

Module 6

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Thesis Statement:

“This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.” (Mk 1:15). The Kingdom of God is God’s plan for all creation. Through Jesus’ words and deeds this Kingdom broke forth, demanding an urgent and radical response. The Church’s mission, therefore, is to proclaim and establish among all peoples the Kingdom of God, here on earth.



Section 1: Who Do They Say I Am?

Section 1A - Matthew and Mosaic Continuity/Discontinuity

Each Gospel has a unique trait, a unique facet, and just like a gem with many faces, each face is not seen in solitude. Rather, the gem is seen in its entirety, revealing the beauty of the whole. As much as each Gospel portrays a different side of Jesus (The Markan Suffering Messiah, the Lukan Savior of All, and the Johannine Word Made Flesh), they point to the same reality and guide us to a wonderful understanding of the mystery of Jesus. For use in this course however, we turn particularly to Matthew, and how continuity and discontinuity in this Gospel allow us to grasp the essence of who Jesus was to this community of believers, and through them, allowing us to enter into the light of understanding for our own faith.

The author of this Gospel hides behind the anonymity of the community of faith in which he taught as a scribe “instructed in the truths of the Kingdom” (13:52), but has long been associated with the name of Matthew. Whether he was the Matthew who left his tax office to follow Jesus as a disciple (9:9; 10:3) is questionable. What can be said with confidence about the author is that he belonged to a Hellenized Jewish culture, was able to write good Greek, and was well versed in the Jewish Scriptures.¹

Matthew’s Jewish slant is readily apparent even to the casual reader. He leaves many Jewish terms and customs unexplained, such as handwashing (15:1), the nature of two didrachma/the temple tax (17:24-27), the seat of Moses (23:2), phylacteries and fringes (23:5), and flight on the Sabbath (24:20).²

Matthew goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus was the son of David, a title highlighted particularly in the Matthean Gospel, and attempts to prove that Jesus had met all the qualifications to be the Messiah of Israel.³ Many in Matthew’s day also assumed that the Messiah would be similar to redeemers of Israel that had come before, especially one like Moses. Moses’ words echoes in this manner: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet” (Deut 18:15). Thus, given these expectations, Matthew must show not only that Jesus is the son of David if he is the Messiah but also that Jesus is like Moses, if indeed he is the new Redeemer.⁴

Therefore, throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist’s stance was to highlight how Jesus was the New Moses, and how through his words and deeds, was able to perfect the Old Testament.

The Matthean Gospel begins with a genealogy, a list of names charting out descendants, much like a family tree. This is very similar with the beginning of book of Exodus, which also charts out a list of names. From the onset, images of Exodus begin to fill the Matthean audience, and they are treated to even more come the next verses.

For instance, the parallels with Moses are readily apparent in the events surrounding Jesus’ birth: a dream about the child’s birth⁵; a king informed of the birth of a liberator by scribes and wisemen⁶; the slaughter of male children by a tyrant (Exod 1:15-22); and the narrow escape of the infant (Exod 2:1-10). Moses was also forced to flee into exile (Exod 2:15) and returned only when he was told, “all those seeking your life are dead” (definite parallel bet. Exod 4:19 with Matt 2:20).

¹ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 1.

² Cf. Ibid., 2.

³ Cf. Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Ibid., 51.

⁵ Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.9.3 § 210-16; Pseudo Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9, 10.

⁶ Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.9.2 § 205-9, 2.9.7 § 234; astrologers in *Exodus Rabba* 1:22.

As much as there are many parallels between Jesus and Moses, these should not be overdrawn, and it is in the major differences that we are revealed the greater nature of Jesus as compared to Moses.

- a) Moses is led into the wilderness to be tested for forty years, but eventually fails to enter the Promised Land. Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tested for forty days, but succeeds. (Matthew 4)
- b) Transfiguration, Moses is the symbol of the Law, Elijah was considered the greatest of all the prophets. In the Gospel, whenever the formula “Law and the Prophets” appears, it indicates the Old Testament. Therefore, the transfiguration is a reminder that what has been said and done in Old Testament has come into new shape and new form, perfected and transfigured in Christ. Whilst, for instance, Moses’ face shone from his encounter with God on the mountain (Exod 34:29-35), Jesus is completely transfigured; and after Moses and Elijah fade from view, a voice from a cloud proclaims, “This is my beloved son, listen to him!” (17:1-9)
- c) Unlike Moses, who spoke in the name of God, Jesus speaks in his own name (5:21-48) and recovers the will of God that had been diluted by Moses to accommodate human hardness of heart (19:7-8)
- d) Moses ascended the mountain to be taught by God, to be given succor, and to worship. (Exod 19:3; 24:16-17; Deut 9:9). Jesus ascends (or descends) a mountain to teach others the definitive intention of God’s will, to give aid to others (14:23-33; 15:29-31), and to commission his disciples (28:16-20). Also, Jesus is the one worshipped on the mountain by his disciples (28:16-20).

Section 2B - The Incarnation

When we speak of the Incarnation, it is the belief that the Word of God (aka the Second Person in the Trinity, the Son) became flesh, and dwelt among us. Jesus then is both fully human and fully divine through the Incarnation.

What is the significance of the Incarnation? We can claim a fourfold importance to the Incarnation as follows:⁷

- a) First, our world is no longer only the ‘work’ of the Son of God; he is now part of it. He no longer merely sees its life; he is caught up in it. He now experiences immediately our world of joy and sorrow, hunger, weariness, hatred, fear and pain.
- b) Second, he can represent human beings before/to God, since he belongs to us completely sharing our condition both in life and in death. An ‘alien’ who does not authentically share as an insider in our condition could not appropriately represent us human beings.
- c) Third, by being truly and fully one of us, Jesus can communicate very concretely and show us how to act, suffer and pray – in short, show us what a human life before God should really be.
- d) Fourth, the fact that Christ has genuinely shared our experience from the inside can persuade us that God personally understands and loves us. Thus we can be convinced that we are uniquely worthwhile and lovable.
- e) Fifth, we can lovingly identify with and follow Christ in faithful discipleship because we know that he shares our human condition.

We can spend a sizable portion talking about the semantics and metaphysics of such an event, but it would be more prudent to attempt to understanding the consequences of this marvelous reality.

*Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, lovely in eyes, not his,
For the Father, through features of our faces
-Gerard Manley Hopkins*

⁷ This next section is adapted from Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *Jesus: A Portrait* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 48-49.

“Every time I board a plane or fear death I pray these words: ‘Dear Lord, if I am to die, please let people remember of me only that which was you. Let my life serve merely as a witness to your love.’ It’s an abbreviation of St. Francis’ classic prayer, “Make me an instrument of your peace...” and resembles this one by Mother Teresa: ‘Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your Spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours.’ Whomever I got it from, the prayer works for me because, like a compass for my soul, it directs me to my Creator and to my purpose on earth. It’s the Incarnation in my own words: God becoming human in each and every one of us.”⁸

*Whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him*
-Colossians 3:17

Section 2: Introduction to the Kingdom of God

Section 2A - Semeiotics of the Kingdom

What is the role of signs? A “sign” in the widest sense is “that by which something is known or recognized.” Thomas Aquinas says that a sign is any sensible object through whose knowledge we are led to the knowledge of something else. Human communication and divine revelation possess a similar semeiological (sign) structure.

Type	Human Communication	Divine Revelation
Attractive Signs	To capture the attention of the audience	According to the biblical accounts, revelation is frequently preceded by signs which attract the attention of those who are to hear it, awakening dispositions of awe and wonder.
Expressive Signs	To embody the message	Then the message itself comes to expression through the sign-events of Word and Deed.
Confirmatory Signs	To identify the speaker and to confirm the message	Finally, the revelation is often sealed as divine by some kind of marvelous deed which is judged to be evidence that it is indeed the Lord who has spoken.

Think about the various signs used in secular society. On your daily drive or commute to school, you will encounter a plethora of signs. Examples will include stop signs and traffic lights. A good example would be the various advertisements on billboards. It embodies all the types of signs. Often, these ads will be brightly colored or have some kind of gimmicky twist that would turn your attention to them (and as such, acting as an ATTRACTIVE sign). At the same time, the purpose of ads is to market a product by delivering information regarding what a product is all about (thus becoming an EXPRESSIVE sign). Finally, ads often feature a celebrity endorser of some kind to give some kind of authoritative seal of approval that such a product does work (which then becomes a CONFIRMATORY sign).

The Kingdom of God is the symbol of God’s dream for the whole of creation. A symbol is a sign which not only points to a deeper reality, but also participates in it. Therefore, as much as the Kingdom is merely a sign, it also *is* part of that dream of God for creation, that the enactment of the Kingdom itself will lead to the enactment of the dream of God.

⁸Therese Johnson Borchard, *Winging It: Meditations of a Young Adult* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

“Symbols have the ability to be not only their own reality but they can also represent a further reality and in some real way make that other reality present. If however a reality symbolized by the symbol is not recognized, it remains merely a sign. Alternatively, if a symbol is seen as the full reality as opposed to seeing what it is an expression of, then the symbol becomes an idol. It is only through symbols that some invisible essence can be expressed, and hence the function of a symbol is to open up levels of reality, especially its depth dimension, which cannot be grasped in any other way. Symbols are born and can also die when they no longer convey relevant meanings within changing cultural contexts. An example of this is when patriarchy is solely connected with one’s image of the Divine. Symbols are more than indicators. They convey meaning, at times even presence, when we dialogue with them and surrender to what they offer. This symbolic form of knowing demands levels of participation/indwelling and has the potential and powerful ability to open us to Mystery.”⁹

Section 2B - Biblical Foundation of the Kingdom

Jesus never defined the Kingdom of God. He describes the Kingdom in parables and similes, and in concepts like life, glory and light. Even theologians face some degree of naive helplessness when it comes to defining the Kingdom. If one is to attempt to define the Kingdom, one needs to turn to Scripture.

The best biblical description of the Kingdom is given by Paul in his letter to the Romans: “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).” Some authors regard this text as the only definition of the Kingdom ever attempted in the entire New Testament. The constant danger has been to interpret these words exclusively in a spiritual sense and overlook that its basic concepts like “righteousness, peace and joy” are equally meant for the life of the Christian in the here and now.¹⁰ Therefore, it will take more than Paul’s definition to capture what the Kingdom is.

In the Old Testament, the Kingdom of God has already been foreshadowed, especially in the teachings of the prophets, who spoke out against the injustice of the human kingdom, the royal consciousness. The Kingdom is a reversal of everything the royal consciousness stands for, as seen in Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6 and 61:1-2. The description of how the “unable” (the marginalized) in society become “able” once more denotes the possibility of a change in the current state of affairs in the world. The poor, the imprisoned, the women and children, all these second class citizens will once again be reintegrated into a Kingdom that is not of human wills, but of divine will. This ideal is seen most clearly in the words of Jesus himself (Luke 6:20-21) as well as in Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

Look at Luke 17:21. It speaks of the Kingdom of God “within” us. That is true. The Kingdom lies within our hands, and the enactment of the Kingdom will rely on individual human will to call it into existence. It is human work. But a closer examination of the original Greek of Luke 17:21 reveals that the translation that is more appropriate is that the Kingdom of God is “among” us. Which denotes that the Kingdom is not only on the personal level, but on a social level. The human wills joined together in unison will call in solidarity the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the human task of the Kingdom goes beyond merely doing good works on an individual personal level, but a task that extends to a call for social action and reform.

“The spiritual genius and daring of Jesus are that he finds God in the most universal place of all. He absolutely levels the playing field. He finds God where the suffering is. Which is everywhere, on both sides of every war, inside every group and religion, and God is nothing that any group can take to itself as an ego possession, even if they be a Syro-Phoenician woman, a Roman centurion, a Samaritan leper, a woman caught in adultery, drunkards and tax collectors. There is no spiritual loyalty test going on in the ministry of Jesus - just naked humanity responding to naked humanity. This is a religion that can unite and save the world.”¹¹

The Kingdom of God was proclaimed through word (parables and teachings) and deed (miracles and meal-sharing). Let us take a look at each in a more nuanced manner in the next few sections.

⁹ Catherine McCann, *New Paths Toward the Sacred: Awakening the Awe Experience in Everyday Living* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 205.

¹⁰ John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 155.

¹¹ Richard Rohr, *Soul Brothers: Men in the Bible Speak to Men Today*.

Section 3: The Kingdom of God in Parables

Section 3A - Characteristics of the Parables.

Particularly, a creative source for the depth of Jesus' words and teachings can be found in his parables. Before diving into the actual parables of Jesus, it would be prudent to explain what a parable is using its primary characteristics. What makes a parable a parable?

First, a parable is EARTHY. Parables draw from Jesus' Jewish culture and Palestinian environment, and the images he uses evokes many of the images from such tradition and time. However, what makes the contextual examples earthy is its usage of the familiar and the mundane: crops, a coin, a callous judge, employers and employees, farmers, cooks, travelers between two actual cities, family conflict.¹² Parables are very practical, in the same way we use the word *practical* in practical theology. Drawn from the lived experience of the community that hears the parable, the message of the Kingdom becomes easier to accept and digest.

Second, a parable is SURPRISING. The element of shock present in parable occurs in the strange course of action taken by its central characters. [e.g. 1) a shepherd obsessively looks for one sheep, that he abandons the rest of his flock, or 2) sensible employers don't pay a day's wage for an hour's work, and yet the story's employer happily obliges.] From their settings in the ordinary, the parables have a wild way of leaping into the extraordinary.¹³



Third, a parable is DISORIENTING. The goal of the parable is to make the reader uncomfortable, so much so that he or she is led toward some kind of action. It is an invitation to go out of our comfort zones, in the same way that the narrative of the parable often brings about a reversal of our usual ways of thinking.

Fourth, a parable is TITLELESS. As with chapter and verse numbering, the titles of Jesus' parables are inventions from a different generation. Thus, it would be more of an exegetical hindrance to rely on the assigned titles of parables when doing interpretation.

Finally, a parable often ventures into HYPERBOLE. Often, parables come off as over-the-top and outlandish. Characters of parables often take actions of enormous and surreal proportions. What is the purpose of this grandeur? Jesus drew "large and startling figures," in part because of our near-sightedness veering into blindness. The message of the Kingdom is usually right before the audience's eyes. But in the face of a people's hardness of hearing (and hardness of heart), the parable's extravagance comes out as a shout.¹⁴

¹² Paul Simpson Duke, *The Parables: A Preaching Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 8.

¹³ Paul Simpson Duke, *The Parables: A Preaching Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 9.

¹⁴ Paul Simpson Duke, *The Parables: A Preaching Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 14.

Section 3A - Structure of the Parables¹⁵

Particularly common among all the parables is the use of a threefold structure of advent-reversal-decision.

- A. Advent - There is always a proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom, either directly or indirectly. This advent can come in two ways:
 - A. The Kingdom of God draws near by God's gracious initiative, and this is cause for joy; or
 - B. The Kingdom of God is breaking into the world in hidden and humble ways, but it will assuredly triumph.
- B. Reversal - There is a proclamation of how the Kingdom does away with traditional human experience, counteracting usual ways of thinking regarding what Kingdom is. This reversal can come in two ways.
 - A. God draws near in mercy and generosity; or
 - B. God's drawing near effects a "polar reversal" in human relationships
- C. Decision - The decision of the parable does not usually appear visibly within the parable itself. This decision usually lies within the human person who hears the parable, and understands and interprets it in his or her own way. The inbreaking of the Kingdom creates within the hearer a situation of crisis, judgment and decision. It calls for an urgent human response.

Section 4: The Kingdom of God in Teachings

Section 4A - The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus, throughout his life, has had many discourses regarding the Kingdom. His teachings can be found in the Gospels, but particularly, a wonderful source would be the Matthean Sermon on the Mount (a parallel can be found in the Lukan Sermon on the Plain). Each version has its own personal twist to Jesus' teachings, but the message is still the same: the Kingdom of God.

"Beatitude, the fulfillment of the Promise, the 'already and the not yet,' is the heart of the Gospel message. Jesus proclaimed the inbreaking of the Reign of God: 'Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21), and he lived as if that were true, demonstrating for his disciples and all who could 'see,' the new pathway to inclusive community, right relationships and the New Creation, the Reign of God.

Though the stage on which we move through the journey of life may seem stable, though we may have already proclaimed I have decided to follow Jesus, the stage settings often change, sometimes dramatically, in response to the multiple opportunities and invitations of a lifetime.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount lays out a moral framework for vocational decisions in response to these invitations. By his powerful preaching and by his own life, he emphasized over and over again the privileged place of impoverished and excluded peoples; the great need for compassion and social comforting; the centrality to the discipleship journey of the work for social justice or righteousness; and the call to peacemaking and reconciliation."¹⁶

¹⁵ Adapted from John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Oregon: Polebridge Press, 1973).

¹⁶ Marie Dennis, *Diversity of Vocations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 89-90.

Section 4B - Salt of the Earth, Light of the World

Particularly, a portion that summarizes beautifully what Jesus' teachings ask of us is Matthew 5, where he discusses that we should be salt of the earth and light of the world.

Most foods do not taste or smell appetizing without seasoning. Thus, there is a need for spices, which can be in the form of minerals, such as salt, or florals, which can be cultivated or gathered in the wild, or imported (in the case of some plant spices like myrrh, galvanum and cinnamon). Salt, an important spice (Job 6:6), is a deposit found where saltwater evaporates. It originates in limited locations, so most communities had to purchase it. Its importance is demonstrated not just by the fact that it is used in food, but also as part of ritual offerings and sacrifice (Lev 2:13).¹⁷

In the ancient Near Eastern culture, salt is a purifier, and the application of salt consecrates and makes holy (makes *kadosh* and sets apart) whichever it is applied to. However, to make the salt effective, especially in use with incense, it must be crushed up, before being applied to the altar (Exodus 30:34-36). To be salt of the earth requires that we be "crushed" for the Lord, that whatever suffering we will incur because of our fidelity to God, that suffering is made holy for the Lord.

What about the light of the world? This phrase is related to the light that is found in the "holy place" within the Jewish Temple. In the holy place, on the south side of the Tabernacle, stood the lampstand (*menorah*). It was made of approximately thirty-five kilos of pure gold of one piece. The function of the lampstand was to light the space, providing light in the holy place for the service of the bread of presence and the incense altar. Leviticus 24:2-4 describes its further use. Aaron (and his consecrated sons) kept the lamps burning all night, every night.¹⁸

The suffering as salt of the earth can cause many Christians to denounce their mission of enacting the Kingdom of God. It is difficult. However, Jesus reminds us, that like the light in the Temple, we must never let darkness overcome us. The light of the Temple always burns throughout the day and throughout the night. It does not go out. And so, our passion for the Kingdom of God must also not be extinguished, even in the face of crushing suffering and darkness.

Basically, it can be summarized in the following thesis: "You are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world." This is a call to a life of faith offered to God in Jesus Christ. The call to be *alter Christus* is a call to be the fragrant presence of God in the world, and when we endure suffering because of our faith in Christ, then that spot in space and time becomes most holy to the Lord. We must never let our light go out!



¹⁷ Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical , 2003), 72.

¹⁸ James K. Bruckner, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2012), 236.

Your Will Be Done¹⁹

*Lord, you placed me in the world
to be its salt.
I was afraid of committing myself,
afraid of being stained by the world.
I did not want to hear what "they" might say.
And my salt dissolved as if in water.
Forgive me, Jesus.*

*Lord, you placed me in the world
to be its light.
I was afraid of the shadows,
afraid of poverty.
I did not want to know other people.
And my light slowly faded away.
Forgive me, Jesus.*

*Lord, you placed me in the world
to live in community.
Thus you taught me to love,
to share in life,
to struggle for bread and for justice,
your truth incarnate in my life.
So be it, Jesus.*

Section 5: The Kingdom of God in Miracles

Section 5A - The Historical Status of the Miracles²⁰

Very often, the challenge to the veracity of the miracles of Jesus comes in the form of historical objections, scientific objections and theological objections.

HISTORICAL OBJECTIONS

As theologian Rudolf Bultmann claims, it is historically founded that Jesus undoubtedly healed the sick and cast out demons. However, he also states that it is difficult for people of our time to believe in miracles. According to him, miracles are offensive and inconceivable to 'modern' persons.²¹ This is because modern people are prejudiced against people who have historically come before them. There is a subconscious assumption amongst the moderns and postmoderns that early believers were prone to make up miracles and attribute them to religious heroes because they were all uniformly gullible and credulous (which pretty much disregards all the great scientific advancements and human progress of that time as the work of the gullible and credulous). Moreover, this claim about 'modern' persons ignores, of course, the millions among us who do not find miracles offensive and inconceivable. Inasmuch as the historicity of miracles are always questionable, there exists ways to try and verify miracles via historical methods. Most notable of these is the criterion of *multiple independent witnesses*, highlighting that if multiple sources claim a certain historical event to have happened, its veracity increases (though the certitude is not absolute). In the case of Jesus' miracles, at least six ancient sources point independently to the miraculous activity of Jesus, inclusive of the Gospels, the oral gospel source *Q*, and the historian Josephus.

¹⁹ Peggy M. de Cuchlo, from *Bread of Tomorrow*, edited by Janet Morley.

²⁰ Adapted from Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *Jesus: A Portrait* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 75-80.

²¹ Robert Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Collins Fontana, 1958), 173.

SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIONS

Often, people claim that miracles were not real because it goes against generally accepted scientific principles. However in the present day, science, in general, has become rather more open to the possibility of miracles. While science seeks at every level to describe and explain the phenomena of our world, it has relinquished something of that former rigidity which dismissed the miraculous as impossible. However, the definition of miracle in the scientific sense, is closer to the word “marvel.” For instance, take note the baffling of the research scientists at the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN, near Geneva) regarding the God particle, the Higgs boson (whose existence will confirm the Higgs field, which could consequently explain why matter has mass). Its eventual confirmation on March 14, 2013, became a scientific miracle. We are not claiming here that Jesus’ miracles are cases of scientific marvels, but that a certain capacity to stand open to the world’s unexpectedness must be put forward with regards to miracles.

THEOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS

Theologically, some exclude miracles in principle because, in theology, there is a dominant belief that God operates and is revealed only through normal, everyday events, often in the form of human action and agency. God works through the regular order of nature. God works through human hands as well. Thus, many rule out the validity, in principle, any *special* divine acts, including miraculous events. In particular, one important point of contention here is the *scandal of particularity*, a theological term referring to the resistance of people to the idea that the divine would enter human history in a very localized way.

When we speak of Jesus’ miracles, often the points of objection lie in the veracity and legitimacy of the EVENT of the miracles. However, a more important question should come before these: the question of the veracity and legitimacy of the MEANING of the miracles. That, of course, is the more important question that should be asked, especially amongst believers.

Section 5B - Miracles of the Kingdom

“According to Israelite understanding, the sources for sickness were two: (1) ideological, namely, YHWH’s response to misbehavior such as breaking the covenant; and (2) physical, namely, close association with a sick person that led to contagion and contamination. The first factor was dealt with by prayer, observing the covenant, and by sacrifice; the second was dealt with by quarantine and ritual purification.”²²

Jesus’ healings are miracles of the Kingdom. This is because illnesses are heralds of death, and are closely associated with the sin of the world, sin being equated with death. It is a physical actualization of the malice and suffering that drowns the world. It is sign that Creation is corruptible and tormentable. To bring about the Kingdom, which is God’s dream of new Creation, illness and the suffering brought with it must be extinguished. Therefore, healing is sign of the Kingdom, because it shows the initial possibilities that the forces of the death can be battled as long as one trusts and enacts the Kingdom into the world.

Positively, Jesus seems to have understood his miracles as deeds of power that expressed and proclaimed the way in which anti-God forces (sin, sickness, bodily death, spiritual death) were being overcome. The divine power was finally and effectively saving human beings in their whole physical and spiritual reality. Over and over again, Jesus associated his miraculous deeds with his call to a faith that would believe in his authority to forgive human sin and save people from the forces that afflicted them. No less than his preaching, his miracles manifested the reign of God and the divine promise to deliver sick and sinful human beings from the grip of evil.²³

²² Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical , 2003), 77.

²³ Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *Jesus: A Portrait* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 80.

However, Jesus did not have the divine power of healing at his own disposal. In certain events and moments, there was healing. Other times, for example in his own hometown of Nazareth, 'he could not do a single mighty work,' we are told in Mark 6:5. What is the difference between these two possible scenarios? What are the conditions for the miraculous healing powers of Jesus?

There is a strong connection between healing and faith. Examples can be seen in Mark 5:25ff and 9:23-24. It is when the people themselves show faith that change happens to them physically. In the face of the definitive revelation who is Jesus Christ, the necessary response of faith is the only way for change to be enacted. Remember, faith comes as a gift from God, but at the same time, it must be accepted as well. Faith is 100% a divine act, but also 100% a human act. As much as Jesus is willing to bring about healing, only by accepting it does one really become healed.²⁴

Section 6: The Kingdom of God in Table Fellowship

Section 6A - Table Fellowship of the Kingdom

To share a meal with someone is to welcome them into your life, and to establish that they are part of the life that you are living. In the same way, every time Jesus shares a meal with people, it is sign and symbol of the fact that he is embracing people into his new life and new world, the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' actions, therefore, become a direct critique of the way dining practices have become quite exclusionary in the Palestine of his time. Dining practices are a means of self-definition, often-signifying membership in or exclusion from a community. This is reflected, for example, in the spacious triclinia (formal dining table with couches along three sides) of the Jewish royal palaces, which were used for receptions and formal dinners and banquets. The presence of the triclinia suggests that the Jewish ruling class structured itself according to Roman social norms, since seating arrangements at a Roman banquet were governed by rules that reflected each diner's rank and status in society.²⁵ On the other side of the social spectrum, the poorest members of Jewish society - the destitute - begged and scavenged for food, or were provided for, either through a communal fund or soup kitchen:

They give to a poor man traveling from place to place no less than a loaf of bread worth a *dupondion*, [made from wheat which costs at least] one *sela* for four *seahs*. [If such a poor person] stayed overnight, they give him enough [to pay] for a night's lodging. [If such a poor person] spent the Sabbath, they give him food for three meals. Whoever has sufficient food for two meals may not take [food] from a soup kitchen.²⁶

Although attempts at food distribution were in place within Jewish law, the very stark difference in food consumption and practice between the rich and the poor was evidence of a great divide and injustice that was present at the time. That is why Jesus' simple act of table fellowship with the poor and the marginalized members of the community was seen as a radical statement in and of itself. Jesus' commensality, the practice of eating together, with the oppressed became sign and symbol for the message he was proclaiming. "Commensality was, rather, a strategy for building or rebuilding peasant community on radically different principles from those of honor and shame, patronage and clientage. It was based on an egalitarian haring of spiritual and material power at the most grassroots level."²⁷

²⁴ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1994), 12-15.

²⁵ Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 77-78.

²⁶ See mishnah Pe'ah 8:7. The *Pe'ah* is the second tractate of *Seder Zarin* ("Order of Seeds") of the *Mishnah* (written redaction of the Oral Torah) and the *Talmud* (the central text of Rabbinic Judaism). The tractate deals with laws of giving charity in general.

²⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), 344.

The following account from the Lukan gospel captures the nature of Jesus' table fellowship:

When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:12-14)

Who were those invited to be part of the Kingdom? Who were welcome in Jesus' meal-sharing escapades? In the gospels, it is pointed out that Jesus 'receives sinners and eats with them' (Luke 15:2). These sinners range from those who are sick (remember, sickness is associated with sin; these people include the blind, lame, deaf, as well as those stricken with leprosy), the women (and prostitutes were particularly targeted, but women in general were second-class citizens), the children and the poor. Every one of these so called sinners are the marginalized in society, because of the Jewish Law. However, Jesus' inbreaking of the Kingdom calls for a renewed love, one that points to love of God and love of neighbor. And love of neighbor means social action towards those in need, the sinners of that time.

Jesus' table fellowship is a "parable in action" of the approaching Kingdom of God. Jesus enacts what has been heard of in the parables. It is by sharing a life of solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized, an intimate union found in meal-sharing that we see the Kingdom coming into fruition in this world.

Section 6B - The Eucharist

The table fellowship of Christ extends in a cosmic and transcendent way to us today in the form of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Every celebration of the sacrament becomes a pact to continue the mission of the Church, and such a pact is shared with everyone in attendance, and with Christ who is understood as truly present in the Sacrament, not only in the priest (priest as *alter Christus*) and in the species of the (transubstantiation), but especially in the community called Church (the continuing Incarnation of Christ).

1. The Eucharist is Memorial

- a. Remembering what God did in the past, what He continues to do now, and will continue to do in the future, the Eucharist is a commemoration of God's *hesed*, or steadfast and faithful love for His people.
- b. ANAMNESIS - Eucharist as memorial is clearly seen in the formula taken from the Pauline tradition: "Do this in order to make remembrance of me, *eis anamnesin*" (1 Cor 11:24) The concept of *anamnesis* is particularly important here. When we talk of anamnesis, it is a grateful remembering, but at the same time a remembering that makes present a certain reality. It is "rendering present again" the reality of Christ, and thus we affirm that within the celebration of the Mass, Christ is truly present in the Eucharistic species of bread and wine.
- c. ZIKKARON - The Pauline formula roots itself from earlier Jewish tradition. There is an essential parallelism between that and this formula from Exodus: "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you (*zikkaron*). You shall celebrate it (Exodus 12:14). The concept of *zikkaron* is that of remembering that includes memory, action and expectation. When we offer up to God, God remembers his salvific works for humanity, and thus actualizes once more the liberation he has enacted into the world. With every memorial through the Eucharist, the Kingdom of God is drawn into the world.

2. The Eucharist is Paschal Meal

- a. The Eucharist adapted much of itself from the Passover of the Jewish Tradition. Passover is a meal that is done every year commemorating the passing over of the angel of death from the houses of the Israelites during the events of Exodus in Egypt, where a lamb was sacrificed, and its blood painted over the doors of the Jewish houses.
- b. The Passover ritual is repeated every year by the Jewish people, where they slaughter a lamb as sacrifice. Half of the flesh of the lamb is burnt as a fragrant offering to God. The other half of the flesh is given to the people to be eaten. Half of the blood of the lamb is showered unto the altar, a consecrated place which symbolizes God. The other half of the blood of the lamb is showered unto the people.
- c. The Paschal meal is both a communion with God and a communion with fellow men. As one Church, we gather together in Eucharistic celebration as means of attaining communion with others and with the God who created us all. The Bread (flesh of the lamb) and the Wine (blood of the lamb) are offered to God at the same time partaken of by the people.

- d. The meal which in literal reality is the coming together of men and women to share bread and wine, in symbolic reality is the coming together of the body of Christ to symbolize (to proclaim, to realize, to celebrate) its essential unity in Christ.

3. The Eucharist is Sacrifice

- a. "The Israelite Passover was a ritual memorial and the memorial was inextricably bound to sacrifice. The Passover nature of the Eucharist, and especially the unmistakable presence of the biblical concept of 'memory,' provides a symbolic grounding for the theological interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ explicit in the narratives."²⁸
- b. The Eucharist is a commemoration and representation of the sacrifice of Christ. *Commemoratio* does not mean re-calling, but recalling. *Representatio* does not mean re-presenting, but representing. The Sacrifice of the Mass is not a sacrifice distinct from Christ's sacrifice on Calvary but its commemoration. The Church, in its memorial meal, makes present again in symbol and in sacrament both the Lord who was sacrificed and also His sacrifice, so that the Church may commune in both.
- c. "The self-offering of Christ in obedience to the Father continues to be celebrated on the altars of the world. On these altars, the self-offering of the Christian community (Rom 12:1) is the communion of the redemptive action of Christ and, as such, symbolizes the universal offering of the crosses of humanity called from slavery to liberation until Christ's return."²⁹



²⁸ German Martinez, *Signs of Freedom* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 159-60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.