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**BRINGING HEAVEN DOWN TO EARTH – A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION
FOR BEST PRACTICE**

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Bringing Heaven down to Earth – a Biblical Foundation for Best Practice

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Our life goal or objective, contrary to how we might have been taught, is not to be good enough to make it to heaven. Actually, our goal in this life is to bring heaven down to earth. You and I have chosen fields of vocation that are centered on the notion of such a grandiose objective. In fact, the core of our work is uniquely connected with expanding the Kingdom of Heaven.

The intent of this presentation is to explore the concept of bringing heaven down to earth in a scriptural frame work that heightens our individual sense of stewardship for the roles and professions we have chosen. I believe that each of us has the unique gifts, calling and opportunity to bring peace out of chaos for those we are given to work with daily. And out of the stewardship of this calling, each of us is convicted of the responsibility to build “best practice” values into the application of these gifts.

This presentation is about the Kingdom of Heaven and each of our roles within the Kingdom. You and I have chosen roles, work, that is intently related to the Kingdom of Heaven, and with that understanding we are uniquely driven to respond to the call with a higher degree of stewardship than we might ordinarily pursue. This is greater than just values and integrity, evidence-based skills or cutting edge technique, this is responding to His calling and ministering to His children in whatever field our focus is centered. I believe this is true whether we work in a faith based ministry or a secular one.

What does Jesus have to say about the Kingdom of heaven? Matthew 11 – John the Immerser, who is in prison, about to be executed, sends his disciples to Jesus and asks, “Are you indeed the promised Messiah?” Jesus responds with a Messianic era passage of hope from Isaiah 35 that says in those hoped for days of the Messianic Kingdom, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the leper is cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised up. He then goes on to say the Kingdom is “breaking forth” as if violent or strong men are taking hold of it and expanding it exponentially. The Kingdom of Heaven is not something in the future, it is now! It is real and it is today! When the Apostle Paul says, “We see through a glass darkly”, he is referencing, in part, the Kingdom of Heaven (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is here today, imperfect but real, but there will come a day when we will see the Kingdom in its perfection – “the New Jerusalem coming down” as John describes in Revelation 21.

So, based on what Jesus reports in Matthew 11, the work of expanding the Kingdom has everything to do with replacing chaos with shalom – order, structure and peace. In New Testament times we see this concept vividly in Acts 4 where we see the saints praying to God, acknowledging healing along with other signs and wonders. They preached boldly the

reality of Jesus as the Promised Messiah; and there was no needy person among them because they did whatever it took to take care of one another.

As Kingdom workers today, you and I are part of the “strong men” expanding the Kingdom as described by Jesus to John’s disciples; you and I are engaged in the process of bringing order, structure and peace to those with whom we work every day. What an impact we are having on our clients, just as Jesus impacted those He encountered! Just imagine the peace that would come for the blind person who regains sight; or the lame person who can now walk, and because he can walk, he can once again work and provide for himself and his family. Or, how blessed would be the life of the leper who is allowed to rejoin his family and all of society? I tell you, these are the same faces of those we help in overcoming addictions, families who are reunited, children rescued from abuse, those with HIV, or returning to society from prison, etc. You and I are about expanding the Kingdom of Heaven every day through the work that has been given us.

God provides a model of reconciliation in the opening pages of the Bible – Genesis 1. In Genesis 1 we read that the world is void and without form – chaos. The Spirit of G-d hovers over this nothingness and chaos, and then He speaks, “Let there be light”. The light was good, so G-d separated the light from the darkness. And He called the light day and the darkness He called night. From there, G-d continues to speak into existence the elements of this world, taking what exists in the world from chaos and nothingness to a fully functioning and orderly existence. In the middle of this creation, G-d built a special garden, Eden, and He dwelt there, bringing His shalom or His peace. From the very beginning G-d provides us a model of bringing heaven down to earth, replacing chaos with order, structure and shalom. Shalom here is not just peace, but embodies orderliness and structure, and most of all, His presence.

But man failed and sin entered this beautiful paradise. G-d will not dwell where sin exists, so the Garden Eden was closed to mankind and a barrier was formed between G-d and man, and chaos was allowed to once again take dominion of over the world.

But the presence of sin did not stop G-d from pursuing a relationship with man. G-d is a pursuer of man – constantly pursuing a true relationship with man! His covenant with Israel is repeated many times, “If you keep my commands I will dwell among you” (Leviticus 26). We see this pursuit of man through His interactions with righteous men such as Seth, Enoch, Noah, and especially Abraham. G-d faithfully demonstrates His desire for relationship and His continuation of the model of bringing shalom out of chaos. And then there was Moses, a man so special to G-d that G-d shares His name with Moses, something He did not even share with Abraham (Numbers 12).

All this brings us to a very special event where G-d demonstrates His Kingdom on earth, the Tabernacle, also known as the “Tent of Meeting”. Construction of the Tabernacle was an assignment G-d gave Moses on Mount Sinai, a special place where the Presence of G-d would dwell among His people. In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us G-d showed Moses the heavenly temple and instructed Moses to duplicate this structure on earth – the tabernacle.

Before sin occurred in the Garden Eden, one could imagine the physical world and the Kingdom of G-d (Kingdom of Heaven) as two circles overlaying one another in perfect harmony. Genesis 3 gives us a picture of the cool of the day when G-d would walk through the Garden and speak freely and openly with Adam and Eve. When sin occurred this harmony was destroyed and the two circles were parallel but separated, and no longer in harmony. G-d would communicate with the righteous men listed above, but there was not a harmony between earth and Heaven. Earth was on a downward spiral, even bringing the destructive wrath of G-d in the form of the great flood.

However, from Sinai, through the construction of the Tabernacle, where the 100 square cubits, roughly 15’x15’, of the “most holy place” existed, the very room housing the Ark of the Covenant (also known as the “Mercy Seat”), there was a small, ever so small, overlap between the Kingdom of Heaven and earth. G-d’s presence brought order, structure and shalom to the Israelite people, a presence of the Almighty that had not been known on earth since the Garden of Eden. And in conjunction with this overlapping presence of Heaven on earth, G-d gave His people the instructions they were to live by, the Torah, which if followed, would for all time preserve His presence among His people (Leviticus 26).

But sin continued to dominate the people of G-d and He eventually withdrew His presence from the people, and the circles were once again separated for hundreds of years. Had the people followed the Torah as laid out by G-d on Mount Sinai, social justice would have prevailed, not only in Israel but throughout all nations. The widow and the fatherless along with the sojourner would have been provided for. The impoverished would not have been taken advantage of, and justice would have been the rule of the land. The blessings of Israel would have drawn the surrounding nations to G-d as well. But sin prevailed and that opportunity was lost. But G-d’s desire and pursuit of relationship with man did not diminish.

For a relatively short period of time the temple, conceived of by David and built by his son Solomon, revived this relationship between heaven and earth, but again, and in short time, sin prevailed and that opportunity was again lost, as were the people of Israel.

Push forward again several hundred years, and when the time was right according to

G-d's plan (Galatians 4:4), Messiah, Jesus Christ was born, and there in the midst of the people, G-d once again dwelt among His people. And the Kingdom of Heaven existed in overlapping proximity with earth once again, the contact point between G-d and man. Here (Matthew 11) we have Jesus Himself proclaiming the powerful expansion of the Kingdom of Heaven as proven by chaos being replaced with order, structure and shalom. *"The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the leper is cleansed and the dead are raised"*. The Kingdom is expanding in rapid progression and there are strong men and women making wonderful kingdom things happen in the lives of ordinary and often downtrodden people. Matthew 4:25 gives us a glimpse into this rapid and powerful spread of the kingdom: *"People from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan were coming to see Him"*.

You and I have been given gifts through the wonderful Holy Spirit of our Creator and King to expand the Kingdom of Heaven by replacing chaos with structure, order and shalom. The Apostle Paul discussed these gifts in passages like Romans 12; I Corinthians 12 and Galatians 5. We have been called and we have been gifted and we have been commissioned to bring the good news to the hurting, disenfranchised, abused, addicted, forgotten and downtrodden of our world. If Jesus was talking today He might say, *"Go tell John the addict is clean, the abused are safe, the HIV patient is healed, the hungry are fed and the captives of human trafficking are set free"*. The Apostle Paul would say, *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors"*, and *"we have been called to a ministry of reconciliation"* (II Corinthians 5).

The Apostle Peter will tell us we are to love one another and be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one of us has been *"gifted"*, we are to employ our gifts to serve one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of G-d. (I Peter 4:7-11) Most preachers will preach on stewardship in relationship to money; mainly, we should give more money to church. You and I have something far more valuable than money or gold. We have a spiritual gift we can use to expand the Kingdom of Heaven in our everyday work-a-day world. As in Acts 3 when Peter and John were going to the temple to pray and were entreated by the lame beggar asking for alms, Peter responded that they had no money but they had something far better, the good news of Jesus Christ, and through His holy name, they instructed the man to *"rise and walk"*. You and I have the power of Jesus Christ to restore structure, order and shalom in the lives of our clients, thereby expanding the Kingdom of Heaven to each and every person with whom we work. I realize that not all those we work with will accept the blessed name of Jesus, but we have that opportunity to reach out and bless each of them in His precious name, using the gifts we have been given by His Holy Spirit. It is the Matthew 25 statement of *"If you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me"*.

Our call is far greater than the ethics and standards of professionalism and best practice modalities. These are important, and we need to pursue best practice interventions and modalities, but the reason we strive to be the best we can be, to serve in the best capacity possible, is the higher calling of our spiritual stewardship and the opportunity to expand the Kingdom of Heaven, just as in the days of the apostles.

- Are we prepared to bring our best to the work site, recognizing that we are serving Christ the Messiah when we serve each client?
- When we strive to learn new practices, do we look at these as improving the tools in our tool boxes to better expand the Kingdom of Heaven?
- Do we look at ourselves in comparison with the servants Jesus talks about in Matthew 25 whose master gave them talents? Are we using the talents, spiritual gifts, we have been given to the fullest capacity possible?

Best practice for the Christian practitioner has to be looked at in the context of our role in the Kingdom of Heaven. Are we producing in such a way that we can be cited among those powerful and forceful men and women expanding the Kingdom of Heaven by replacing chaos with shalom?

Bringing heaven down to earth is a multi-faceted concept, but just for today I want to convey that the power of our calling is in the possibility of bringing heaven down to earth. This is accomplished by being great stewards of the gifts He has given us. Families can be made whole. Addicts and prisoners can truly be set free. Children will be safe and have the opportunity to reach their G-d given potential; the aged can die with dignity and hope; the refugee can find the opportunity he is hoping for. By responding to the call to “bring heaven down to earth”, you and I are given the capacity to play a vital role; to be part of the “powerful men taking the Kingdom by force” and expanding the Kingdom of Heaven in our neighborhoods; and all across the earth.