

# **The Gospel of the Kingdom**



**Kingdom Route Closed  
Use Individual Avenue**

Based on a message preached by John D. Martin

## Introduction for Evangelicals

This message will probably present the gospel in terms that may be new to you. And yet, they will be terms that you are very much acquainted with if you read the Bible.

All we can ask of you is to take your Bible and see if what Bro. John speaks lines up with the text and Spirit. You may be shocked by some of the phrases, and by some of the implications.

Just be aware that Bro. John is not the first to speak of the gospel in these terms. To the early church, the kingdom of God was the good news: God's will being done on earth by regenerated humans!

We do not expect that this one message will cause a paradigm shift in your view of what Christianity is all about. But we do trust that it will cause you to look at Jesus and at what HE had to say about the good news.

After all, Jesus didn't just blabber off the Sermon on the Mount to pass the time. He really meant what He said!

## Introduction for Anabaptists

This message is a wakeup call. The mighty revival of kingdom Christianity that began almost five centuries ago is in danger; and that danger comes from our not seeing the distinction between the gospel of the kingdom vs. the "gospel" of the average corner church just down the street.

We suspect that parts of this message will resonate with you. After all, as Anabaptists we have been told from our pulpits that practicing the Sermon on the Mount is for us even today.

The problem is that we have been trying for too long to make practical discipleship to fit into typical Evangelical theology. And it really doesn't make a good match. Like one Anabaptist friend tried to tell me, "Good works are not necessary, yet you still have to have them."

Huh? (I still haven't figured that one out!)

This message presents the foundation of the kingdom gospel. Practical discipleship and brotherhood make sense when viewed from this kingdom gospel paradigm. In fact, without discipleship and brotherhood, the gospel of the kingdom makes no sense. ~MA

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## Detour!

My concern for this message is to expose a detour that our Anabaptist churches took in the past century. As I was growing up, the message I heard was what I call a “save ME gospel.” Now, the term “kingdom of God” was used very loosely—as it is in many church circles—but I don’t think I ever heard, in all my growing up years, a message specifically on the kingdom. In this message, I want to make it very clear what the kingdom of God is.

It is *not* about us! That is where the problem came in the shift of focus when I was growing up. The main thing in the messages that I heard was “We need to get saved!”

That certainly is true, but “getting saved” is a means to an end, *not* an end in itself. Unfortunately, “getting saved” was made an end in itself, and much of the revival preaching was focused on that end. Therefore, I want to make it clear what the original gospel of Jesus Christ really was.

## The original gospel message

The original gospel was the *gospel of the kingdom*. Jesus began His ministry by saying, “Repent ...” Now, the classic words usually following this would be, “... or you will be lost” or “you will go to hell!”

But Jesus did *not* say that. He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In other words, “The kingdom is right there for you to grasp, it’s at hand.” Six verses later, after calling His first four disciples, it says He “went about all Galilee ... preaching the gospel of the kingdom.” Mt. 4:23 Do you know that Jesus never called the gospel anything else but “the gospel of the kingdom”? In every instance where you find the content of the gospel described, it is “the gospel of the kingdom.” Every time, in the entire gospel record!

Jesus’ two most important statements were the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s Prayer. Both of these begin and end with an emphasis on the kingdom of God. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of God.” “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Referring to the end of time, Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” I ask you a searching question: Has the gospel of the kingdom been preached unto the ends of the earth, or has it been a “save ME gospel”?

Now I want to make one thing clear before proceeding: God uses imperfect means. I believe the gospel has been preached in many parts of the world, and despite a wrong emphasis, many people have been reconciled to God.

## Parables of the kingdom

Basically all of Jesus’ parables focus on the kingdom: the kingdom is as a treasure in a field, the kingdom is as a merchant, the kingdom is as a net, the kingdom is as leaven, the kingdom is as a mustard seed ...

I want to ask you a question: If I were to ask you what the seed was in the parable of the sower, what would you say?

[Response from someone in audience: “The Word of God!”]

That’s what most people say! And that is true in a general sense, but *specifically* it says it is the “word of *the kingdom*”! I never noticed that until recently. We are so used to reading our Bible through certain lenses. Six months ago I would have probably said the same thing [as the responder from the audience]. When Jesus interprets the parable of the tares, He says the seed is “the children *of the kingdom*.” That excites me!

Here I am, speaking to approximately 400 seeds! What should happen is that all you seeds will go out there, be planted, and grow up to be a kingdom expression of the gospel! Not just a personal experience of people getting ready to go to heaven, but a kingdom expression of the gospel should grow up around every kingdom Christian. Because you are the “seed of the kingdom.”

## The kingdom in church history

However, when we turn to the history of the church, it is not very far along before we see a drastic change in focus. How many of you can recite “The Apostles’ Creed”? [A few raise hands.] Tell me, what is the first word of The Apostles’ Creed?

“I.”

That’s interesting! The Lord’s Prayer begins with “*Our* Father.” Neither The Apostles’ Creed nor any of those other major creeds after the first centuries say a single thing about the kingdom. Only the

What God wants is a corporate expression, a society of the redeemed. Thus, personal salvation is an important means to an end and not an end in itself.

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Creed of Constantinople says at the end: "... and He shall come again to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end." It places the kingdom "out there" somewhere in the future, but says nothing about its present reality.

The result of losing the kingdom centrality in the gospel is a difference in a person's outlook. If the focus is on ME, then the preaching I heard all my life was truly "gospel preaching," where the most important thing in the world is for me to "get saved." And before I proceed, I want to make it clear that "getting saved" is a very important thing, and heaven and hell are two very important realities we must resolve in the right way.

But that is *not* God's most important concern for the present age. What God wants is a *corporate expression, a society of the redeemed*. Thus, personal salvation is an important *means to an end* and not an end in itself. God cannot express His kingdom until He has redeemed people that He can use to *show to everyone what the whole world would be like if everybody obeyed the King!*

That's what Christianity is all about. We are talking about community, society, corporate relationships, so that the world looking on can say, "Wow!" It is like what the Queen of Sheba said when she saw

Solomon’s court: “What a great God they must have! What a beautiful kingdom! I cannot believe what I see! I did not know that human beings could live together this way!”

That’s what kingdom is all about!

But you see, if you concentrate only on your personal salvation, and you don’t really make the kingdom to be the heart of your gospel—as did Jesus, Paul, and the others labored to teach it—then you have

all the splits and splinters and fragmentations that we have, individual Christians who have no vision for submission to a corporate Kingdom expression. I wonder just what the world looking on does see?

**Jesus used the word “kingdom” (in reference to the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God) at least 124 times.**

### **The great paradigm shift**

Now, I stand here guilty with all of you; we have all been involved in this paradigm shift. It is because we have not been taught that *the end of our salvation is to be involved in something larger than ourselves.*

The kingdom of God is the society of the redeemed. As I mentioned, this gospel of the kingdom was lost in the early centuries to an individualistic salvation. And during the past century, Anabaptism swallowed it also, and we wonder why we have so much individualism now. It is the fruit of a distorted gospel. We need to get back—it is a burden of my heart—to the kingdom gospel instead of a “save ME gospel.”

Jesus used the word “kingdom” (in reference to the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God) at least 124 times, and He never referred to the gospel as anything else. If Jesus focused on the kingdom, then that is the centrality of His message, not a marginal issue. He said, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.” Lk. 4:43 He tells us very explicitly why He came—to preach the kingdom!

### **Gospel distortions**

Is the kingdom ever taught today? Well, in Dispensationalist circles, the kingdom is to happen somewhere off in the future. You know, I think the Devil has used every strategy he can think of to get the fo-

cus off the kingdom. I really do! So the Dispensationalist has put the kingdom off into the future ... it is coming. This makes Jesus' teaching irrelevant for today. That is what some people do with the teaching about the kingdom.

Other people, such as Augustine and Calvin, made the kingdom the central theme their teaching, but it was a carnal kingdom ruled by force. Thus, we have these two distortions, two wrong concepts, of the kingdom of God. So the message is lost.

Why did Jesus focus His message on the kingdom of God? Because that was God's original purpose; that is why man was created. Salvation was *not* the main theme of God's original work with man. Man was not "lost" when he was created. God created man so that he would have dominion and express God's authority on this earth.

The first use of the word kingdom in the Bible is in Exodus 19:6, where it states, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests ..." That makes it very clear what serving God is all about. We are mediating God's rule on earth. He is the King; we are simply His subjects expressing His rule and authority, first of all in our own lives and fellowships, and then to the conscience of the world around us. Notice God says that "ye shall be unto *me*," not unto us (as humans) a kingdom of priests. The purpose of the kingdom is to show God's benevolent rule, through us.

The world does not understand God. When they think about God, they view Him as a negative entity, as some sort of grumpy sovereign out there who enjoys giving lots of rules to make life hard ... His ways are not good, and if you follow them, you will never be happy. That is the world's concept of God. Therefore, God's purpose is that through this society of the redeemed, this little colony of heaven on earth, the world would get a glimpse of His true attractive character and have a desire to respond properly to Him.

Now, the Devil has perverted the idea of the kingdom, which is why people have difficulty with it. Some leaders have perverted the idea of God's kingdom and left a bad taste in our mouth. In the Old Testament, God initially wanted all men to be that kingdom of priests, but this purpose got lost, so He chose a nation. We will not take the time to do so now, but it is an interesting study to go through the Old Testament and see what God wanted to do with that nation. He told them, "I want to lift you up on high, so that all the nations will say, 'What a God they have! What laws they have! What nation has been

more blessed?”“ He said, “I will make you the lender and not the borrower. You will be number one among the nations ... *if you keep all of my commandments.*”

You see, that is the only way people will be blessed, by a total surrender. Now, I told you of the fragmentation that has taken place in our churches. We don't understand submission of our lives to God and each other for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

## The kingdom come!

We saw that in the Old Testament that God wanted a kingdom that would demonstrate to the whole world what a nation would look like if God was the King. And only briefly did the world ever see that, under David and somewhat under Solomon. That was it. Then, we come into the New Testament.

I want to show you that the preaching of gospel as the *gospel of the kingdom* didn't end with Christ. My goal with this message is to make all of you *passionate church builders*. I want you to forget about yourself, get your relationship with God established, and then *lose yourself in something bigger than yourself!*

Look at Acts 19:8. What did Paul preach? “And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God was Paul's message; it was *not* a “save ME gospel.” Now look at Acts 20:25. “And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.”

I want to ask you another searching question. When you “preach the gospel,” do you preach the kingdom of God? I hope so, and if you haven't been doing so, I hope you start! Now let's go to the end of Paul's life, described in Acts 28:23. “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God.” Again, we see that *the kingdom* was the message! Then after Paul ends up a prisoner in his own rented house, what is he preaching in the very last verse of Acts? “The kingdom of God!”

Now, I think if Paul's gospel had been a “save ME gospel” it would not have been stated that way. The coming of the kingdom of God was the message.



## A present reality

This kingdom is a present reality, and the effects of the kingdom show, as in 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. This is what should happen when the kingdom is genuinely expressed.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

This is the kind of authority that the gathered body has when it is gathered in unity. It is a true kingdom expression of authority. Psalm 89:7 tells us that “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.”

## The *ekklesia*

What is the church, as denoted by the Greek term *ekklesia*? If you ask most people what that means, they will say, “the called out ones.” My question is, “called out to what?” Are they called out just to enjoy each other’s fellowship?

In Acts 19, when the uproar took place in Ephesus, the town clerk came on the scene and said, “We are going to be criticized for this disorder. If something needs to be resolved, there is a proper order. If anything needs to be done, it shall be determined in a lawful *ekklesia* (assembly).”

If you had gone to a Greek town and asked for the *ekklesia*, they would have taken you to the town council! It was a governing body; *ekklesia* means a body of people *called out to govern (guide, lead)*. Now suppose you went to the U.S. Congress when they were dismissing and asked them what had happened that day. Suppose they said, “We had a wonderful fellowship together! We were so encouraged! We had a fellowship meal, and it was a wonderful potluck dinner; you should have seen it! I was so glad I came to Congress, because I was so discouraged, but now I am really inspired!”

You would probably say, “That is not the reason you were supposed to be meeting together! You were *not* supposed to be there for yourself! You were supposed to be there to make good laws for this country, for yourself, for the assembly, and for the whole nation.”

## A kingdom of peace

And that is why *we* are here, to give guidance to the nations. The early church demonstrated that. Concerning the *Pax Romana*,<sup>1</sup> history books tell you that it was because the Roman army was so formidable and its punishments so terrifying that other nations dared not resist Rome's rule. But if you read the early church writings, you get a different story. They say the reason for those 200 years of peace—which coincided with the first centuries of the church—was that the Prince of Peace had come and established a kingdom of peace, and this kingdom's prayers and influence was keeping the world at peace! Interestingly, those 200 years of peace ended about the same time that the early church began to lose its practice of nonresistance.

The most tragic compromise the church ever made was its compromise of nonresistance. Since that time, some of the most horrible things have happened “in the name of Jesus”: the crusades, the Inquisition, slavery in America, the American Civil War, and World Wars I and II.

People say, “What do you do with a man like Hitler?” Well, most of the people in Germany were Lutherans. If the church had never lost its stand on nonresistance, Hitler would have had no army! Almost none of the wars in Western civilization would have ever occurred. Do you see now what happened to this kingdom? It got messed up, with tragic and unspeakably horrible consequences .

I have to tell you—and I have heard this in testimonies from various people—that the most powerful testimony of the church has been its testimony of nonresistance. We live in a world that is sick of war, hatred, violence, killing, and all the things that go along with war. To hear that there is a group of people—the Anabaptists—who for 500 years have been able to live together in peace without the sword is about the most appealing message we could ever give to the world.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Two hundred years of internal peace in the Roman Empire, with no major wars or disruptions.

2 This testimony has not been without flaws, but it is a marvelous testimony still. And, there have been other groups that have lived out kingdom Christianity through

I hope that by now you understand what the gospel of the kingdom is: a gospel that says, “Yes, God wants to save human beings and take them to heaven, but the *most important* part is that He wants them to be an expression of His kingdom here on earth.” I will again state my definition of the kingdom of God: *A group of people who show to everyone what the whole world would look like if everybody obeyed the King!*

## Embracing the kingdom

If we are going to experience the kingdom, we are going to have to embrace the following five aspects.

### 1. Kingdom focus, not personal salvation focus

We need to embrace a “kingdom theology.” I don’t even like that phrase “kingdom theology,” so let’s rephrase that to “kingdom focus.” This means the focus is going to be on the King! The early Christians were passionate about the King.

By the way, I don’t believe in a Christianity that doesn’t have any passion in it. If you don’t have any passion in your Christian life, I doubt your walk with God. I will let Him be the judge, but you won’t convince me. To me, that is what the seal of the Holy Spirit is all about. The Holy Spirit is motivation, drive. In fact, where it says that Jesus was “led of the spirit into the wilderness,” the word “led” is literally “driven.” And where it says “as many as are led by the Spirit of God,” it again means “driven.” Christians are driven people, and the proof that you have the Holy Spirit is that something is driving you. You have a gleam in your eye; there is a passion in your heart!

The cry of the early church was that “I might know Him and the power of His resurrection. I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Christ was the passion of the early church. Paul expresses a fear in 2 Corinthians 11:3 that this passion would be lost. He said, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

The context of Colossians 2:8 is that of Christian people in a Christian atmosphere. Paul says, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudi-

ments of the world, and not after Christ.” Now, what are the traditions of men and the rudiments of the world? What is he talking about?

Basically Paul is saying, “Beware lest some Christians take verses and manipulate them into a system of thought that you will follow but not be following Christ. Brothers and sisters, that is *exactly* what happened!

And it is still happening, even in our Anabaptist churches. If someone gives a talk on biblical stewardship, in many situations what you are going to get is a clever manipulation of the text into a system of thought that encourages you to “keep building up your assets and investing.” And the speaker will use the parable of the talents, picking his text to construct a systematic theology of economics that is absolutely un-Christlike. Paul said, “Don’t let that happen! Don’t let anybody spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit—like the world does—using “scriptural” logic take you away from following Christ.”

### **Salvation by theology**

But it happened. Heresy threatened the early church, and it was a serious situation. Instead of turning up the volume on simple obedience to the explicit example and person of Christ and His commands, they fought those heresies with theology. They constructed creeds and systematic theology ... until what they had was what Bro. Dean Taylor has called “salvation by theology.”

Hmmm.

Originally, such a thing would hardly have been possible because the complete canon of Scripture was not even available until many decades later. There was no such thing as a person saying, “I am going to do an exhaustive Bible study on the doctrine of angels.” By the way, if you want to put me to sleep right at the beginning of the service, just get up and announce that you are going to preach on the doctrine of angels. I want to hear about *Jesus* and how I can follow Him better. I want to hear about His kingdom. And if in the text from which are teaching about Jesus it says something about angels, you can tell us about it then.

Anyway, theological sermons were what they began to preach after they fell away from simple discipleship. I don’t want to condemn Bible study, but in the beginning of the church you could not have done an exhaustive search on a topic in the Bible because the Bible had not been completed. Not very many copies of Scriptures were available because there were no printing presses. There were no con-

cordances and no lexicons. People in general did not study the Bible in that way, except some of the professional theologians such as Augustine. The early Christians focused on the person of Christ and had a passion to carry out every word He had said because they believed His every word was life. Even if it made no sense! But things such as non-resistance, voluntary poverty, and other things got lost in systematic theology because the theologians could not get them to fit logically into their system.

Now, the Anabaptists returned to the original concept of Christianity. Years ago John Overholt said—and at the time I didn’t appreciate it as I do now—that “the Anabaptists are our bridge to the early church.” They bridged across 1000 years of systematic theology—which continued with the Reformers—to get back to Jesus, saying, “We are going to follow *Him*.”

**The genius of  
Anabaptism  
was not sola  
scriptura!**

(Psst, its genius was  
“following Christ.”)

### **Sola Scriptura vs. following Jesus**

The genius of Anabaptism was *not* sola scriptura! (despite that we often are told). Everybody at that time, so to speak, claimed to support their conclusions with sola scriptura—Catholics and Protestants both claimed to be basing their churches on the Bible. The difference with the Anabaptists was that they were passionate to know the way of Christ, to *follow* Him, to become like Him, and to establish kingdom communities.

That was the original gospel, and that continued in one form or another in Anabaptism up until the 1800s, when the same thing happened to the Anabaptists that had happened to the early church. Modernism raised its ugly head ... and how did the Anabaptists respond? With theology!

That conflict with Modernism brought out the first systematic theological statements in Anabaptism. I will not mention the specific writings, because I am not trying to condemn. And thus the Anabaptists here in North America started down the “theological” road. I have to say that what I heard preached most of my life was systematic theology, proof texts strung together in logical order to come to (often) predetermined conclusions.

Now, here we are after a century of that kind of teaching, which ended up being a “save ME gospel.” And I want to see that changed! That is the reason I am preaching my heart out this morning! I want you folks to go out preaching the gospel of the kingdom; we’re talking about community, society, relationships, corporate expressions of the gospel.

To sum up this first point, if we are going to have a kingdom focus, we must focus on the King, and everything He did and said, with the belief that He meant it for the present age ... so that the kingdom can be expressed *now!*

## 2. A kingdom method

The second necessity for the kingdom happen is that there must be a kingdom hermeneutic. Now that is a big word which means “method of interpretation.” Most of the gospel is very plain and simple and doesn’t really need an interpretation. How is it to be understood and applied? Who is to decide all that?

Well, the Reformers and the Catholic Church said that this is the job of a specialized clergy. Only these “specialists” know enough to understand these difficult things. And once they get it figured out, they will preach it to us. So they built their chapels for that purpose, with high podiums and a big long lecture hall so the preacher could get up and expound to the audience “the gospel.”

That was not the Anabaptist approach. By the way, it should be noted that some people think that the Reformers rejected the Catholic sacraments (means to obtain grace such as penance and the mass) but turned right around and made the preaching of the Word a sacrament. They seemed to be saying, “Just come and hear the Word, and that will impart some grace to you.” The Reformed concept of the church was basically that its purpose was to proclaim the Word and rightly administer the sacrament.

The early Anabaptists returned to 1 Corinthians 14, but this got lost among us, too. Paul wrote:

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or

three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

Here is a picture of an early church service: everybody had the privilege to give an orderly prophecy. Now, when I was a boy growing up, there was a little bit of this still left in the churches. After the sermon, there was an opportunity for other ministers to give a testimony. But by the time I became an adult, even that had disappeared.

If you go way back to early Anabaptist meetings, you will find that a brother would stand up and exposit a scripture, and then it was discussed by all the brothers. The next brother would get up and read another portion of scripture, and then it was discussed. In fact, their meeting places were not long houses with a podium. When they finally built meeting places, they were square, with the pews facing each other and the speaker standing in the middle. The pattern was symbolic of the way they all discussed things together.<sup>3</sup>

It was a beautiful concept. In our congregation, this has been the practice for the past 25 years. Consequently, if you were to ask persons in our congregation what they think on a given subject, you probably would get a similar answer from each one. I doubt that we can have much unity until this concept is restored. It worked in the formation of the Schleithem Confession.<sup>4</sup> Some of those who gathered at Schleithem were not nonresistant when they came. The participants of the meeting were in terrible disagreement and confusion, but at the end of the meeting, their hearts were united and they all agreed to the Schleithem Confession. They believed that the body was united in this sort of brotherly sharing, not by a specialist who preached to everybody else from a high pulpit. They understood that the Holy Spirit works through all the gifts scattered throughout the entire body.

### 3. A kingdom community

There has to be a kingdom society. The church is a brotherhood in which the fullness of the kingdom ideal is explored and explained.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the biblical injunction of women keeping silence in the assembly and of not teaching men was followed.

<sup>4</sup> An early Anabaptist statement of agreement on certain biblical teachings and practices.

This is in contrast to an individualistic, “save ME gospel,” in which each person is individually trying to figure out how he is going to make it to heaven. The church is a community.

Did you know that the church began in the cities? It was an urban movement; people lived close to each other, so they could break bread daily from house to house. They were with each other on a daily basis and shared communion frequently when they met. It was like one big family experience, with constant fellowship, constant discipleship, constant evangelism together, and constant teaching because they lived very close together.

I studied two years of Latin (which subject I didn’t like), during which I learned some vocabulary. One of those words was *paganus*—from which our English word “pagan” is derived. The Latin term means “country dweller.” The church was in the city, where people living close together could gather and fellowship constantly. The pagans lived scattered about from each other in the country.

**The church is a brotherhood in which the fullness of the kingdom ideal is explored and explained.**

Now what I am going to say next will delight our Amish brethren. The automobile destroyed much of the community we had left in the United States. Now we have people who drive 30 to 45 minutes—as we did when I was a boy—to church. I am not saying that you cannot serve the Lord if you drive 30 minutes to church meetings, but I am saying that if we are going to embrace the kingdom, living in geographic proximity is something with which we must come to terms. There has to be enough closeness to enable fellowship on a daily basis. Kingdom Christians must be able to work together, pray together, and sing together. Constantly!

By the way, the word “heathen” means “one who lives on the heath,” or we might say, “back in the bush.”<sup>5</sup>

The early Anabaptists lived in villages.<sup>6</sup> I wish that when the Anabaptists came this country they would have pursued the village model of settlement, as they did when they settled in Russia. Everybody had

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5 The point is, kingdom Christianity is a group experience, and the pagan and the heathen were folks who lived separated and “out in the sticks” without close contact.

6 If persecution did not make it impossible.



their houses along one street, with their farm ground, businesses, and cattle out from the village.

Now I know that you may not like to hear this, but the Anabaptists (and of course the early church) were very serious about Acts 2 and 4. I think it is a stratagem of the Devil to generate a negative view among our people for those two portions of Scripture. I am not saying that you have to make it happen in exactly the same way that the Hutterites have worked it out. I don't care how it is worked out, but there is an ideal picture in Acts 2 and 4 that the Devil never wants you to experience!

We should be seeking ways to get closer together geographically. Now I cannot give you a specific verse that says that, but it is the model laid out in Acts.

Now, the Anabaptists were serious about fellowship, about participation one with another. They had a saying like this: *No man can come to Christ unless he brings his brother with him.* That is how serious they were about constant fellowship. If you wanted to pray, it didn't mean you had to find a brother or two to pray with you. But if you thought about anything in that prayer concerning someone who was not praying with you, you went to him and made it right, like the Bible says. They were greatly involved in each other's lives. They were serious about creating little colonies of heaven on earth, so that everyone could see what the whole world would look like if everybody obeyed the King!

#### 4. Servants for leaders

If we are going to embrace the kingdom, we must have biblical leadership. What are biblical leaders? They are people who outserve the rest of the congregation, just as Jesus did. Jesus did not let his disciples become secretaries who tried to keep people away from Him. When they tried to bring children to Him, the disciples said, "Ah, the Master is too busy ..."

"No, no, no," Jesus told them, "let the little children come unto me."

He had time to serve! In one place it says the sick were brought to Him at sunset. I assume it was the end of the day and He had worked all day and was tired. He could have just prayed a mass prayer and ended it. But it specifically says that He laid His hands *on every one!* That must have taken hours; He must have been there all night.

Did you know that the word “authority” has the word “author” in it? An author is someone who originates something to inspire other people, to draw out their creativity, or to bless them. An author is someone who originates something for the benefit of others. That is the kind of authority we need in the church.

Our first pastor, Brother Lynn Martin, has passed on to his reward. I never saw anybody serve like that brother served. He was determined that he would *not* be a lord over the church. Everything was decided in our brothers meetings instead of by him alone. But a special deference was given to what Brother Lynn said.

As busy as he was, if a student needed help with his algebra, Brother Lynn was there even if it took all morning for him. He did not have an unlisted telephone number. He had nothing to keep people away from him. And he served: he built houses for people, he fixed their cars, he preached sermons, and he counseled them when they were discouraged or needed wisdom. Everybody knew that this brother was totally available to the community all the time. He was a leader. To my knowledge, he never said, “Folks, this is what we are going to do, and we are going to do it because I said it. And I happen to be your bishop!” That was not his attitude.

**There is an ideal picture in Acts 2 and 4 that the Devil never wants you to experience!**

Jesus would not allow people to crown Him a King. He said, “Don’t call any man Rabbi or Father on this earth. One is your Father, and you are all brothers.” We are going to have to secure that kind of leadership. And you know, without me saying it, that a lot of the problems in our churches start right here at this point.

Some of you will be leaders. I am not speaking to those who have failed; I am preaching to you. If you become a leader, it must be because you have outserved the others. And if you don’t outserve, you are not a genuine leader because Jesus said that the man who serves will be the greatest. You won’t have to stand up and say, “I should be leader, because I outserved ...” No, it will just be known.

## 5. Gospel economics

The next point we need to embrace is gospel economics. Are you beginning to see why we have not been able to demonstrate a kingdom gospel? In almost all these areas, we have failed to obey the explicit command of Christ ... and nowhere more than on the point I am about to discuss.

I am excited! If whoever hears or reads this sermon will take these things to heart, there is going to be a renewed expression of Anabaptism, a renewed expression of the gospel! And they are going to go home and pour their hearts into the church and forget about themselves. Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

We have three commands here, and I think Jesus knew that this was going to be the stickiest issue in His whole sermon. He gives the most time to it, almost one whole chapter, more than He does for any other subject in the Sermon on the Mount. Not only that, but in all the other parts of the sermon He simply says, “Do this, do that, and don’t do this.” This topic is the only one in the whole sermon for which He gives us some insight and explanation as to why He said the “impossible” things He said. He knew we would need some help to understand this hard subject, so He gives us three reasons why we should not lay up treasures on this earth.

### **a. Your treasures are telling on you!**

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Your heart follows your treasure. If a man waves his arm over a whole pile of stuff that he owns but doesn’t need and says his heart is not in it, he is not telling you the truth! Jesus told us that where your “stuff” is, that’s where your heart is. If you have dumped your whole life down in the slums of the city helping poor people, guess where your interest is going to be? Guess what you are going to talk about? Wherever your investment is, that is where your heart is.

To make this point, I always tell the story of a friend:

I once drove into the church grounds of the church I used to attend, and he was there working in the graveyard. I had not seen him in a long time. This was in the late 1990s, and I was driving

an old 1978 Pontiac station wagon with a rusted hood. The wood grain was peeling off, and the car had other symptoms showing that it was coming to the end of its days. Well, I drove in there, rolled down the window, and said a hearty “Hello!”

The first thing he said to me was, “I guess you see that I bought a brand new Ford truck. But it doesn’t mean anything to me. It is just transportation.”

I had not said anything except “hello”!

Then he continued, “I guess you heard I bought a new Cadillac, but that doesn’t mean anything to me either.”

I hadn’t said anything; but this is a sample of the strange things people say because they know that is what they are supposed to say. Jesus did not say “where your heart is, there’s where your treasure is.” He said “show me your pile of stuff and that is where your heart is.” And if you say anything else, you are not telling the truth.

We are all concerned about where our heart is. We don’t allow the use of any alcohol in our communities because we are afraid a few people may not be able to handle the temptation. But here is a subject—wealth—that is far more dangerous than alcohol, and the church won’t touch it with a 10-foot pole!

That’s sad!

### **b. Get economics right or you flunk**

The second reason Jesus gives for not laying up treasure on earth is because “the light of the body is the eye.” His comment about the whole body being full of light is in the context of economics. He is telling us that if we don’t get this subject of economics right, we will not get anything else right. We will make foolish decisions, go down blind alleys, and do things that turn to ashes. We will make bad decision after bad decision because we cannot see.

### **c. Mastered by one**

The third thing Jesus says is that you cannot serve two masters. You will hate the one or the other. You see, the Devil would like to convince people that they can do both. They can have their stuff and still worship God.

The word “worship” derives from the Middle English word “worthship.” It has to do with what you value. If you look at Hebrews 11, you will not see one word about the morals of the people described. Good morals among Christians are just assumed. In fact, some of those people in Hebrews 11 had some real moral lapses. But

the thing that chapter concerns itself about is *values*. Those people had values that differed from the values of the people around them! The greatest value statement in the Bible is in that chapter. It says that Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ—something no unspiritual person would want—to have more value than the riches of Egypt. That is quite a value statement!

That is why Jesus said you cannot serve mammon and God. Because if you serve mammon, that is where your values will be, and what you value, that is what you “worship.”

Those are the three reasons Jesus gives us for not serving mammon. If you pursue laying up treasures for yourself on this earth, your heart will go there, you won’t see anything right, and you’ll worship the stuff.

## Where to invest

The second command is to lay up treasures in heaven. How do you do that? In Luke 12:32-34 it says:

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

So He says that the way to lay up treasures in heaven is to give your “stuff” away. You’re not actually *giving*; you actually are *investing*. Talk to the man who has built up a huge portfolio and ask him how he did it. He will tell you, “What I did was not spend anything unnecessary on my own things. I put every penny into that investment because compound interest does wondrous things, and I did not want to have one penny outside of the investment. I lived simply, wore shabby clothes, and drove an old car so that every penny possible could go into the investment.”

That is what Jesus is telling us!

Do you really believe that the money you give for the kingdom in the name of Christ is an investment? The story is told of the man who went to heaven and saw that his neighbor had a huge mansion:

The man asked his neighbor, “Where’s my mansion? Do I have one?”

“Sure,” was the reply.

“Well, I would like to see it!”

So his neighbor took him down the streets of the city out to the

suburbs, to the very edges of heaven, where they finally came to a little chicken coop. “Here’s your mansion,” the neighbor said. “My mansion?”

“Yes,” was the reply. “We build these mansions with the materials you send ahead of time, and this is what you sent.”

An imaginary story, but the point it makes is true! Those treasures are sent on ahead, and Jesus is telling us to lay up a huge pile of stuff in heaven. Jesus did not tell us *not* to accumulate; He just told us *where* to accumulate.

I wanted to discuss the rest of the chapter, but time does not allow that. I also wanted to discuss nonresistance as point 6. And I would love to spend a whole lot of time talking about humility. None of this is going to function without humility, described in Philippians 2:5–11 as the mind of Christ.

## Taking Jesus literally

I conclude with a story showing how to relate to these kingdom teachings. Some of them are difficult and do not make much logical sense. At the first school which I taught, the principal was Clarence Fretz. He had been a missionary to Luxemburg, and he told me the following story personally.

On his way back across the Atlantic to Luxemburg after his first furlough, he met an evangelical missionary who was nonresistant. So he asked this man, “How did you become nonresistant? Were you taught that?”

“Oh, no! I was not taught that. I was taught God and country.”

“Well,” Clarence asked, “how did you become nonresistant?”

To answer the question, the evangelical missionary told this story:

The last time I went back across the ocean returning from my furlough, I opened my Bible and read the verse that says, “Give to him that asks of thee, and him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” I closed my Bible, and the next morning when I went to have my devotions, I couldn’t get past that verse. Try as I would, the whole trip back across the Atlantic, that verse just burrowed itself deeper and deeper into my mind until I could not forget it. I thought about it 24/7.”

I said to my wife, “If we do this, those people in Africa will rob us blind when they find out that this is our policy!” But later I said to my wife one morning, “Let’s just do what Jesus said.”

So we returned to Africa, and it wasn’t long until the neighbors

discovered our new policy. They came and “borrowed” the table, the chairs, the dinnerware, the bed. ... And after awhile we were sitting on the floor with nothing.

Meanwhile, down in the village, day after day, they were discussing the stupidity of this missionary. You know how those discussions go. They are funny for a while, and you laugh for a couple of weeks, but sooner or later the jokes have all been told, everybody has said everything, and people sober up.

Well, one day somebody said, “You know what? We were a bunch of cowards. Anybody can do what we did. That took no courage. It took no bravery or wisdom. It took nothing to do what we did. I am taking my chair back.”

“Yeah, and I am taking my table back.”

“And I am taking my dinnerware back ...”

And so it went, and then they said to him, “You know, when you lived here the first time, you told us about a man who came and gave himself, and gave himself, and gave himself for us. We did not understand your message, but now we do!”

For the first time we had a response from those natives such as we had not had before. My wife and I decided that you do not have to understand the “why” of what Jesus taught. All you have to do is obey what He said. Sometimes you will see the wisdom in what He said, and sometimes you won't. After we did what Jesus said concerning economics, we also decided to do what He said about peace and violence.

Now the interesting thing is that modern North American Anabaptists seem to have the peace and violence part right, but they will not apply the same thing to Jesus' teaching on economics. Will we have the courage of that evangelical minister to go out, take the kingdom teachings of Jesus, and obey them explicitly in faith that He knows what He is talking about. Can we believe He will create this beautiful society that will show to everyone what the whole world would look like if everybody obeyed the King? ~



Why were you “saved”?

To gain heaven? Or, to glorify God on earth?

If you answered the latter, you are correct.

And, you also get to experience the former!

In this message, Brother John D. Martin explores the paradigm difference between a typical “gospel” message and the “gospel of the kingdom.”

He says it succinctly when he says, “I want you to forget about yourself, get your relationship with God established, and then **lose yourself in something bigger than yourself!**”