Hidden Messages: Upside Down Kingdom
Main Scripture

Intro: In the early 1600s there was a man named Galileo. Influenced by a book from 1543 written by Copernicus, Galileo set out to prove the theory that the earth was not the center of the Universe, but instead rotated around the sun. The only issue was that the Catholic Church was in opposition to this theory as they feared that it might disprove scripture. Galileo wrote many letters to the church using math and science to show that this theory was in fact true. However in March of 1616, the Catholic Church's "Index of Prohibited Books" published a statement (without naming or charging Galileo) declaring that any theory suggesting the Earth revolved around the sun was false and, worse, such notions contradicted the ultimate source, the Holy Scriptures. The same decree banned Catholics from reading Copernicus's book. Galileo was then sent to trial before the church, was humiliated in front of his town, and was sentenced to house arrest.

We now know that the world does in fact rotate around the sun, but Copernicus and Galileo's discoveries were a bit ahead of their time causing uproar among people who just couldn't believe the words they were saying.

In the same way Jesus was a bit ahead of his time. Today we read the words of Jesus and we see that Jesus laid out a way of living that brings peace, unity, and stability to the world around us. However, just like Galileo, Jesus was ahead of his time and his words caused controversy and disbelief to many who heard them.

The Sermon on the Mount was in fact Jesus's first "public speech" in which he lays out his purpose…to build a kingdom here on earth as it is in Heaven. Let's look at a few things that Jesus said that would have caused controversy and how these words are still relevant to our lives today.

Upside Down Kingdom: When we think about a traditional Earthly Kingdom what do we think about? A King or Queen. armies, walls, moats, wealth, war, castles…

Jesus liked to start a lot of his stories that he told like this: *For the Kingdom of Heaven is like*…. Each of these stories depicts what God's perfect Kingdom looks like, and each of these teachings are usually the opposite of what we would consider to be a Kingdom. In other words, it was upside down…

Jesus starts this type of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. First, we see in the Beatitudes things such as:

- *"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."* Matthew 5:3
- *"God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God."* Matthew 5:9
- *"God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."* Matthew 5:10

Then Jesus continues this type of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount talking about giving to the needy, loving your enemies, not judging others, money, and possessions. (see Matthew 6:28-34.) Here is a man who is obviously a wise man and a great teacher who is telling the crowds to seek the Kingdom of God first! What a revolutionary thought!

Parables: At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we see that people were shocked at Jesus's teachings (see Matthew 7:28-29). They couldn't believe some of the things he was saying. Over the next few chapters we see Jesus going out and performing miracles.. Through this process Jesus gains a lot of followers, but also gains a lot of enemies who could not accept who he was, until we get to Matthew 13. We see that Jesus starts teaching again. Once again, He uses the language *the kingdom of God is like…* But now we see Jesus isn't being as direct as he was on the Sermon on the Mount. He is now speaking in stories or parables and his disciples want to know why… (see Matthew 13:10-17)

Jesus taught in parables because he knew that by being direct, it would only harden people's hearts even more. However, if he could tell relatable stories to people, it would allow them to meditate on the meaning of them. Over time these stories would permeate the hardened hearts of those who were in disbelief to a point where they could have ears to hear!

Jesus only gave further explanation of the parables to "those with ears", mostly his disciples. Now you might think that it is selfish of Jesus to keep these explanations private. However, think about those who were hungry enough to come ask for an explanation. When they sought out someone who would know an answer, the disciples would then share these explanations given by Jesus. It wasn't Jesus' role alone to share the Good News. He knew that as the Good News spread and as others had ears to hear that his disciples would share the meanings of his words.

These parables were taught to show what it looks like to fully be immersed in the Kingdom of God. This upside down way of thinking. (see In Matthew 13:34-35)

Tree of Life: *"I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world."* (Matthew 13:35) Jesus says He is explaining things that have been hidden since the creation of the world. So what concepts is He unveiling? Let's go way back to our friends Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve lived, not in a kingdom, but in a Garden… A beautiful garden full of fruit for them to eat, no worries, no stress, no responsibilities to speak of, PERFECTION. Until… they eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Their eyes were opened. They opened the door to struggle. Now they realize they are vulnerable, they experience pain for the first time, God tells them that they will struggle to make ends meet as he sends them out of the Garden.

From that moment on we see humanity as it struggles. There is murder, sins abound, we see humanity fall into a way of nature. It's dog eat dog. Only the strongest survive. We see the Isrealites become hungry and tired more than once. God makes covenants with man to try to make things better for them, but humanity continues to break these and return to an old way of life. Humanity can not fully return to God because they don't fully understand how to deal with

the chaos set into motion at the beginning of creation. The Israelites fall into the trap that there isn't enough. Not enough food, not enough land, not enough money… They rely on themselves instead of turning to God to be their source of provision.

God does say something interesting right before booting Adam and Eve from the Garden… It's a bit of a hidden message. *"Then the Lord God said, "Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!"* Genesis 3:22

If humanity eats from the Tree of Life then a direct connection to God can be restored. However, there is only one problem. The Tree of Life is in the Garden that man has been removed from. There is no access to it. Enter Jesus… Check out what Jesus has to say about himself in John. *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."* John 6:54-58

Jesus brought the Tree of Life to Earth, for us to take from. Jesus gained us access to Life Eternal. His teachings are meant to be a reversal of the way we naturally think and act as humans. Jesus is teaching us how to reverse the curse of Adam and Eve. Now that is a Hidden Message…

Return to the Garden: What would it take for us to return to the Garden? It would take a collective effort of all humanity living out the Parables of The Kingdom of God is like… It would take all of us accepting Jesus's upside down kingdom.

Take a moment to consider this. Think about an average neighborhood or village. Imagine if, one by one, its citizens started making decisions to bless one another with resources rather than hoard and fight over them. Imagine what it would be like if society at large considered vulnerability and kindness to be the highest forms of power and glory. It's a world where mutual love between citizens has made it impossible for evil to continue.

Total peace. Total safety. Total provision. Everyone is experiencing the good life in God's Upside Down Kingdom.