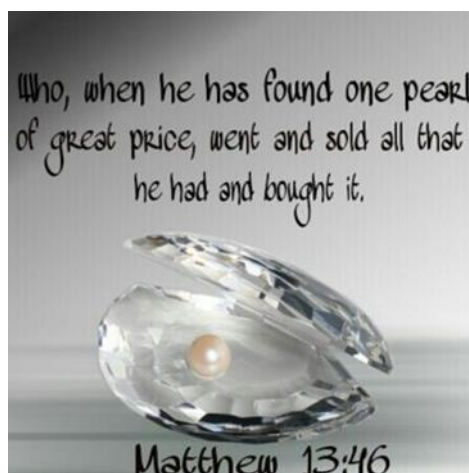


## Heaven vs. the Kingdom



Jesus asks us, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?" (Mark 4:30), a question [reflecting his own inner struggle]. So how does the New Testament describe **heaven** (the "kingdom")? We tend to imagine heaven as a special place—radiant with light, where angels sing and play instruments, endlessly beautiful. Yet Jesus says the **kingdom** is not an afterlife realm at all, but something one can find **in a "field."** 1) Scripture says: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:44–46).



"Jesus defines the kingdom as **the quest** to discover which 'pearl' matters most in each of our lives. Seeking treasure is an open-ended search, a process like **casting a net** into the sea and selecting the good fish from all that are caught. The kingdom is the wisdom to discern life's priorities and the resolve to give one's all for them. That, Jesus says, is the treasure." 2)

In Mark 9:1 Jesus emphatically declares, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the **kingdom of God** come with power." The expression **kingdom of God** appears throughout the four Gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament, whereas **kingdom of heaven** occurs **only in Matthew**. In Matthew 10:7 Jesus sends the disciples out to proclaim, "The **kingdom of heaven** has drawn near," in agreement with John the Baptist's cry in Matthew 3:2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near." In both cases, "kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven" is **not** a place one goes **after death**, but a reality that **arrives in this life**.

"Repent" in Greek is **metanoia**—the act of replacing the old self with a new self, a self that transcends me. In Hebrew the verb is **shub**, and in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke) **tab**. The sense is: **to recover the image of God—God's 'DNA'—implanted in humans**. 3)

The term "**kingdom of heaven**" (a postmortem "heaven") appears **more than 30 times** in Matthew. If, hypothetically, one were to go there after death, Matthew also uses the phrase "**Father in heaven**" **20+ times**. "Father in heaven" appears in Mark only at 11:25–26 and in Luke at 11:2; **John has neither expression**. The appearances in Mark and Luke likely reflect **later insertions**. By contrast, **kingdom of God** is distributed widely: **Matthew (5x), Mark (16x), Luke (32x), John (2x)**,

## Acts (6x).

Notably, the KJV explicitly includes **"in heaven"** in the phrase **"Father in heaven,"** while the NIV often **omits** "in heaven," rendering simply "Father." Such editorial adjustments suggest that textual revisers understood the differences among the Gospels and **deliberately** tried to smooth them out. In short, the expressions **"kingdom of heaven"** and **"Father in heaven"** are, in effect, **Matthew-specific** terms.

Because Jesus stressed **realizing the kingdom in this life**, his references to "heaven" are **figurative**; his real intent is the **establishment of the kingdom here**. Matthew's use of "kingdom of God" borrows the concept that Mark expresses as "kingdom," and it is clear that the **author of Matthew** is the one who reframed Jesus' **this-worldly kingdom** as a **postmortem heaven**.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Jesus tells us what true happiness is and shows us **God's kingdom**. 6) The kingdom is **not where we go when we die**; it is **right here, right now**, in the very way we set our hearts—so that, in this life, we already **experience** heaven or hell.

"The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God does **not** come with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is **within** you"' (Luke 17:20–21). This passage makes it unmistakable that the kingdom (heaven) is an **already-present reality within the faithful** (present tense: ἐστίν). It is **not** a visible, spatial realm—neither "here" (ὧδε) nor "there" (ἐκεῖ). In

sum, the New Testament's kingdom is **not** an afterlife utopia, but a **present** reality that **already has come** (or can come) **within** believers. 7)

In the **Gospel of Thomas**, Jesus says: "The kingdom is **inside you** and **outside you** (3a). Split a log; I am there. Lift up the stone; you will find me there (77b). The Father's kingdom is **spread out upon the earth**, and people do not see it (113)." 8)

"We should heed Jesus' word that the more graced person is the one who, **forgetting** the dream of a millennial kingdom or of a **signless** paradise in the skies, strips away every illusion, listens to the voice of one's will and spirit, and **re-enacts** the true 'kingdom of God' (**the kingdom on earth**) so that it may return within one's own heart." 9)

The **kingdom** Jesus proclaimed is a concept **already real**. It is a place where there is no discrimination between Jew and Gentile, woman and man, slave and free, tax collector, Samaritan, or prostitute; where the laws of circumcision, Sabbath, and clean foods fall away; where one speaks with God **directly**, without a mediator, anywhere—so **temple** and **priesthood** are unnecessary.

Jesus' saying, "The kingdom is like **treasure hidden in a field**" (Matt. 13:44), is akin to the Buddha's call to "seek the **diamond** hidden in your heart." Finding the kingdom is **not** buying a time-machine ticket to the afterlife; it is obtaining the **key** that ushers us into the stage where we recognize the **oneness** of all beings and expand the **centrifugal force of love** that unites us.

When Jesus speaks of treasure hidden in a **field**, the **field** points to the **heart**, and

the **treasure** to our **innate divinity**, latent within us like a **mustard seed**. To find it, cultivate it, and become one with all beings looks like this: "The kingdom of heaven is like a **mustard seed** that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is greater than the shrubs and becomes a **tree**, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" (Matt. 13:31; cf. Luke 13:19).

Saints like **Buddha** and **Jesus** awakened to the oneness of all and, breaking free from divisions, came down to the lowly places to extend **compassion and love**, embodying sacrifice and simplicity. Yet established religion has **deified** them, turning figures and places from fable and myth into "**facts**" via film, painting, children's stories, and novels; it has replaced Jesus' atonement-for-all with **original sin** and **free will** that merely prolong the privileges of elites—thus **damaging** the true teaching of the saints.

A community **festival** (祝祭), to which **all** contribute according to their means (蓄財), has been corrupted into a festival **for the few**, funded by wealth **extracted** from the many. Some clergy praise the luxury of a small elite as if it were a **divine right**, while turning the general public into a **divided, exploitable** class to bolster clerical privilege. In return for absolving rulers through the scapegoat mechanism, granting them quasi-divine status, and delivering them votes, clergy receive legal cover for exploiting their flocks and a blind eye to their misdeeds.

Now we must honor the saints' noble **self-sacrifice** meant to bring **everyone** into the festival. We must admit the error of dividing "**us**" from "**them**," branding "them" as heretics to be persecuted, exploited, and dispossessed, and return to basics. Because **no one** can speak with certainty about what happens after we die, we should **end** fruitless quarrels over the afterlife—its existence, entrance criteria, or

mode of living. Let all religious people together receive the legacy of Buddha and Jesus and **work to build, in this life, the 'kingdom of God' (the kingdom)**—by thinking together, and seeking sound alternatives and practical paths.

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