

Born Again (Part 3)

The Kingdom is at Hand
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On July 2, 2009 I received an email message from a man that I have never heard of before. As far as I know, he had never written into the Church of the Great God before. It is possible that maybe he did, and his questions were sent off to one of the other men who are answering questions. He opened his letter with the following: "I have a question. What do you mean, 'Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God'? Aren't those who are Christians in the Kingdom of God now? How are people prepared for the Kingdom of God?"

This man appeared to me to be fairly new to Bible study, but he already knew that Christians are already in the Kingdom of God. Why? Because the Bible clearly says so a *multitude* of times. What he lacks knowledge of, though, is sanctification.

This man understands a biblical truth that some are struggling with. This man's question highlights one of the weaknesses of Mr. Armstrong's analogy that most of us, including myself, sincerely believed, but in believing, we were led in a wrong direction.

Brethren, let me make this clear as I begin. *Anyone who has the Spirit of God is already born into the Kingdom of God.* He is already converted to some degree. He is already born again, already part of God's family, already a son of God, and therefore already in the Kingdom of God. It has already occurred. At the resurrection what occurs is glorification through transformation from flesh to spirit. I intend this day to give you ample proof from the Bible of these facts that I just related to you, and in order to do so I am going to begin by giving more background material on the setting in which Jesus made His Temple announcement in John the second chapter.

As we begin, I want to turn to one scripture in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 12:28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

That is pretty clear, is it not? Did Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of God? Of course He did. Then the Kingdom of God is already manifested, and the converted have been born into it, as we will see.

The announcement that Jesus made in John 2 is what sets the stage for Jesus' interview with Nicodemus in John 3. I am going to then show you numerous ways in which Jesus and Paul gave evidence, made witness of, that we are already in the Kingdom of God.

John 2:13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

I wanted to read that verse so you can get a time element here.

John 2:16-22 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and

said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Before we go any more deeply into this episode, I want us to briefly consider a bit of the purpose for the book of John. John was written later—much later than the other gospels. It may have been written about 90 AD, which was about 25 years after the others were completed. Among other things, it fills in gaps of other information by including events of teachings on occasions missing entirely in the other gospels. In some places it may exercise, or may put in order or give better shape to the things the others have mentioned but really did not highlight. For example, John is the only one that mentions the wedding in Cana during which Jesus performed what John calls “the first sign” of His ministry.

John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

Each of these signs is a revelation of some aspect of Jesus’ identity and His mission on earth. The wedding is not an insignificant event. Let us consider this, first from the standpoint of who He is, that His participation in this wedding celebration confirms His strong support for marriage, that He did not come to rob people of God-intended good. Do not forget that He too is destined to be married.

A second reason is it shows His graceful generosity, even during an embarrassment to the groom. A third is that He bestows His gifts even lavishly, as the quantity of water changed to wine shows. This reveals the graceful nature of God’s attitude toward us. It shows His power over creation and that He will use it in love. He is not a narrow-minded cruel guard. Fourth is that it sets the record straight regarding His relationship with His mother. This is important, with the Catholic Church’s view here. She is respectfully and kindly admonished, but an irreversible step has taken place in their relationship, and that she must accept this fact which will include His crucifixion and resurrection.

I want you to notice again verse 22. The “water into wine” episode leads directly to the Temple cleansing and Jesus’ pronouncement that a very significant change will take place.

John 2:22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

They did not get it right at that point, but when the time came, the revelation came, and *bong!* The light went off that Jesus had said something very significant on this occasion. He was announcing a change in the worship of God that would occur after His death. As one commentator stated, “What Jesus did was an act of radical reform, but the viewers did not understand.”

John 2:16 And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”

In modern English, Jesus’ statement more closely resembled, “How dare you turn My Father’s house into a market.” A very challenging statement; accusative. Then in verse 17 it says there, “Then His disciples remembered.”

There is a second scripture that I also want to take you to.

Malachi 3:1 “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple. . .

That is exactly what happened. He burst on the scene and turned things over, upside down, backward, sent them flying all over the place, and then made that very significant pronouncement.

Malachi 3:1 . . . even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.

Now the one scripture that says the disciples remembered right off is in Psalm 69.

Psalm 69:9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

What He is doing there is surrounded by at least two fulfilled prophecies, setting the stage for what He is going to announce.

Now He had just given them a sign by fulfilling Psalm 69:9, and the people watching never made a connection to it, and so He responded to their request—“Who is giving You the authority to do this?”—by giving them a prophecy that would *be* a sign, and the sign would be His death and His resurrection from death. These of course would demonstrate His deity. Hang onto that thought. We are not done yet.

John 2:19-21 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

We see here the beginning of a pattern, because they responded with a typically carnal reference to *Herod's* temple-rebuilding project. This establishes an oft-repeated pattern, namely that Jesus would say something with spiritual intent, and the people would respond with an answer having *physical* intent.

Now just a few verses later we have the interview with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was off the target just as surely as the people at the Temple were off the target. Nicodemus responded with that, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

John 4:7-15 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” [There is the statement with spiritual intent.] The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the

water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

She was still responding physically.

John 4:27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

John 4:31-34 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” [There is the spiritual statement.] Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

So the disciples were not entirely tuned into His manner of speaking yet either.

Let us go from here to Matthew 13. We want to see the real spiritual reason why these people responded as they did.

Matthew 13:9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Did those people hear what Jesus said? They heard the words, but they did not really get what He was saying.

Matthew 13:10-17 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

The statement in verse 9 is at least partly what triggered the question that the disciples asked, and then the response Jesus gave. The term “mysteries” that He used when He said, “Because it has been given to you to know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven”—indicates that there is more than what appears on the surface of Jesus’ words.

I want you to carry away one thing from there, and that is, when you read it carefully you will find that the root of the problem was shared by two. It was God on the one side, who did what *He* did, and

there were the people on the other side and what they had done. They had closed their eyes. God was not lying. It was something they purposefully did. “They have stopped their ears lest . . .” They really did not *want* to hear, so He said.

Even though the people like the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees may have been religiously oriented, they really did not see or hear spiritually. This is *very* important to understand, because *no one* except those truly called of God tried to understand spiritually on the basis of physical revelation. Now why did the church leaders especially not get it? It was because they were too wrapped up in their own outlook, and they were blinded by their knowledge, which was set.

Before we get back to John 2 again, we are going to go to John 12:16 just to touch on the disciples once again. This is just before the final Passover. A couple of years had gone by.

John 12:16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

That of course is in regard to the crucifixion. Even that late in Jesus’ ministry, the disciples were still struggling with things Jesus said, trying to perceive. I hope this, in a way, gives you hope, because here we are, and we have been following Christ for a lot longer than three and one-half years, and yet we struggle with what Jesus said, trying to understand what He said. It is not a shame that we do not get it right away, but it is a shame if we just throw it out as being of no value whatsoever, because we stick with God, and He is going to teach, and He will reveal.

We find in John 2:22 that the disciples did not truly get what Jesus said here, but after Jesus’ death and resurrection, and because they were already putting their faith in Him, their minds were open, so they eventually did get it.

Now what significant spiritual change was Jesus announcing? The cleansing of the Temple at this point in John is very important as part of the foundation of Jesus’ entire ministry. First, it is a signal to what He said about the Temple. It is a signal that Judaism, despite having God’s Word, is corrupt to the core, and that a significant housecleaning change is being introduced by Jesus’ ministry. The change was announced when He cleaned the place out, so His actions were announcing that. You will notice the timing of the event. It occurs just before Passover. It focuses on the death of the Savior. Following this He rose from the dead, and seriously then began building the church through the apostles following the giving of His Spirit [Acts 2].

The word “Temple” is also translated correctly as “sanctuary,” depending upon the context. Sanctuary especially indicates the actual place of worship.

Let us begin to put this together. Jesus is announcing that *He* is the sanctuary, not a building. *He* is the sanctuary. He is looking beyond the age of the Temple worship to the time when worship will be offered by means of the Holy Spirit on the basis of His sacrificial death.

John 4:19-24 The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

That is somewhat of an expansion of what He is saying at the end of John 2. We will get back to that again and touch on that a little bit later.

Now when the Jews who were witnessing this asked for a sign, they asked for a miraculous evidence of His authority to do as He did. He responded with a deliberate and emphatic, but visible, proof of His resurrection from the dead, and at that time was yet three and one-half years in the future.

Now even as people do to this very day, the Israelites always associated worship of God with a building. People go to church—a building—to worship God. People are still doing that today. The Israelites first worshipped at the Tabernacle, and then later on at the Temple. Both of these God commanded them to build, and in which He was believed by them to reside. The worship of God was associated, brethren, with something physical. Again, something physical. This was His house.

Jesus was announcing that this was about to end and something far better than that was going to replace it. Now worship must not only be associated with, but absolutely be focused and centered upon a living Being with whom each worshipper has, by and through faith, a personal spiritual relationship. Jesus is claiming right here at the end of John 2 nothing less than the reconstituting of the entire worship of the people of God. It is a spiritual worship focused on His own person and teaching, because He is, after all, God our Creator, and He is also our spiritual Redeemer in order that we might live life on the same level that He does.

So what was going to happen, brethren? The physical Temple was going to pass into oblivion, not only because it was going to be destroyed by Titus’ army, but also because it was spiritually obsolete even as the Old Covenant was obsolete, or passing away, as Hebrews 8:13 faithfully says. He was announcing here a New Covenant. He was announcing here a new way of worshipping, and the worship was to be focused on *Him* as the means to God the Father.

Let me define “worship” just very briefly. Worship is the means and the manner of one’s response to God. It is more than just bowing down. It is the way we work. It is the way we talk. It is our attitude. It encompasses all of life. It is the means and manner of one’s response to God. None of this does away with the responsibility to keep God’s laws, but it does shift emphasis to keeping them by faith to the extent of the spirit of the law as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. This makes the law more broadly and deeply applicable. It magnifies the law and makes it honorable to everyday life as never before.

Jesus was forecasting a direct person-to-person interfacing between man and his Creator God in contrast to the Old Covenant’s physical Temple into which the Israelites were not even allowed to enter. What a change! Now Jesus is telling us God can be accessed anywhere in the world, at any time, under any circumstance. All we have to do is be a son of God and cry out to Him.

We do this of course through the Mediator, Jesus Christ. That is why He said it would be focused on Him. This was radical. No wonder they did not get it. A distant relationship is being replaced by an intimate one. It will operate entirely on the basis of faith to the intent that the worshippers can then be

created into the image of God and operate their lives by love, even as God does. And because of the intimacy of the relationship, this places the requirement of being holy as God is holy to the front and center of a person's life.

There is something very important to understand in verse 23 of John 4. I will read it again.

John 4:23 But the hour is coming, and now is [*right now*, even as Jesus was saying it], when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

The hour—the time appointed by God the Father—has already arrived, Jesus was saying, as He was talking to this unconverted woman. It had already arrived when the true or the genuine worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Do you see that? It has already arrived. The hour to begin worshipping in spirit and truth had begun, even as Jesus was speaking.

Let me ask a dumb question. How can a fetus in the womb have a personal relationship with the father? Even in physical life that is impossible. Only those, brethren, who have been born again can have this relationship. They are already born and a relationship can then begin. As soon as a baby is born and those eyes work, it is seeking out mama especially, but more generally seeking out an adult human being to begin a relationship with. It does not happen until after the baby is born.

It is an awesome thing what Jesus has done. He has taken another step toward showing the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven to those who understand what He is saying. He is saying that what He is teaching regarding the Kingdom of God is both a present and a future reality. We will see a lot more of this as we go along.

In regard to the future meaning, when other information is added to what He is saying here, it means that when He returns to earth to fully establish God's Kingdom on earth, everybody will worship God in this manner; but for right now, in this present age, only a very few, and He singles out who they are: the *true* worshippers, the *converted* worshippers, the *called of God*. In other words, the church. The brethren will worship as Jesus is teaching here in John 4:23. Again, I repeat that He is saying that the Kingdom of God is both at one and the same time a present and a future reality.

Let us keep adding to this.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

"The kingdom of God is at hand." I decided to look in a number of Bibles to see how this "at hand" part is translated. What did He mean by that? Other Bibles translated it "has arrived."

You fellows out there who work with tools, do you not like your tools to be at hand? Does "at hand" mean your tools are around the corner and down the block? Does it mean that they are in the house when you are out in the garage? No. It means they are right there so that when you want them you just reach out and get them so you can continue your work. That is what Jesus is talking about here. The Kingdom of God has arrived. Other Bibles translate it "near." Other Bibles translate it "upon you." You cannot get any closer than that. It is right on you.

None of these translations indicate this arrival is two thousand years away from the time that Jesus said this. So often we go along reading that, and we see He says “at hand,” and we just read into it, “Well, He just means when He returns.” No, brethren. He meant right then. It is there. Jesus’ proclamation here is full of urgency. “Repent!” “Do it now!” “Take advantage of it.”

The most obvious part is that it made its appearance with the arrival of Himself. Jesus of course is in the Kingdom of God. Nobody is going to deny that, are they? He was. He was a human being, but He was in the Kingdom of God. Right? Right. What Jesus was announcing, and why there is the urgency in His announcement, is that He wants the Kingdom of God to expand and for God to have the opportunity to call more into that kingdom. So He is inviting men to be a part of it and to begin to participate within it right now, not two thousand years after He said it.

Let us go to another place. You will recognize this one right away.

Matthew 6:9-10 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Is Jesus saying there, “Well, God, I want these things, but let us wait for two thousand years. I want to wait for two thousand years before Your rule is done.” That does not make any sense at all. He wants God’s will to be done right away, and He wants God’s Kingdom to be established **in people’s hearts and minds** right away—immediately, and so when you pray that part of your prayer, you are asking God to add people to His church right now. “Don’t wait. Expand Your kingdom into the hearts and minds of others as You have given it to Me.” It is an appeal; not one that you want fulfilled two thousand years later. You want it fulfilled right now so that others can share in what Jesus has announced.

Luke 17:20-21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Now put yourself in the Jews’ place for just a moment and I think it will help you better understand what Jesus said. The Jews were looking forward to the arrival of the Messiah, and with Him, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, with them in top positions of rulership. And Jesus, though He indeed was the Messiah, was not fulfilling *their* expectation. They expected the cry was warfare, the roar of battle, with them triumphant all the way to the magnificent and joyous establishment of the Messiah as King over all of the earth. “No,” Jesus said, “you have got it all wrong. It is not coming with all of that clamor. It is already here.”

The Greek word translated “within” is also capable of being translated as “among” or “in your midst.” All of those translations are correct, just depending on how you look at what Jesus said. Now Jesus, as King of the Kingdom, was in their midst. He was right there as the Kingdom’s representative, but the word “within” is also a correct translation because that is exactly where the Kingdom is being established in those called of God. It is being established *internally* in a person’s mind, by faith within men.

Were the Pharisees called of God? No. Absolutely not. What about that then? Was the Kingdom really within them? No. The answer is contained within the word “you.” It is in *you*. “You” in both Greek and English is capable of being understood personally—(meaning “you” when it points to a

person)—or generally. Jesus intended it generally. You are very familiar with the general use of the word “you” in English.

Almost every time you hear advertisements on radio or television, the word “you” will appear in it. “Why don’t you go now to the drugstore and get this prescription filled?” They do not mean you *specifically*. They mean you *generally*. Understand? What Jesus said then does not mean that the Kingdom of God was established in these corrupt Pharisees at all, but rather the Kingdom of God generally will be established within men.

This gets better and better as we go along. I hope I am building this up in a way that leads you to an answer that is inescapably true.

Matthew 13:36-43 Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. [The sons of the kingdom are the opposite of the sons of the wicked one. That must be church members who are sons of the kingdom.]. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

In all likelihood you are very familiar with the content of this chapter because it is filled with parables. Almost every parable here begins with the same statement.

Matthew 13:24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . a man who sowed good seed in his field;

Matthew 13:31 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,

Matthew 13:33 Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

Matthew 13:44 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:45-46 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind.

Matthew 13:52 Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

In every parable Jesus goes on to explain something that directly involves instruction for the church and its membership. Do you understand what He is doing? He is using the term “Kingdom of God” in place of “church,” and when you put this together with Jesus’ proclamation in Mark 1:14-15, Jesus proceeded to use the words “Kingdom of God” and “church” as virtually one and the same thing. They are interchangeable in some contexts; not every context, but in context like this where He is giving instruction to His brothers and sisters. We are *in* the Kingdom of God.

Let us go back again to verses 38 through 41.

Matthew 13:38-42 The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

How can the angels gather tares, not just from any old place, but out of Jesus’ Kingdom on earth if the Kingdom does not yet exist on earth? Since the field is the world, the field is the earth, the Kingdom of God is on the earth, and that is where the church members are. They are on the earth, and that is also where the tares are. All of those four factors are on the earth presently, like now, and church members are part of the Kingdom of God.

God’s sons are not only children *in* the Kingdom, but tares are fellowshiping with them in the church—in the Kingdom of God. You cannot escape that. The church and the Kingdom of God are one and the same thing. The church is God’s Kingdom, but it is not yet manifested in its fullness.

You probably remember Mr. Armstrong saying that when God gets involved with anything involving men, it starts at its very smallest, and then it gradually grows. The Kingdom of God is in a very small undeveloped, as it were, condition right now. It is a present reality, but it has an awesome and glorious future ahead of it.

Mark 12:28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?”

Of course you know that Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Leviticus 19:18 You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Mark 12:32 So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.

Now listen to this next thing the scribe said, which is really perceptive.

Mark 12:33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Notice what Jesus said in return.

Mark 12:34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

Do you understand what Jesus said back to that man? He said, “You are not far from being converted and being part of the church.” That scribe was really perceptive. He caught the issue—not completely, but he was on the right track, and Jesus appreciated that, and that is why He said, “You are so close.”

Matthew 25:1-4 “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

I need not go any further than to ask you a question. What organization are the virgins a part of? Everybody knows that Jesus is talking about the church. The virgins are in the church, but what did He say when He spoke it? He called it the kingdom of heaven. Do you see what I mean about “church” and “kingdom of heaven”? In many, many cases [they are] one and the same thing. Who says you cannot be born into the kingdom of heaven? Who says that we are not already in it? How are we going to refute what Jesus Himself is teaching of it?

I am going to go off in a little bit different direction to something about which we do not speak of all that often, but it is intended as instruction for you and me, and actually a confidence-building instruction with the understanding of what is at stake here.

Romans 8:12-14 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

I identify them in another way. These are the true, the genuine, the real worshippers of God—those who are led by the Spirit of God.

Now verse 15. This is actually a concluding statement.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

When one receives the Spirit of God, the step we know is when hands are laid on one for the receipt of God's Spirit following baptism, and at that time the person is already a son of God. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." Now if they are the sons of God they are already part of the family. They are already in the Kingdom of God. So when one truly believes and repents, one is granted sonship, not begettal; sonship. One moves from a condemned sinner to a privileged sonship. One is not an embryo or a fetus in a womb.

Paul clenches this statement in verses 12 through 14 with two pieces of evidence—the first being the mention of adoption. It is interesting I think that this term "adoption" appears in the epistle to the Romans. The reason is because these people were very familiar with Roman adoption practices.

Most modern adoptions are of infants and toddlers. However, that was unusual for the Romans because most of their adoptions were of adults, usually men, from one family to another. For instance, they would take a young man who was in a poor family, but he showed a great deal of promise to be a good servant of the Roman empire, and so some Roman senator, or whatever, would see that, and he would begin negotiating to adopt that son into his family. I will give you a couple of really notable examples.

Julius Caesar adopted Tiberius. Emperor Claudius adopted Nero into his family. There was no blood tie in either one of those cases. After the legal necessities were met, the adoptive person was fully and completely within and accepted into the new family, having full legal right to any inheritance the father might provide for the family. Thus Tiberius became Augustus Caesar. Claudius died, and Nero became Caesar. There were no blood ties in any of those persons. Those are just significant examples of Roman adoptions.

What Paul is saying then is, as sons of God, we are adopted into the family of God. This is besides birth. Now why the adoptive portion of this transaction? It was a legal maneuver, because God and man were from two different families of beings. One was immortal, ever-living, perfect in righteousness and character beyond our imagination, and power too, and here we are, puny human beings, filled with sin, except for the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us. So God takes us out of this one family and adopts us into His, and then we become part of the God Family legally as well; not just spiritually by faith, but legally as well so that legal requirements are met.

The second evidence that the apostle Paul gave touches on the statement "Abba, Father." It is kind of an emotional thing there because this was an affectionate greeting given to the head of a household revealing the intimacy of the relationship. In other words, the one adopted, Paul was saying, has every right to use it in addressing our Father in heaven.

This covers all the bases, even down to a little thing like that. We, brethren, are already in the family. We were born into it. We were legally adopted into it besides, and that family is the Kingdom of God, and we are already in it. What an honor.

John 8:34-36 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

Jesus makes a veiled reference to "house," and then He drops the subject. But notice briefly what He says in relation to the term "house." "A son abides forever." Not *the* son; *a* son—the word "abide" meaning "remain," or, once in the house he continues in the house that Jesus referred to.

Mark 13:33-37 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

A brief explanation. Jesus is the One gone to a far country (heaven) who will return to His house. His admonishment is to the members of His house, or His household, and that is us. We are part of the same house that Jesus is part of. The church is His house, and it is what He, by His Spirit, dwells in. Again, us.

Let us go to what Paul wrote in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:19-20 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

Now this is very clear.

Let us go from here to the book of Hebrews where it becomes so clear it will knock your eye out.

Hebrews 3:1-6 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

We are His house. He lives in His house. Jesus is in the Kingdom. We are in the same house, and He lives in us. We are in the Kingdom of God.

I Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

“House” can also be used in a sense of a family dynasty, and a dynasty is a succession of rulers of one line of descent, and we are to be kings and priests who will bear rule.

Let us summarize as we end this sermon. I think that we can reach a conclusion that is justified.

Though the terms “Kingdom of God,” “church,” “house,” and “household” all have specific different meanings, God, in His inspiration of the scriptures, uses them interchangeably depending upon how He wants to illustrate a context.

We are going to go now to the book of Colossians. I have a hard time understanding how people will not believe what it says here.

Colossians 1:9-14 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [translated] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

That is a direct statement that we are in the Kingdom already. It is already here as shown by the scriptures that I have given, and many more besides. That Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom in the same manner that the church is a living spiritual organism. The Kingdom of God consists of God's children who make up His house.

Jesus clearly stated that everybody must be born again, not merely begotten, in order to be a part of it, and to enable one to perceive it, to see it, to grasp it, to comprehend it, as it must be spiritually. A fetus in the womb sees, perceives, comprehends nothing.

God deals with us as adult children who have already been born. We do not have to wait for the resurrection at Christ's return to be born into it. This is because, by the time He returns, one has already been born into it years before. "Born" is simply used to indicate a new spiritual beginning. It has nothing to do with anything physical.

"Born again" is the beginning of true, genuine spiritual life, and that spiritual beginning occurs when one receives the Spirit of God. Birth into God's Kingdom occurs following God's call. We exercise the faith to repentance, in the blood of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin, and this, by God's grace, accomplishes justification before Him.

Justification also covers the legality so one can be adopted into God's family, and then must be baptized in order to perfect our death to sin in the likeness of Christ's death, and thus burial in the likeness of His burial for our sins. We arise from the watery grave to a newness of life in likeness of Christ's resurrection, with our sins behind us and as a clean vessel before hands are laid on us for the receipt of God's Spirit.

If we can point out the specific point when one is born again, it is right then. It is then the convert begins his pilgrimage, his walk to the Kingdom of God. Brethren, a fetus cannot walk. We begin our walk to spiritual maturity, empowered by God's Spirit. God always deals with us as an adult member of His family, fully capable of learning judgments and decision-making. This is why God does not use the term "born" in I Corinthians 15. God uses the term "changed" when we take on the image of the heavenly man, Jesus Christ.

This entire process is spiritual in nature. It is activated by spiritual faith, because the New Covenant is a spiritual covenant. No physical analogy will adequately cover this spiritual process.