According to God's law every sin which requires sacrifice must be brought to the altar at the Tabernacle and later at the Temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, the priest would be daily offering sacrifice after sacrifice. I'm talking about the sacrificial offerings of the individual Israelites. Even if no one showed up to offer a sacrifice the priest was still responsible for the morning and evening sacrifice. Thus, the primary activity of the priest was the offering of sacrifice.

In addition the priests were enjoined to place God's blessing upon the people. I often use Numbers 6:24-26 as the benediction to our Sunday morning worship service. In the verses just preceding that blessing we read: *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. (Numbers 6:22-23a). And again in Deuteronomy 10:8 we read: At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day (Deuteronomy 10:8). Thus the sons of Aaron and the tribe of Levi had the responsibility to pronounce the blessing of God upon the children of Israel.*

The priests also had a responsibility to assess and to dispel impurity. In other words they were given the responsibility to examine a person who had a skin disease and to determine whether or not it was a spreading disease or a leprous condition. They had a responsibility to examine a garment or a house or utensils when they appeared to be infected or infested in some way. In any case the priest would make a determination after certain procedures and then either quarantine a person or call for the destruction of a home or manufactured good and so on.

They also had the obligation to "manage" the circumstance of a person who is infected with a skin disease. They would determine if and when that person was cured and then oversee the ritualistic cleansing which was required before the man or woman would be allowed back into the assembly. We

see these issues detailed in Leviticus chapters 13 through 15 for instance.

The priesthood also had a pastoral or nurturing responsibility as well. They were called upon to judge in domestic and civil situation. In Deuteronomy 21:5 it says: *Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled* (Deuteronomy 21:5).

And yet, all of this pales in light of the most important duty of the priest. Indeed, it was the high priest who had this responsibility and was only once a year that he would carry it out. I am speaking of course of the priests on the Day of Atonement.

God had told Moses that the priests were not supposed to enter the holy place at just any time. They were not to stand before the mercy seat (which was on the Ark of the Covenant), whenever they felt like it because if they did God would kill them. It was once a year that Aaron (or the current high priest), was supposed to come to the holy place with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering and the blood of a ram as a burnt offering. When he did this he had to be dressed in the holy linen tunic, linen trousers with a lead in sash and turban: he was to prepare for this duty by washing himself thoroughly and then dressing himself in the holy garments.

He then would take two kids of the goats as sin offerings and one ram as a burnt offering. He was to offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and make atonement for himself and his house. One of the goats was to be presented before the Lord at the door of the Tabernacle of meeting. Lots were to be cast for the two goats; one goat to be sacrificed the other to be the scapegoat and released in the wilderness with the sins of the people placed upon his head. After making the sacrifices Aaron was to take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord and place sweet incense upon the coals. This after he had entered the holy place, passing through the veil so that the cloud of incense would cover the mercy seat that was on the Ark of the testimony. At this point the high priest was supposed to take some of the blood of the bowl and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side. And he was supposed to sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times there before the mercy seat. After that he would leave the holy place, kill the bull for the sin offering and bring back inside the veil to repeat the process. The high priest did this all once a year as a means of atoning for the sins of the people of God.

We all know that Jesus Christ is our true high priest. He is the one who blesses us. We see an example of this during his earthly ministry when he gathered the little children into his arms to bless them. He continues to act as our high priest today as we are blessed with every spirit of blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). In Jesus Christ all of God's promises are yes. In Jesus Christ all the blessings of the covenant relationship are given to us.

In Jesus Christ all impurity is assessed and dispelled. The apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth that the unrighteous would not inherit the kingdom of God. He tells them that fornicators and idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards and extortionists will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6: 11). Yet each of us are washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of God. There is no impurity or sin that Christ cannot remove. We have been saying *through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly to Jesus Christ our Savior* (Titus 3: 5-6).

Moreover, Christ nurtures us and cares for us. He is a priest who is also the great shepherd of the sheep. He watches over our souls and "makes us to lie down in green pastures and leads us beside still waters." He does so in that he makes all of the circumstances of this life work for our good (Romans 8:28). It may not seem like green pastures and still waters at times yet as a nurturing priest, as a great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ always does what is best for us.

But most important is the fulfillment of the priestly duty which the high priest of the old covenant administration would perform on an annual basis. Hence, in the book of Hebrews we read: *Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts*

and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "SEE THAT YOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (Hebrews 8:1-6)

We have a great high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. He ministers in the true sanctuary. It is not that the old covenant sacrifice has been abolished: instead it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the holy place – not made with hands which is a copy – but the true holy place in the heavenlies. He isn't one who had to do this every year with the blood of an animal. If that were the case he would not truly have fulfilled the sacrificial system. No, he, just once, at the end of the old covenant age, appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Thus Christ *was offered once to bear the sins of many* (Hebrews 9:23–27).

The Lamb of God – the true Lamb of God – has taken away the sins of the world. All who come to him participate in the fulfillment of the old covenant sacrificial system. That old covenant system was designed to place a down payment to forestall the judgment of God in anticipation of Jesus Christ our high priest. You see, in a sense the priesthood is not actually abolished. It continues in Jesus Christ. He resides in the heavenly as the only mediator between God and man. There is no one else who can fulfill that role. The old covenant priesthood was merely a type. Jesus Christ, the anti-type, is the only one who is allowed into the actual holy of holies in heaven as a representative of humanity. He offered his blood there one time, a fulfillment of the old covenant illustration and remains there continuously mediating on our behalf. And indeed, according to the Bible we reside in the holy of holies with our representative Jesus Christ in a spiritual sense (Ephesians 2:6).

This priestly function continues here on earth in his corporate body after a fashion as well. The corporate body of Jesus is called to express Christ's priestly role in this messianic kingdom. The Church does not offer sacrifice or mediation as Christ does. However, the corporate body of Jesus Christ does bless others by offering help and nurture. The corporate body of Jesus Christ can assess and dispel need by organizing charity and helping people get back on their feet. The corporate body of Jesus Christ – the Church at large – offers pastoral oversight and guidance in the Christian life.

The Bible always describes believers as priests in a corporate sense. We are called a kingdom of priests or kings and priests. We are a royal priesthood. Thus it is in the context of the corporate body that we are identified as priests. This means that we cannot claim to be exercising a priestly role apart from the body of Christ. We cannot say that the Church is too corrupt, or that our little home Bible study is a substitute for the Church. To be a kingdom of priests is to be a member of the visible Church.

It also means that no one should claim the title as priest within the corporate body. All of us are identified as priests individually within the corporate structure but none of us can fulfill the role that has been reserved for Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only priest, the only mediator within the church.

Thus it is as individual Christians - connected to the body of Christ - that we express the priestly aspects of the Messianic reign. For instance it is the individual Christian that is to present his body a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). And how is that done? Well, by working out our salvation and by manifesting the rule of Christ in our life. Paul tells us how to do that on a practical basis in the rest of Romans chapter 12. Take a look at Romans 12:3-16: *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with*

cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

We are to minister to one another and nurture one another by using the gifts God has given us. Minister, teach, exhort, show mercy, love and be kindly and affectionate. We are to pray for others, bless others, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with the sorrowful and not be wise in our own eyes.

Nonetheless, it is within the context of the family that the priestly aspects of the messianic reign are best manifest. Although each Believer has a duty to express the priestly character of the kingdom, this office is best accomplished within the context of the family. Indeed, the most profound exposition of the priestly function is illustrated by the Apostle Paul in his description of the marriage relationship. *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* (Ephesians 5:23-27, ESV).

This is the highest expression of the priestly character within the Messianic reign - and probably the most neglected. Here we see all of the elements of the priestly office in action: headship, sacrifice, cleansing and nurture. A husband is to provide leadership to his wife (and children). He is to love her self-sacrificially: esteeming her more highly than himself, providing for her and protecting her. A husband sanctifies his wife and cleanses her through teaching her the doctrines of the kingdom and by modeling Christ-likeness. He nurtures her as he superintends her process of Christian maturation that he might present her to himself *in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

Unfortunately the majority of Christians believe that this pastoral role is the duty of the Church and the local pastor. This is one reason for the feminine character of the modern Church. Instead of teaching men how to lead and pastor their own families, local ministers often direct their efforts at women and children. This usurps the role of the husband and short circuits the priestly function of the family. Furthermore, when the Church is primarily focused on the pastoral role, the prophetic voice of the Messiah is silenced. As a result Christian families are often unable to demonstrate the priestly aspect of Christ's rule within their sphere of influence. Husbands do not lead, wives are discouraged and children grow up to leave the faith

This does not suggest that wives are dependent upon their husbands for salvation. Women do not require a husband to call them through the veil for instance. Hence the husband is not a mediator between God and the wife. Even his covenant headship is not singular. A woman who is married to an unbeliever provides covenant protection to her husband and children, for instance. In any case, the primary expression of Christ's messianic rule as Priest is manifest by the individual believer and most especially by the husband in his own home.

In this way we see that Christ's role as Prophet is best demonstrated in this realm by the Church and his role as Priest is best demonstrated by the individual believer in the context of the family.

King

We must begin a discussion of Christ's kingly role in the messianic reign with an acknowledgment that God has always been presented as a king. Indeed, the establishment of kingly rule in Israel came about because of a rejection of God as king. In 1 Samuel 8:7-8 God tells the prophet Samuel that Israel's desire for a king is not a rejection of Samuel as Judge but rejection of God as king. In fact, God says that it is the Coleman nation of their rebellion which began soon after they left bondage

in Egypt. Yet God used that rebellious desire to establish the kingly role and to introduce the Davidic dynasty as a type of the messianic rule.

This Davidic rule was providentially abolished about 600 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, there was no existing Davidic king who might resist the claims of Jesus. Instead, we have a pretender to the throne in Herod the Great. He was an Edomite and so had no claim to the Davidic dynasty.

In the old covenant administration the king was to rule over the people and to act as a judge in the civil realm - he was to have legislative and judicial power. However, the primary duty of the king was to wage war against the enemies of Israel. In doing so he would provide security to the citizens. In the ideal kingdom every citizen was secure under his own vine and fig tree. We are told in the book of 1 Kings that during the reign of Solomon every man dwell securely under his own vine and fig tree the entire length and breadth of Israel.

Later, the prophets described the messianic reign in the same way. This is not to be taken literally; it is not a promise of a chicken in every pot. It is however, a promise of security and safety.

Jesus drew upon this aspect of the messianic hope when he told Nathaniel that “before Philip called you when you are under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:48). It is interesting that in that first chapter of John Jesus touches on the prophetic, the priestly and the kingly aspect of the messianic reign. Like a prophet he holds the plum line alongside the character of Nathaniel and says that he is a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit. Like a priest he stands as the mediator – the stairway to Heaven – the one who superintends the proper place of worship. And then of course, again, as the king he references the promise of security.

Christ was acknowledged as king even before he was born. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, declared that in Christ, God was about to raise up a horn of salvation for his people in the house of his servant David (Luke 1:69). Near the end of his ministry Jesus was publicly acknowledged as king as well. In the event we call the triumphal entry the people cried out *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The king of Israel* (John 12:13)! Jesus himself acknowledged his kingly rule when he stood before Pilate. The Roman official asked him if he was a king and Jesus answered by saying: *You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice* (John 18:37). Finally, after his ascension Jesus Christ announced the comprehensive nature of his rule. He told his disciples that: *All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Before his ascension Jesus Christ gave an example of how he would exercise his legislative and judicial duties. In Matthew chapter 25 we see the parable of the sheep and the goats. There Jesus passes judgment concerning the actions of those who are brought before his throne. He makes clear that in his kingdom he legislates a particular behavior and those who fail to live according to that standard will be shut out of the kingdom. In addition he exercises judicial authority when he rewards the obedience and condemns the unregenerate. By the way, that parable does not preach works salvation. It simply reaffirms that faith without works is dead. In any case it is an excellent example of Christ exercising these aspects of his kingly rule.

Christ is our warrior king and protector as well. In Colossians 2:13–15 it says: *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*

But we should also note that we have a role in this cosmic battle. Certainly Christ conquered Satan and rules this universe unopposed. Nonetheless, Jesus demands our participation in the mopping up operation. He began to do this even during his earthly ministry. Recall how he sent out the 70 giving

them authority over the demonic realm and the ability to heal the sick in the name of Jesus. When they returned they were overjoyed that *even the demons are subject to us in your name*. Christ responded by saying *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven* (Luke 10:17–18).

The apostle Paul affirms our duty of participation when he tells us the church in Rome that as they walk in obedience God would crush Satan under their feet (Romans 16: 19–20). Thus we are the ground troops in this mopping up operation. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. Our armor and our weapons are not of this world but are spiritual for the pulling down of strongholds.

We have this authority because we are friends of the king. In John 15:14 Jesus told his disciples: *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*. Jesus made this statement in the context of the ancient near Eastern culture. In that society a person might have a special relationship with the king and be called a friend of the king. This kind of relationship would often be established with a meal together. That covenant meal was more than a mere oath of allegiance. It was actually considered a vow to represent the king himself – to be the king in any situation demanding his presence. To partake of this feast was to become a member of the king’s family – to be his body.

Consider the threat that was directed at Pilate when he attempted to release Jesus Christ. In response the Jews cried out and said *if you let this man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes it so the king speaks against Caesar* (John 19:12). Pilate was not simply a warm acquaintance of Caesar; apparently he enjoyed a close relationship bound by a vow. Because of his relationship he could claim to “be” Caesar in Palestine.

One of the rituals that established a man as a friend of the king was the wearing of a robe which formerly had draped the shoulders of the monarch. To do so meant that the friend of the king was vested with “righteousness” as a source of action. This would be in contrast to a servile relationship wherein the Kings “righteousness” was imposed upon one as a limitation on action. Therefore to be a friend of the king was to be robed with authority.

Now, in Jesus Christ we are friends of the king and his righteousness is our source of action. When we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ we *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts* (Romans 13:14). Again, his righteousness is our source of action. This is just another way of saying that the law has been written upon our heart. We act out of that righteousness. We are no longer subject to the letter of the law in that we are not in a position of servile righteousness with the law on the outside pushing us in a direction we do not want to go. Instead we are friends and clothed in his righteousness having received the robe of honor from our king.

To reject this robe is to reject the king himself. This is the point of the parable recorded in Matthew 22. It is a parable about a king who gives a wedding feast. When the apostates refuse to come, the king hears about it sends out his armies and destroys those murderers and burns up the city. Later at the feast the king comes in to see the guests and he sees a man there who does not have on a wedding garment. In other words he has refused the robe provided by the king. The result? The king says to the servants *bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 22:13). This man did not “lose his salvation.” He was never “a friend of the king.” A friend would never have rejected the robe offered him by the king. Thus, this parable is not about losing one’s salvation but about the nature of the visible church. Even within the visible corporate body there are those who refuse the robe of the king.

As individuals we express this kingly aspect of the messianic reign when we do battle against the forces of darkness. Paul says that in Jesus Christ we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). And we demonstrate this kingly rule as we exercise self-government under God. As individuals, this aspect of the messianic reign is best demonstrated in our personal piety and in our efforts to bring our sphere of influence under the authority of Jesus Christ. We entered the glory and grace of the kingdom not by becoming gods but by membership in the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. We are not made gods but are a newly created humanity with the law written upon our heart and thus the Royal righteousness is our source of action.

However, I would suggest that this role of Christ in his messianic reign is best expressed as Christians participate in the civil government. We have seen that the prophetic facet is best demonstrated as individual Christians operate within the corporate body, the Church. We have seen that the Priestly functions of the Kingdom of God in Christ are best manifest by the individual in the Family. And to finish the role call we need to acknowledge that the kingly dimension of Christ's reign is best displayed as Christians minister within the public square and especially in the context of the State.

The kingly role is focused upon legislative, judicial and executive duties. Take a look around and you can see that the friends of the king are badly needed in the kingdoms of this world. As Christians we can bring the unchanging standard of morality provided for us in God's Word to the marketplace.

Friends of the king need to be involved in the legislative process working to see that the law code in this land is a reflection of God's own law. Friends of the king who had been robed in his righteousness need to don the judicial robes in our nation to preside over civil court rooms in the wisdom of God. Friends of the king need to become involved in the defense of our nation - either as elected officials or as those who would work within the system to see to it that our domestic and foreign policies reflect godly thinking.

Efforts to restore our godly standard for law and government are not efforts to impose a religious system on the nation. It is never a matter of "no law" versus "law" but always a matter of "whose law." In other words, every nation is ruled by some standard of right and wrong. Don't be fooled into thinking that it would be improper to use God's standard of right and wrong to govern this nation. I don't know about you but I would rather be under the light yoke of the Master in every area of life than the crushing burden which typifies godless government.

I don't want to belabor the point so I will simply remind you that this nation at one time was self-consciously Christian. Our elected and appointed leadership looked to the standard of God's Word and exercised their authority as friends of the king. The result was the freest nation on the face of the earth. Those days are long gone. But I believe that as Christians demonstrate this dimension of the messianic reign, this kingly rule, in the marketplace and in the civil government we will once again become "the land of the free."

Conclusion

When Jesus says that "the kingdom of God is like" he says quite a mouthful. As we examine the kingdom parables in Matthew's gospel we need to constantly keep in mind that the kingdom is the rule of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest and king. When we talk about the kingdom of God we are talking about a demonstration of Christ's tri-part rule and our own imitation of him in this realm. Never forget that we are called to do so. We are called to imitate Jesus Christ and we are called to imitate our Father in heaven as dear children.

Therefore, when we say that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is like a sower or a mustard seed or like leaven or a field of wheat, when we say that the kingdom of God is like a dragnet - all these things are designed to help us understand how these three characteristics of Christ's messianic reign impact this world. It is my prayer that we will then understand our job in the manifestation of the kingdom.