

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ – The Kingdom of God (Part 2) Acts 1:3

1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Last week we began to consider the subject matter our Lord Jesus Christ discussed with the apostles for those forty days between the time of His resurrection from the dead, until the time that He ascended into heaven as recorded there for us in Acts 1:9. What was the subject that so permeated the teaching of Jesus during this time? We read in our text of Acts 1:3,

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Our text says that Jesus was “speaking” – communicating, discussing, discoursing, elaborating on the topic of the kingdom of God. As we have been working through these first three verses, we have been noting that it was that made the early church most effective in its evangelism; in its ability to speak to others about Christ in such a way as to help them come to see Jesus as Lord and Savior. I will not repeat the previous four, but as we come to the end of verse 3, we have before us the fifth such necessity imperative for us to be better communicators and witnesses for Jesus Christ, that necessity being that we must live as citizens of the kingdom of God. Our lives need to be increasingly expressive of the truth that we live according to God's reign and God's rule in our lives. This is what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of God, to live under the authority of God.

Moreover, it is this theme that Jesus is expounding upon for the apostle these forty days. However, we find little in our immediate text that communicates to us the nature of this kingdom. What does it mean to be a part of the kingdom of God? How are we a part of the kingdom of God? Are the Church and the kingdom of God the same thing? These are questions that we need to know if we would be effective in proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. Let me say then that this subject of the kingdom of God is one of the most important and foundational themes of the Scripture. While it might be thought that Jesus only spoke of the kingdom of God for these forty days, we know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus spoke concerning the kingdom of God all the time.

Because it is important for us to grasp the meaning of what Jesus communicated both here in our text as well as throughout His ministry concerning the kingdom of God, we are going to camp out on this theme for a time. Before we consider what the kingdom of God is in relation to our text and the book of Acts; let us begin with to stretch our minds a bit on the broad idea of what we mean by the word “kingdom” – the Greek word in our text meaning simply “the sovereign reign and realm of a king.” As this description suggests, no kingdom can be properly understood without what – a king, a sovereign ruler over a specific realm.

Let me challenge you to think with me here about the concepts of a king and kingdom. We here in the United States have never experienced life under a king. Our country was born in a

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revolution against a king. Interestingly, most of the modernized and civilized world is not governed by a king or a monarchy. There are some countries that have royal families and even a queen or king, but these are often powerless figureheads. The truth of the matter is that our world has been moving away from the practice of kings and kingdoms.

In such times in the past, where this world was governed more often by kings, we learn that such persons exercised sovereign power and absolute authority over the subjects of their realms. What the king willed was done. The king was able to do what he wanted, when he wanted, how he wanted to whomever he wanted and did so with little fear of recourse. That was the way of the past. Today, when a person does such to the people of his realm, we do not call him a king, we call him a dictator. The world generally despises dictators. If you have been following the news lately, you are aware of what is going on in Libya. Freedom fighters; rebels, who want an opportunity to participate in government, are warring against their leader, Moammar Gadhafi and his reign. Gadhafi is a dictator; and as a growing mass of his people have been standing against him, what has he been doing, he has been using his absolutely power over his military forces to pummel his own people. And how has the world responded? In general outrage, even asking the United Nations to invade this sovereign nation to give the rebels a fighting chance against this ruthless dictator king, Moammar Gadhafi. Neither our world, or even ourselves, as Bible-believing Christians, are too keen on such expressions of kingship. Our world is one in which everyone is to be brought down on a level playing field, with no one nation, superpower or not, flexing its muscles and imposing on other nations.

And yet, if we are to rightly understand Scripture, and be rightly related to Jesus Christ and God the Father, and if then we are to be most effective in communicating the gospel of Jesus to a dying world; we must begin with seeing that God reveals Himself to humanity as what? He reveals Himself as King – the one, true, absolutely sovereign, absolutely supreme, absolutely unquestionable King over all things, all people, over all creation. As King, God can do what He wants, when He wants, how He wants, to whomever He wants without any fear of recourse. That is what it ultimately means to be King. And yet this is what the world rebels against. But this is what we find Jesus communicating to His apostles, the kingdom; the reign and rule of God.

Do the Scriptures actually portray God as the unquestionable, majestic, mighty Monarch over all things? Is God rightly the unrivaled and awesome Dictator over all the earth? If we are to be kingdom citizens, is our view of God to include seeing Him as the only Sovereign King, full of wisdom, full of knowledge, full of justice, full of power, full of authority, who does just as He alone sees fit and is obligate to no one else? Consider with me the testimony of Scripture. What do we read in the great doxology of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:34-36?

***34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?
35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36
For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.
Amen.***

What does God need from us? Nothing. What can we offer Him? Nothing. This is our King, a King who needs no counselors, who is obligated to no one. How awesome is our God as sovereign King? Consider the testimony of God recorded by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 40:12-14, 18

***12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens
by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the***

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mountains in a balance And the hills in a pair of scales? 13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has informed Him? 14 With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding? ... 18 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

And what do you suppose is the proper answer to these rhetorical questions? No one! Without even scratching the surface of the testimony of Scripture, we find God doing what He wants, how He wants, when He wants to whomever He wants purely on the basis of His own Being, His own power and His own purpose without any consultation with man. In Job 42:2 we read this testimony of Job:

I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

Again, we read from the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 14:27

For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"

Who dictates to the Lord? Who corrects the Lord? To whom is the Lord answerable? To no one. This is the truest and highest definition of what it means to be King. In Isaiah 46:8-10 we read:

8 Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'...

And just in case we have not yet grasped the depth of the Bible's teaching on this matter, consider with me the words of King David as record in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13:

10 So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. 11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. 12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.

What does it sound like David is describing in these verses? A King and His kingdom. And more specifically, the highest and most sovereign of Kings and His kingdom. What does this have to do with Acts 1:3? Let me ask you, concerning what is Jesus speaking to the apostles for forty days? The kingdom of God. No doubt many of these very thoughts concerning the kingship of God were discussed. While Acts 1:3 tells us very little about the specifics of what was taught, Jesus spoke so frequently on the subject of the kingdom of God that we can get a flavor by simply looking at what He said. I would like to walk you through the gospel of Luke primarily as

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we know that whatever Luke intended to communicate in the book of Acts about what Jesus taught concerning the kingdom and what the church, including you and I would need to know about the kingdom of God in order to proclaim the kingdom of God to the world, was at some level already laid out in the his gospel record. Of course all of this can also be found in the gospels of Matthew and of Mark, but let us confine ourselves to the gospel of Luke and get a flavor of the kingdom teachings of Jesus. We begin in Luke 4:43 -

But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose."

In Luke 6:20 we read:

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

In Luke 7:28 we read:

I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

In Luke 8:1 we see the continued theme:

Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God.

In Luke 9:1-2 Jesus includes the disciples in the kingdom proclamation:

1 And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. 2 And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom in Luke 9:11 -

But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.

And again in Luke 9:27 -

But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

In challenging others to true discipleship Jesus said in Luke 9:60 -

60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."

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And just a couple of verses later, Jesus explains the importance of a kingdom mindset in Luke 9:62 -

But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

According to Luke 10:9 the message the disciples were to proclaim included the exhortation that -

'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

With reference to the kingdom authority of Jesus, He said in Luke 11:20 -

But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

We could go on, but the point is that Jesus continually taught about the kingdom of God through out His ministry, we have more said about the kingdom in chapters 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23. Someone I read noted that Jesus spoke more about the kingdom of God than Genesis 1-2 records for us about the creation of this world. The subject of is of such importance for His apostles to get right that even after His resurrection, we find Him proclaiming the kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom. Jesus had something to say about the kingdom of God and continued to convey that message to His apostles in the forty days before His ascension into heaven. In most of these passages, Jesus was proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God because the King Himself had also arrived. The point is this, that wherever the King is, there must be a kingdom. Jesus, the King (as we will come to see later) is among His people and therefore His kingdom was truly "at hand."

We have seen that Jesus continually and intentionally spoke of the kingdom of God various individuals and groups of people; but the larger question we need to answer is this; "What is the kingdom of God?" If we are going to be most effective in completing the unfinished work of Christ; then not only must we live as kingdom citizens, but we must know what the kingdom of God is to which we are submitting ourselves.

So, in our remaining time this morning, let us lay the foundation of what is the kingdom of God. What do the Scriptures reveal to us about its nature, how a person becomes a part of that kingdom and then our relationship to the kingdom. In the Scriptures, we learn that this sovereign, absolutely powerful, wise and majestic God reigns and rules over two realms. We need to keep this simple; so consider the two realms the Scriptures reveal as being under the kingship of God. There is what we can call the material kingdom and then there is what we can call the spiritual kingdom. There is the material, visible, tangible, external kingdom of God and then there is the spiritual, invisible, transcendent and internal kingdom of God.

Keep in mind that it is not so much that there are two kingdoms of God but rather two aspects of the kingdom of God, one being material and the other spiritual. If we can grasp this, our understanding of what Jesus was teaching in the gospels and in the book of Acts concerning the kingdom, and of our lives as kingdoms citizens, as well as our expectation of a future, material manifestation of the kingdom of God, that which we call the Millennial kingdom; or the 1000 year reign and rule of Christ on this earth as described in Revelation 20, will be greatly

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enriched. So, let us lay a foundation for understanding these two aspects of the kingdom of God beginning with the material, external kingdom aspect.

The word of God is very clear in declaring that all that He has created and therefore rules is an expression of this external, universal kingdom of God. According to the Scriptures, everything God has created is directly subject to His sovereign power and control. We read in Psalm 10:16;

The Lord is King forever and ever; Nations have perished from His land.

In Psalm 29:10 we are told;

The Lord sat as King at the flood; Yes, the Lord sits as King forever.

Psalms 103:19 declares;

The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

And in Psalms 145:13, David makes this statement about God's external, sovereign reign over all things;

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

From verses like this we must conclude that creation itself, this material, external, visible, tangible word is from God, for God and to God. Indeed, even as the Psalmist noted in Psalms 50:10, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills." In other words, everything, everyone, all time, all space, all matter, everything belongs to the Lord.

Turn over to Daniel chapter four. If you recall the account of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, you find a man who ran up against this majestic, external kingdom of God. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which revealed that the only reason why he prospered was because of the goodness of God and that if he refused to acknowledge and declare and live by this truth; to live in acknowledgement of the superior kingdom of God, he would lose his sanity and his kingdom would be removed from him for a time. We of the why God gave him this dream in verse 17 where we read,

This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men.

No matter how great or how lowly a person is, all are to acknowledge that their lives are the matter of the greatest King, the God of heaven. As the interpretation of this dream reveals Nebuchadnezzar's curse for not acknowledging, it also says such a curse will be for a time, until, as we read at the end of verses 25 and 26,

25...you recognize that the Most High is ruler [King] over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes... 26...your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.

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You know the story, Nebuchadnezzar, some time later, standing on his balcony, looking over the splendor of all that he had accomplished, said, according to verse 30;

Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?

And before the words were off his lips, all his sovereignty as king of Babylon was stripped away and naked he went into the fields with the beasts for seven years, until, as verse 32 declares just as verse 25 did, ***"...you recognize that the Most High is ruler [King] over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes."***

Dropping down to verse 34, we find Nebuchadnezzar's testimony. Follow along as we read;

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

I love it where Nebuchadnezzar said, "my reason returned to me and I blessed the Most High..." This is truly where all reasonable people must end up. It is unreasonable to either fail to acknowledge or in rebellion to refuse to acknowledge the external, universal, sovereign Kingship of God over you. And so we find this pagan king, who I believe became a believer through this, saying in verses 35-37 these words that ring true to all that we have been saying about the universal, external, material kingdom of God;

35 All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' 36 At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

Beloved, what does all this mean for us today? Why is it important that we understand God is Sovereign King over all creation? Let us not allow ourselves to be so grand and so general. For if God is King over all creation, then we must acknowledge that God is King over each one of us. And if we refuse to acknowledge Him as King, or if we rebel against His authority; there is a curse that awaits us far greater than the one that happened to Nebuchadnezzar; that curse being one of death; of eternal separation from both the wondrous, majestic presence of the King, but also from the very bliss of heaven; the joy of heaven who is Jesus Himself.

Next week we will look at the spiritual aspect of the kingdom of God and how all that relates to this as well as to our study in the book of Acts; but the question for each of us now is this; will we live as citizens of God's kingdom; acknowledging His ways, His rule, His reign over us? Do our lives reflect ones of obedience to the King? Do we stand in pride on the balconies of

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our lives and either neglectfully forget or at times arrogantly refuse to recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realms of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.

Do you thank God, the King of the Universe, for your relationships; for your spouse, your children, your parents, your friends? Do you praise God for your job, the blessings of your hobbies; the food that you eat? Beloved, if kingdom citizens will spend more time acknowledging the King, then those to whom we speak the gospel of Jesus Christ will be more inclined to respond to His Kingship, because they will see the wonder of His working in you more clearly.

Let me close with what has become increasingly a favorite verse of mine; a verse that reflects my heart and prayer for myself and for each one of you as you live your lives before the world. That verse is found in Acts 4:13; Peter and John having been severely questioned and reprimanded by the Jewish leaders for healing and preaching in Jesus' name, yet they boldly and clearly continued to proclaim Jesus; and this is what was noted by these hostile Jewish leaders concerning them:

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

"Having been with Jesus" who for forty days spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God. Do the people in your life recognize you as having been with Jesus? They do not and cannot see Him as King at this time apart from God's granting them repentance and salvation; but can they see you as having been with Jesus, the King; because you recognize and you acknowledge before all that all things material and all things spiritual are subject to His sovereign rule; and you desire nothing else than to ascribe to the King all glory, honor, power and praise! May this aspect of living as citizens of the kingdom of God be increased in each of our lives!

Soli Deo Gloria

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