



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 13.3 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

The Difference between Church and Kingdom

Although we sometimes speak of Christ's Church as the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, there is a difference between the Bible word for "church" (ἐκκλησία *ekklesia*) and the Bible word for "kingdom" (βασιλεία *basileia*). The word "church" refers to people. The word "kingdom" refers to the ruling *activity* of the king. We can define the kingdom of God as any activity God undertakes in connection with His plan of salvation. There are some passages where this definition of the kingdom does not fit, but in most cases it does fit.

For example, Jesus compared the kingdom of Satan with the kingdom of God when He was accused of driving out an evil spirit through the power of the devil. Jesus said: **"If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub ('the ruler of the demons' v. 15). ... But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you"** (Luke 11:18-20). The two kingdoms refer to the activity of Satan as opposed to the activity of God. Satan puts demons into people; that is his kingdom. Jesus, as God, casts out demons; that is His kingdom. Jesus further explained: **"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils"** (Luke 11:21-22). Satan is the "strong man", but Jesus is the One "stronger than he".

When Jesus' enemies accused Him of breaking the Sabbath law by healing a man on the Sabbath day, Jesus responded by saying: **"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working"** (John 5:17). God keeps working on the Sabbath day, and so does Jesus, for Jesus is God, and He is ruling over all the world together with His Father at all times. Jesus at this very moment is **"head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all"** (Ephesians 1:22). The church is Jesus' people, those who believe in Him. The kingdom is Jesus' activity on behalf of His people. That is the way His kingdom comes. Thus, wherever the King is active, that is where the kingdom of God is present and at work.

The work of God that He is most interested in is His work of gathering a people of believers for Himself through the preaching of His Gospel Word. Jesus told His parables of the kingdom to show how His kingdom works. He told His listeners that the kingdom of God is like a sower going out to sow his seed. Some of it falls by the wayside, and the birds eat it. Some falls on stony places, where it starts out well but dries up in the heat. Some of the seed gets choked out by weeds and bears no fruit. But some falls on good ground and yields a good crop, in some places even a hundredfold. Jesus explained that in this parable **"the seed is the word of God"** (Luke 8:11). In other words, the kingdom of God comes through the speaking and spreading of God's Word. God works through His Word with the aim and purpose of bringing people to faith in Christ and producing good fruit in them. Jesus' other parables bring out other aspects of how Christ does His work in the world, and how God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are also active through the Word to gather and sustain Christ's Church of believers. Examine Matthew 13 to see how the kingdom of God works.

Jesus explained to Pontius Pilate the nature of His kingdom in these words: **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here. ... 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 18:36-37). Notice that Jesus’ kingdom comes through the proclaiming of the truth. This truth is centered in Jesus Himself and the salvation that He established for the world through His suffering and death and resurrection. Wherever this truth is spoken, there the kingdom of God is at work. The apostle Paul wrote: **“The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”** (Romans 14:17). The Holy Spirit uses the Good News of Jesus to give the righteousness of Christ to sinner. This righteousness can be received only by the faith created by the Holy Spirit. This faith is then accompanied by peace and joy in the knowledge that our sins have been taken away and we stand as righteous in the sight of God.

For further discussion of the kingdom of God, please refer to the closing paragraphs of our study in Christology in Chapter 6. The word “kingdom” in the Bible sometimes refers to a place or a possession when referring to earthly kingdoms, but it is always good to keep in mind that the principal meaning is the ruling *activity* of the king. A good understanding of this truth helps us grasp the meaning of the prayer Jesus taught us: **“Thy kingdom come”**.

Questions

1. What is the difference between “church” and “kingdom”?
2. How did Jesus show His power over Satan in His ministry?
3. How did Jesus show His power over Satan in His death?
4. In what way are Jesus and His Father working every day?
5. Explain the parable of the sower and the seed.
6. Explain one of the other parables of Jesus recorded in Matthew 13.
7. Why can we call the kingdom of God a kingdom of truth?
8. How does God's kingdom come, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer?