

Dear Darryl,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You asked if those who are called least in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19) would even be in the kingdom of heaven. You said that Matthew 5:20 seems to imply that. Then you asked how the least in the kingdom, those who teach others to annul God's commandments (Matthew 5:19), could be greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). You wanted to know what "least in the kingdom of heaven" meant in each of the above verses.

"Anyone who breaks [relaxes] one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:19-20)

The kingdom of heaven is spoken of in two different senses of the word. In one sense we are waiting for the kingdom when the entire church class will be complete and in glory in heaven. In another sense the church class that is in the flesh now is also the kingdom of heaven in its embryonic state. This class, which has existed throughout the entire Gospel Age, is spoken of by the Apostle Peter as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people. In this sense, all the church is spoken of as the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violence take it by force." (Matthew 11:12) We know the heavenly kingdom of the future would not be suffering violence. However, Jesus represented the heavenly kingdom on earth and he suffered violence, as did the Apostles and many of the Lord's chosen throughout this age. Therefore, in Matthew 5:19 Jesus is saying whosoever in the church class now on earth (the kingdom of heaven) will make little of any command of God, he will make himself less, or should be considered that much less amongst the Lord's people. If anyone would do or teach anything contrary to the Lord's commandments, he sets a bad example and should be considered least in the kingdom now.

Will such a person be able to enter to enter the actual kingdom of heaven when he dies? Yes, he can if he is properly exercised by the "stripes" he receives now on earth, although he may be one of the least in the heavenly kingdom. "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:47-48)

In Matthew 5:20 Jesus tells his followers that unless righteousness reigns in their hearts and is not just an outward show as it was with the Pharisees, they shall in no way be worthy to be part of the kingdom of heaven, that is, the church class or the Elect on earth now. Unless one has more of the spirit of the divine law than the hypocritical Pharisees had, one cannot be begotten of the Holy spirit, which is a prerequisite to be part of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 11:11 says, "I tell you the truth: among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets and the last of the "house of servants." He had the honorable service of directly announcing the Savior. John tells us that he was the friend of the bridegroom and not the bride (John 3:29). Because John died before Jesus paid the ransom price on the cross, he was not eligible to be part of the kingdom of heaven. When John awakens from his sleep of death he will come forth on earth as a perfect human being. This will be his reward for faithfulness. Others of the servant class, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, etc, will join him. Therefore, the least in the heavenly phase of the kingdom will be greater than John, the greatest in the visible, earthly phase of the kingdom. Only those justified by Jesus' blood could be invited to the High Calling, and John died before the sacrifice was completed.

We hope we have answered your questions. Be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio