

**The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ –
The Kingdom of God (Part 3)
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.

We have been taking a brief rabbit trail to examine what is the content of the teaching Jesus gave to His apostles for the forty days between His resurrection from the dead until His ascension into heaven. According to Acts 1:3, the subject of which Jesus spoke was concerning the kingdom of God. And we noted that if are going to be effective in evangelism; if we are to be the best equipped, the best prepared and the best able to speak to others concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ, then we must live as Kingdom citizens; our lives are to be increasingly in compliance with the rule and reign of God.

But just how does this "kingdom of God" manifest itself? How are we understand and then live with this mindset of God as King? To answer such questions, we need to understand what is meant by this phrase, "kingdom of God." Last week, we gave a simple definition of the word "kingdom" – that is, the sovereign reign and rule of a king. And the more powerful the king of any kingdom; the more sovereign; the more absolute power, authority and control that king will possess. The most powerful of kings do what they want, when they want, how they want, with whom they want, generally without fear of recourse. This is what it means to be king.

From here we moved to look at how the Scriptures reveal God as king. And since God Himself is all-powerful; we should expect and indeed find God portrayed as the unquestionable, majestic, mighty Monarch over all things. Let me remind you that this reigning and ruling of God takes two fundamental forms. Or to say it another way; there are two aspects or realms in which God manifests His kingship. Last week we considered the first of these two realms, noting that the Scriptures reveal God to be King by virtue of creation [repeat]. Because God created all things in the heavens and the earth; He is sovereign, ruler or king over all such things He has created. We find that God is rightful king then over all things material, external. God is King by creation; He is King by genesis; by beginning and sustaining all things by the word of His power; God is King by generation; by generating, or calling all things into existence for His purposes and His glory. This truth, that God is King by creation is well summarized in the testimony of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:35 –

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?'

This is the King of creation; King by creation; the King to whom all creation owes its existence and its life. God's kingdom then extends from the realms of heaven, including the entire angelic host; down the very depths of hell including the fallen angels. God's Kingdom

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encompasses and engulfs all the kingdoms of this earth and while God has determined to allow rebel kings to seemingly have their way at this time; God still controls and one day bring all the nations in submission to Him.

But there is another aspect or realm in which God rules as king. That realm is the spiritual, invisible, transcendent and internal kingdom of God. And what makes this rule so intriguing is that unlike the general rule of God over all things; this internal; spiritual rule is personal; it is intimate. For while God rules over all things universally by right of creation; God also specially rules internally over everyone He has recreated; the new-genesis; the regeneration. Not only does God reign over the kingdoms of the earth; but also for those who have experienced this recreation; God is King over the heart. God is king by creation, universally; but He is also king by recreation, personally, individually over the heart.

We get a glimpse of this in Romans chapter 1 where we are told in verses 18-20 that all people ought to know God and His power to rule by virtue of creation. We read:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

In other words, there is enough revelation in creation to show man that there is a Creator God to whom they ought to show allegiance. This is that universal knowledge of God as King by Creation. But God is also King by recreation; by the changing of people's rebellious hearts to personally know and love Him. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that this recreation is called being born again.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

In Ezekiel 36, the prophet records the words of the Lord and reveals that to be right with God requires God to recreate within a person a heart that can beat with the pulse of the living God. The blessing, the transaction of the New Covenant as brought to us with the first coming of Jesus is declared in verses 25-27

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Do you see God sovereignly, authoritatively recreating a heart for which He may reign and rule over in these verses? God is King of all hearts over which He has recreated. This is what is summarized for us so well in 2 Corinthians 5:17

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

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

The new creature is not one who is characterized by living in rebellion against the King; but as we read a couple of verse up in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, is one under the control of Christ.

14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

So then, we have this universal reign of God over all things, over all matter and over all time. It does not matter whether the things in that kingdom recognize Him as King or not; He is King over all such things. But we also have this internal, specific, and personal reign of God over the hearts and minds of His people. Both of these aspects are rightly referred to in the Bible as the kingdom of God. These are the things that Jesus would have been communicating to His apostles in Acts 1:3.

But the question for us is why; why did Jesus speak concerning the Kingdom of God and what does this mean for us today? The Scriptures are replete with references to God's universal reign one day being fully manifested upon this earth. The popular Christmas Hymn, "Joy to the World" by Isaac Watts, is not actually about the first coming of Jesus, but the second coming, when Jesus comes to judge and rule the earth with truth and grace, with righteousness and equity. Psalm 98:9 declares:

Before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity.

Passage after passage in prophetic parts of the Old Testament declare the coming reign and rule of God the King upon this earth. In Isaiah 2:1-4 we see this universal and full manifestation of the physical, earthly reign of the kingdom of God on earth:

2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

We read of the physical, literal reign of God upon the earth in Isaiah 11 with a clear description of Christ as the King. We see it again in Isaiah 12, 32:15-20; 35:1-2; 60:10-18; and in Isaiah 65:20-23 we read;

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

20 "No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, Or an old man who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of one hundred And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred Will be thought accursed. 21 "They will build houses and inhabit them; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 "They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat; For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands. 23 "They will not labor in vain, Or bear children for calamity; For they are the offspring of those blessed by the Lord, And their descendants with them.

These are hardly descriptions of the eternal state, for no one dies in eternity, and the continuation of offspring tells us that children will be born in this future kingdom. Again there are multitudes of verses in the Old Testament that point to the future, full and all-encompassing reign and rule of God on earth. One final one for us to see is found in Zechariah 14:9-11;

9 And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one. 10 All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. 11 People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.

Jerusalem has not dwelt in security, nor has the Lord revealed Himself over Jerusalem and the earth as King. But it is coming; a future, physical, literal manifestation of the kingdom of God that Revelation 20 tells us six times will last 1000 years.

This is in part what Jesus was speaking about to His apostles in Acts 1:3; the things concerning the Kingdom of God. You see, the expectation of every Jew at the time of Christ was that when Messiah came, He would establish His Kingdom on the earth. Indeed this is what the Old Testament taught. Every Jew was a premillennialist. When John the Baptist came proclaiming as recorded in Matthew 3:2, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand..."** it was his expectation that the literal, earthy kingdom of Messiah was on the brink of beginning. Jesus does not correct that at all for as He begins His ministry, He says the same thing, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** Jesus came to offer Israel the Kingdom; but they refused Jesus as King and rather crucified Him; thus, the physical manifestation of God's universal reign upon the earth was postponed to a future date. Of course, to say postponed here is not to imply that God did not already know Israel would reject Jesus as King any more that it would be right to imply that God did not know that Adam would sin. It was all part of the plan to reveal to Israel her hardness of heart and to spread the offer of salvation to include the Gentiles. We read of this in Romans 11:7-12, 25-28

7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 8 just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." 9 And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. 10 "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE

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NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER." 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

The point then is not that God will not fulfill the promises like those we considered in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, but rather that Israel and the apostles were not Biblically wrong to expect the coming of a literal, earthly kingdom. For even after Jesus taught the apostles on all this for forty days, what question did they ask in Acts 1:6?

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

Are you going to usher in at this time the promised Kingdom? What was Jesus' answer? Was it, "no, you do not yet understand anything that I just taught you?" No, the answer is truly, "not yet." We read in Acts 1:7,

He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority..."

For the issue that Jesus would address throughout His ministry and of which we must see Jesus most concerned about in these opening verses of Acts, is not the coming of future manifestation of the universal reign of God on the earth; that is coming; that will happen. But what is of first importance is how it is a person enters into that kingdom. How do you know if you will be there? And people enter into that kingdom through spiritual means. Again, when Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus in John 3, what did He tell him was necessary in order to see the kingdom of God? He must be "born again". There must be a spiritual recreation before anyone will be allowed to participate in the coming kingdom.

This was the very problem the Pharisees were struggling with in Luke 17. Turn to Luke 17, a passage that is very much like what we have in Acts 1 with a sound understanding that there is a physical, literal, coming Kingdom to be established on the earth as taught in the Old Testament, but a limited understanding as they failed to recognize that to enter that physical kingdom, they must first be part of an invisible kingdom. We read in verses 20-21,

20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be

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observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

In these verse, Jesus is teaching the Pharisees that before the pomp and circumstance that is accompanied and clearly taught in the Old Testament concerning the coming Kingdom (Joel 2), there is a kingdom of which they must be a part of, one that has no fanfare; one that has no grand signs and wonders save one, a changed heart. With the first coming of Jesus, an invisible aspect of the kingdom had been put into motion whose process was not externally observable. This invisible kingdom does not come as a public spectacle to behold but rather resides in the hearts and minds of people. Whenever God becomes the personal, intimate King over a person by salvation, the Kingdom expands, but it is not visible.

The nature of this invisible Kingdom is that it is ***"in your midst"*** or "it is within you." For now, the kingdom of God is not manifested outward, by form of a visible King with a visible government, but rather is it something on the inside; it is internal, not external; it is invisible. This is not what the Pharisees or the apostles were expecting, but it is the truth; that until the coming of the physical manifestation of the rule of God on this earth, we are to know that there is an invisible kingdom that is to be proclaimed. This kingdom comes as one humbles himself before Jesus and lays down his arms declaring allegiance to the one who suffered and died for his sins and who then acknowledges Jesus as King, as Savior and as Lord. The message of the kingdom; the gospel of the kingdom then is not simply that Jesus is coming again to establish an earthly kingdom, but rather it is that Jesus has come to currently, presently reign and rule in repentant hearts. Jesus is the King, we must bow before Him, we must pick up our cross daily, denying ourselves, our wills and our desires, taking up the will and desire of the King of the Kingdom. That is what it means to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God; to live in constant, joyful, intentional compliance with the King and to proclaim His message; that those each of us has lived as a rebel against the King who created us; and because of this rebellion deserve to die; this King is also the merciful King of recreation; who becomes Lord of our hearts as we lay down our arms and humbly surrender to Him.

This is what Phillip preached in Acts 8:12 where we read,

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

What is the message preached here, that God is King and calls you into the Kingdom. To be called into the kingdom is to surrender yourself and to submit to the authority and sovereignty of the King. With this submission comes forgiveness of sins against the King and the granting of eternal life with the King. This King grants to all who come to Jesus the righteousness of God that makes you acceptable to Him and which produces peace between you; once a rebel, but now a son; and the living God.

How can we look forward to participating in the future, literally, earthly reign of Christ on earth? We must first be made citizens of the invisible kingdom that comes through the new birth whereby we obtain that new nature to live for and with God. Have you been born again? Are you, by the new birth, by the recreation, a citizen of the kingdom of God? Are you a subject of the King of recreation? If not, why not? Why not surrender today to the Lordship, the Kingship of

The Church Alive

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Christ; confessing your sins, your waywardness and lostness and see the work of this King in you.

And beloved, for those of you who have walked with Jesus, who know you are born again; like a child growing up in maturity and responsibility, are you maturing in the things of the King? Are you reflecting more and more of kingdom attitudes; of being a faithful subject of the King of the invisible kingdom of the heart as well as of the coming Kingdom? Let us heed the words of Hebrews 12:1-2 which say,

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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