

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: "The Kingdom of God"



Message: "A New and Living Way"

[Click/tap to hear the live recording](#)

Dr. Mary Craig

May 30, 2021

Jesus comes with a new and living way. He didn't come to rule the world by force or violence. His would be the suffering of love. He would become the sacrifice for sin and He would propitiate the wrath of God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Jesus would bear the sin and be the scapegoat. He was sent by the Father in the fullness of time and upset religious, social, political, and economic ways of the world.

Jesus contended with religion. He didn't embrace institutionalized religion. In His day there was a complex code full of "do's and don'ts," pilgrimages, and a sacrificial worship system which encompassed much of Jewish life, from civil law to national festivals. Many rituals became empty outward acts and rituals, even though religious fervor ran deep.

Jesus' way clashed with religious leaders who guarded sacred rites of ritual all in God's name. Jesus demolished some cherished assumptions and practices. He upset the way things were. He was bringing in a New Covenant in His Blood.

The devil had come to Jesus in the wilderness, offering Jesus an option to miraculously certify His mission. Jumping off into the temple court would make Jesus an instant Messiah. The angels would catch Him and it would be quite a show. The devil wanted Jesus to bypass encounters with the Pharisees and religious leaders, forget issues like poverty and disease; not speak the parables and teachings; and definitely, bypass the Cross. Why suffer anyway? Take the kingdom. Worship the devil. Jesus quoted Scripture. **"It has been said, You shall not tempt the LORD your God."** **"Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve."** Luke 4:12, 8.

Instead Jesus had His own way of encountering the temple and religious leaders. He was there shortly after His birth. He showed up there at 12 startling the teachers with His wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures. When He entered into public ministry, Jesus challenged the Pharisees and Sadducees and upset commercial operations of the temple. He went after the money changers.

The temple stood to remind the people that God's elect had direct access to Him through the covenantal, sacrificial system. Perpetual offerings required some 1,200 animals per year. There were incense offerings. It was quite a lot of work. At least 20 priests, chosen by lot each day, performed the regular sacrifices while others attended to special offerings.

The temple stood as the centerpiece of Jewish faith and life. It symbolized God's living presence on earth. We cannot stress too much how important the temple and the sacrifices were in the life of the Jewish people. The power of the high priest grew considerably under the Roman procurators. The high priest became the key Jewish spokesperson for ceremonial matters and also for political negotiations with the Romans.

Likewise, the Torah stood at the core of Jewish religion. Scribes explained the Torah's secrets. Yet the Law cannot give Life. Salvation comes through the Promise (Romans 4, 5), not by law-keeping. The Law shows us our inability to keep the commandments/covenant. The Promise shows us that true righteousness must be imputed to those who believe in Jesus, by faith. The Holy Spirit is the Life-Maker. Jesus is the Promised Messiah. It's all about getting back to the Father.

Jesus entered a culture of two religious political parties—the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Jesus spoke about the leaven of Herod as well as the leaven of the Pharisees. Jesus' appeal to commoners threatened the political base of the Pharisees and stirred their criticism of Him.

Regardless of their political views, the people were all expecting a messiah who would rout out the Romans and set things straight, bringing One who would reestablish David's throne in all its former glory and usher in a peaceable kingdom of God. We have examined the hope of the KOG previously.

Jesus comes, though, and rejects religion as it was practiced in His day. He didn't succumb to institutionalized religion with its political factions. In fact He uprooted its very foundations. His parables proffered harsh judgment. He violated sacred Sabbath traditional customs. He chased merchants from the temple. He called the holy temple a den of robbers when it was to be a house of prayer for all people.

And yet He did teach in the synagogues and in the temple. He did endorse the Torah. He told cured lepers to show themselves to the priest. He directed Peter to catch a fish and to pay the temple tax. Jesus was a Jew and acknowledged to be a Jewish prophet. He supported the virtues of the Law and the piety of genuine Hebrew faith. He came to make crooked places straight. He fulfilled all righteousness.

Jesus called people back to original purposes of the Law. He didn't bless religious structures. He emphasized love and compassion. With a new and living way Jesus came as the high priest of a new order of priesthood, the Melchizedek order. God's Spirit would vacate the Holy of Holies in the earthly temple and abide in the heart of every believer. People wouldn't worship on this mountain or on that mountain. God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. There would be no particular sacred place. People could approach God anywhere. Worship would be freed from elaborate buildings and complicated ritual. **“Something greater than the temple is here.”** (Mt 12.6)

Jesus came revealing the secrets of the new Law of love. Yet the Law of Love was right there in the Torah. Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Leviticus 19:18. Jesus in the new covenant in His blood would end ceremonial cleansing and sacrifice. People could have forgiveness directly from God through Christ without going to the temple and slitting the throats of animals. The “old” was passing away. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Jesus would offer Himself as the sacrifice for sin, His Blood. Jesus, The God-Man, the only Mediator between God and Man, was bringing in something new and better.

Mark 12:34 A scribe was told that he was close to the KOG if he placed love for God and neighbor above all burnt offerings. Jesus' new and living way isn't about physical buildings and programs or some elite clergy. In Jesus we have a once-for-all-time sacrifice, a definitive offering, a new temple in the heart of each believer, and a new law of love. The temple is people. The program is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in the believer's heart.

Jesus came in the power of an endless life. His life itself was the sign. He demonstrated care for the lost, compassion for the poor, and love even for enemies. The new heroes were castaways of institutional religion, those forbidden people---repentant sinners, publicans, confessing tax collectors, and harlots. Old heroes were dethroned, brought low, and told to become like children. They received “woes” from the mouth of Jesus.

Jesus was tempted by the devil to self-promotion instead of having his destiny in the hand of God. Jesus’ whole life was determined by the prophetic word. He came putting love above religious sacrifice and ritual. He came insisting upon an inward reality rather than outward rule. He came not in pompous power and spectacular religious show but as one of no reputation, meek and lowly in heart. Though tempted to the misuse of power, position, and purpose, Jesus prevailed in perfect, personal, perpetual obedience to the Father.

Jesus died outside the walls of Jerusalem. And that is where we will find Him today. To live within the veil one must join Jesus without the camp. Hebrews 13

Let’s talk about this. What is true religion? James says, “**If any man among you seem to be religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain (empty of power). Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted/undefiled from the world.**” (James 1:26, 27)

True religion is a matter of the heart, the head, and the hand.

As misguided as Christianity may have been at times over the centuries, as misguided as it may be today, the fact is Christ said that He came to build His church (Matt 16:18). Jesus came to establish some formal gathering of people, called-out-ones, which assemble together. (Hebrews 10:25). Jesus builds His church; thus we speak of the visible church and the invisible church. He will sort. He will sift. He will separate. He will sanctify. He is the Judge of what is living and what is dead.

In James 1:26-27 outward displays of religiosity are vain; worthless, empty, useless. The real litmus test of true religion is obedience to the True God. Out of supreme loyalty and attachment to Jesus Christ, we obey by grace through faith which works by love. True religion is the outgrowth of covenant relationship as we are in vital spiritual union in Christ. Heart, head, and hand will demonstrate the fruit of repentance. Hold onto relationship with the Father through Christ as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Hold out our blessed hope to the world.

Jesus said, “**What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person**” (Matt 15:18). We are not sinners because we curse, or mock, or slander, or lie. We curse, mock, slander, or lie because we are sinners. We’re all falling short of the glory of God, and our words indicate the condition of our hearts. Ephesians 4:17-32 speaks of renewing the mind.

We are to submit to and align with the Word of God. We are to understand God in His self-existent Being; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We come to know God as Father, a heavenly Father who cares about us, who has adopted us and made us co-heirs with Christ; who is moved to action in merciful, compassionate, and gracious ways; and who also is just, judging with divine justice. We are to know the Son, Jesus, who died, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God and who was buried and rose again from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Almighty. We are to know the Holy Spirit, who regenerates, who turns our

hearts in faith and repentance, who sanctifies what has been justified, and who prepares us to live eternally in Christ in a face-to-face relationship in glorification.

In addition to addressing the political and religious areas of life, Jesus also addressed economics. When Satan came to Jesus tempting Him to turn stones into bread, we see this as a temptation to look away from God as the Source and Sustainer of all Life and Blessing to the material world, to another source. Bread symbolizes the heart of material life; it represents basic necessities.

Masses of people in Jesus' day were poor peasants crying out for and searching for bread, literal bread to end gnawing hunger. But **man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.** Luke 4:4. In John 6 Jesus will tell the picnickers who came for the picnic that He is the Living Manna, the Bread of Life.

Jesus saw the economic situation of life. He saw the ruthless creditors pushing people off their lands. He saw a system of double taxation. He heard the cries of people needing help. Satan was also tempting Jesus to be a welfare king, to just use His power to feed the masses. A well-fed mob could seize Him and make Him king by force (John 6:15). Bread is a quick way to anyone's heart. Multitudes followed Jesus, mostly because He fed the crowds. Jesus is never fooled. So Jesus speaks hard sayings and many walk away. Yet who else has the words of eternal life? Who will follow the Christ?

Jesus refused to be a welfare king. He refused to let the masses lift Him to kingship by force. He didn't just lessen poverty without judging economic injustice, without suffering. He didn't reduce people to less than animals, throwing them food and leaving them in their situation. Jesus is Manna, the Bread from Heaven.

The culture of Jesus' day did not have a middle class. Wealth was based on land ownership and most tracts of land had absentee landlords. There was a small upper class which accounted for about 10% of the people, leaving 90% peasants. The landowners consisted of hereditary aristocrats, appointed bureaucrats, chief priests, wealthy merchants, government officials, and various official servants who served the needs of the governing class. The lower class lived hand-to-mouth at the mercy of weather, famine, pestilence, bandits, and war. Within the lower class were craftsmen, carpenters, masons, fishermen, and traders, and mostly farmers. On the fringe of the lower class were the unclean occupations, such as leather tanning and shepherding. At the bottom were outcasts—vagabonds, beggars, and lepers. The parables of Jesus assume a two-class society of rich and poor.

Jerusalem towered above the country in social and economic prestige. Many of the rich in Jerusalem derived their wealth from vast country estates farmed by slaves, hired men, or tenants. Craftsmen working in the temple received the equivalent of \$300 per day. Unskilled workers received their food and 25 cents a day. (USD)

The poor were the people of the land, the common people who lived outside the city, and later, people who didn't observe religious laws. Pharisees avoided contact with the "people of the land." The religiously careless were scorned and could not testify in court or be the guardian of an orphan. Pharisees wouldn't marry them and considered their women forbidden reptiles. (Kraybill, page 76)

Galilee was densely populated and many Gentiles bought land there before the reign of Herod the Great. By the time of Jesus though, Galilee was predominantly Jewish. The region,

however, still carried its former stigma: “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Most Galileans were poorly educated and ignorant of the fine points of religious law. Jesus amazed as He taught.

The two groups hated each other. The poor usually had just one set of clothing. Jesus tells them to be content. Taxes were high, however, and it is believed that Herod may have owned ½ to 2/3 of his kingdom by reason of confiscating land and goods from common people.

There were civil taxes and religious taxes. It is believed that 30 to 60% of annual income fell in the hands of various tax collectors and creditors. Civil taxes covered everything from houses, animals, sales, imports, and exports. A land tax took about ¼ of the crop. Then there was a poll tax on each male over age 14 and each female over age 12. Police accompanied tax collectors. There’s more. You get the picture.

Jewish law and interpretations of law required some two dozen religious tithes and offerings. The temple tax had to be paid in high quality Tyrian silver, requiring money changers for most. Jewish farmers offered first fruits and gave a tithe of the harvest and a tithe of the herd to support the Levites. Another tithe supported the poor, and farmers were required to leave gleanings. Religious tithes and taxes were observed as ordinances commanded by God in the Law. The Law is holy, spiritual, and good; however, corruption and crookedness made it burdensome.

Jesus was known as a carpenter’s son, the son of a skilled craftsman. Joseph would probably have belonged to the higher ranks of Galilee’s poor class. His family had received gold, frankincense, and myrrh---great wealth from the Magi. Jesus’ followers included independent fishermen and tax collectors, the upper levels of Galilean peasantry. “In Christ” we find people of every ethnicity, class, status, tribe, etc. Galatians 3:28; Revelation 7:9.

One time Jesus talked about having no place to lay his head. His disciples were caught on a Sabbath shelling wheat in the field. Jesus showed an empty pocket when grilled about paying Roman taxes. Yet, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Mark 12:17) He wasn’t paid for His teaching. He had no formal support, though wealthy women were in the entourage (Luke 8:3).

What do you think? Did their ethical radicalism lead to homelessness, meager possessions, and distance from family or was Jesus trying to demonstrate a deeper truth? Who is the Source of all life and blessing? To whom do we look when in need or in trouble? The true God? Government? Our own abilities? The devil? Other people? For example, in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, a woman was asked by a reporter what she would like to say to President Bush: “I have high blood pressure. What are you going to do about it?”

Jesus didn’t promote violence as a response to economic oppression. He says He is the Living Bread. His life, His way, His teaching would form a new foundation for living. His Word is Life, Truth, active. Believers would be blessed by sharing and giving out of their poverty. He is the living bread and Messiah (Mark 6:8). People came to the picnic, but what about the Person of Christ? Jesus told the crowd that the only reason they followed was because they were fed (John 6:26). It was a rebuke. He wasn’t fooled by what brought the crowds.

Jesus would be the Bread broken, as bread is broken to be eaten among many. When Jesus becomes the Bread of Life, the Source and Supplier of Life, economic institutions, advertising, the world’s values, and the like, lose their grip on us. We are rich in God and out of our wealth and richness we give out of our abundance. We can give generously, gladly, and graciously, as God guides. We do not fear because the One who supplies our need is infinitely wealthy. We need to ask, seek, and knock; and be thankful, giving glory to God.

True religion is a matter of the heart, the head, and the hand.

Politics, organized religion, social mores of the world, and worldly economic systems of wealth do not govern us in the KOG. Jesus is King of this Kingdom. He is the Living Bread, the Living Way, the Ruler over the kings of the earth. He is the Messiah and He comes declaring the Jubilee. There's more to come. Amen.

Bibliography: Kraybill, Donald B. *The Upside-Down Kingdom* Herald Press, 2011.

Ladd, George Eldon. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1959.

Mary Craig, D. Min.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.
I am the Bread of Life. John 6:47, 48. NKJV

© 2021 Mary Craig Ministries, Inc. All rights reserved. www.marycraig.org www.mcmtffr.org



Thank you for giving to MCM! Donate: Mary Craig Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 4610, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33338-4610 or through PayPal® online at www.marycraig.org. Go to marycraig.org for the latest articles and words received. Take a look and see all that God is doing through this ministry, in world missions, in evangelism, the Barnabas Project, Craighthouse® Christian Fellowship, home visitation, Kinetic Koinonia, media, and more. Worship with us 4:30 p.m. Sundays via teleconference. Reach MCM at 954-491-7270. Send in your prayer requests. Follow MCM Bible teachings and Rev. Jim Craig's sermons; go to www.marycraig.org and click on "Audio Bible Studies" or "Divine Appointment" radio ministry; or go to www.mcmtffr.org for audio sermons, teachings, and handout sheets. Free. Go to www.marycraigverses.org for "Enjoying God for Life," daily encouragement and growing in your faith. Go to www.marycraig.smugmug.com for some pictures of MCM world missions.

See our new Mary Craig Ministries YouTube Channel here:
www.youtube.com/channel/UCs4c-InXmh2HKF36huJQTOA. Subscribe for free.

Free books by Dr. Craig to download, print, or just open and use, here:
www.marycraig.org/Catalog.htm.

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc. is a USA 501 (C) (3) nonprofit corporation founded in 1993. Federal ID 65-0429517.