



Lesson Title: The Why's of the Gospels—Why the Kingdom of Heaven/God?



Key Concept: The Gospels' themes are often obscure to us, but God has a reason for including them. Jesus' descriptions of his kingdom reveal how different his ways and thoughts are from ours.



Scriptures:

³“I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.”
(Matthew 18:3–4 *New Living Translation*)

²⁶But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.
(Matthew 20:26–28 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: Matthew 3:2; 5:3–10; 6:33; 8:11–12; 18:1–5; 20:20–28; 25:1–30



Lesson Thoughts:

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spoke much and frequently about the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. He did this in various places, from the beatitudes in Matthew 5, where he describes who the kingdom of heaven belongs to, to his parables which he would begin with “The Kingdom of Heaven is like . . .” But why so much discussion of this kingdom? Is it real, physical, present? Or is it more abstract, theoretical, aspirational?

Jesus' teachings on his kingdom paint a very strange, often counterintuitive picture. In Matthew 6:33, he stated, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously,” yet in Matthew 21:31, he declared to the priests and officials, the holy people, that “corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into

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the Kingdom of Heaven before you do." So which is it? Are we to live righteously, or are priests worse than prostitutes and corrupt officials?

We get further explanation in Matthew 18, when one disciple asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus called a little child over to him and said, "Anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." Then, in Matthew 20, the mother of James and John requested that her two sons be allowed to sit at Jesus' side in his kingdom. After denying their foolish request, he explained that "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

From these teachings, we can glean that before we can enter the kingdom of heaven, we must become like Jesus. When he reprimanded the priests, his problem with them was that they were too proud to hear the gospel message, while public sinners were not. As with a little child, Jesus wants us to be humble and willing to learn from him. If we want to be leaders in God's kingdom, we must first be servants and slaves. Jesus was a servant to humanity, paying the ultimate price to die for us. Therefore, in the kingdom of God, just like with Jesus, the first shall be last.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) How well do you think you understand the kingdom of heaven? What parts confuse you? What parts make sense to you?
- 2) What are some areas in which you have been "becoming the last" according to Jesus' instructions? What are some areas in which you haven't?
- 3) Are there any moments from your life where you have foolishly wanted God to put you first in his kingdom? How did that go?
- 4) Tell a story about a time where somebody else served you and made an impact in your life. How did it feel? Did it urge you to serve more?

Next Lesson: Why the Incarnation?

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Notes and Reflections

- 1) Read the parables regarding what the kingdom of heaven is like in Matthew 13, 18 and 25. Identify who you would be in each one. If you aren't the one God would be pleased with, decide to make a change and ask him for his help. He is willing and able to transform us if we allow him to.

- 2) Pray the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9–13) and reflect on what it means to request "thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

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Notes and Reflections, cont.