



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

the things we firmly believe

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Study 19: The Kingdom of God (TTWFB, 2:22-24; pp. 228-241)

The Nature of the Kingdom

Ideas that the word ‘kingdom’ bring into our heads: castles, kings and queens; coloured sections on maps; a group of people living under monarch within particular boundaries. These ideas can be misleading. ‘We should think of the Kingdom not so much in terms of a realm with a perimeter, but as “the reign and rule of God”.’ (p. 229)

Biblically there are these elements to the Kingdom of God:

- As Creator, God is King, ruling over all creation—always has been, is now and always will be.
- There has been rebellion by angelic beings and by humanity against the rule of God, yet God is still ruler over all things.
- Everything that happens under the rule of God is to bring creation to the ultimate goal of the Kingdom. Then there shall be no dissent or rebellion; all evil will have been destroyed.
- **Psalm 93** picks up these three elements, using the poetic image of raging seas to speak of the rebellion against the kingdom: vv1-2, 3-4, and 5.

‘Everything is the Kingdom of God, and one day, when the judgments are completed, only that which is truly obedient will constitute the pure Kingdom of God.’ (p. 228)

The Kingdom in History

The story of the Kingdom of God has the following outline:

1. The creational Kingdom of God. All things were created by God—heavenly and earthly and were commissioned to serve Him as King in the particularity of their creatureliness. This was ‘very good’ but the goodness of it was disrupted by the intrusion of Satan’s evil and humanity’s rebellion and sin. Nevertheless, God remained ruler of His creation, bringing His judgments to bear.
2. Israel is God’s Kingdom. God raised up a people through whom He would work to bring about the destruction of evil and the renewal of all things. Thus He would bless the world through Abraham and his descendants. God is the King of Israel, and provision was made for an earthly king under Him. Throughout its life, Israel is given clear indication that what the Lord is doing in them is with a view to the universal kingdom. Prophets were raised up who spoke from the Lord of just how that universal kingdom would be established and all evil vanquished. So they speak of Messiah’s coming, the destruction of death, the judgment of the

world, the coming of salvation, the bringing of eternal bliss, and the inclusion of the Gentiles in the fullness of God's Kingdom.

- 3. The Kingdom comes through Jesus Christ, and is proclaimed to the world by the church.
 - John the Baptist came as a forerunner, announcing that the whole prophetic anticipation of the Kingdom was now about to be completed, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand!' He linked this fulfilment with the forgiveness of sins and with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He then, as the climax of his ministry, pointed to Jesus Christ as the one who would bring the forgiveness of sins (John 1:29) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 1:31-33).
 - Jesus began his public ministry preaching John's message—the Kingdom of God is at hand—but not as its herald but as the promised king/Messiah. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit for the Kingdom work. He also taught concerning the Kingdom of God.
 - His kingly authority to defeat evil is shown in his *rebuking* the evil powers—demons, naturally elements demonically stirred and sicknesses (Luke 4:35, 39; 8:24; Matt. 12:28). These forces had to submit to his authority; he was the Kingdom in action.
 - However, a single triumph to finally defeat all evil and so 'secure' the Kingdom was needed. This triumph was won in the cross and resurrection. In his cross and resurrection Jesus accomplished the following:
 - He defeated all the powers of darkness, sealing their doom.
 - He liberated humanity from evil, guilt, impending wrath and judgment by the propitiation of sins.
 - He took away man's enmity by the love of his sacrifice, thus changing the heart of his elect people from rebellion into glad obedience.
 - The redeemed were freed from fear of Satan and death, and were given hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.
 - God's holiness is vindicated, and the future (=telos) of creation as planned by God is ensured.
 - Those who believe the gospel of the Kingdom and who trust in Christ are brought *into* the Kingdom. That is, they are now glad subjects under God the Father, their king. They will finally inherit the Kingdom—i.e. have a full share in all the future for the creation that the Father has planned. This provides a strong impetus towards holy living, for the one who persists in evil will not enter the Kingdom, now or in its future consummation.
 - The church, formed by the kingly triumph of Christ exists to proclaim the kingdom to the whole world. The message of the Kingdom that the church proclaims is an enlargement of the message of Jesus in the Gospels, for the church proclaims the Atonement that was accomplished through the cross and resurrection. (Jesus spoke less of these things because he had come to do it, not primarily to talk about it!) Linked with the proclamation of the gospel is the suffering of God's people. Just as

Christ suffered in establishing the Kingdom, so his people suffer in proclaiming it. Acts 14:22—It is through many sufferings that we enter the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Thess. 1:4-5).

- The Kingdom is not established using the principles of power in this rebellious age. Rather, the power of the Kingdom comes through seeming weakness—death, service, sacrifice, love. Yet these ‘weaknesses’ are the most potent forces in the creation. See Philippians 2:6-11.
- 4. The completed Kingdom comes at the end of the age. In the current time, Christ is putting down all the enemies (1 Cor. 15:24-28) so that at the end he may hand the Kingdom to the Father. This is linked with the proclamation of the gospel by the people of God to the ends of the earth. At the end though, the final judgment comes with the return of Christ. The victory of the cross and resurrection is worked out in the final defeat of all evil, which is destroyed and taken to eternal judgment. Those in humanity who have resisted the gospel likewise share in this judgment. Then, all that is, is pure, holy, without blemish, good and true. Revelation 21ff paints the picture of this. There is no place any longer for rebellion. All that is, is *in* the Kingdom.

The Coming of the Kingdom

Christ does not build the Kingdom—the Kingdom always has been. In his death and resurrection he has asserted the reality of the Kingdom. What Christ’s builds is his Church, that group of people who are *in* the Kingdom and who now with him proclaim the Kingdom. We are not extending the Kingdom—already God is King of all the earth.

‘The Kingdom of God is really the sovereignty of God working in history, drawing it to the plan and goal that God has for His creation... As Creator, God is faithful (1 Pet. 4:19), which means He will not betray His creation or give it over to evil powers. Defeating evil in Christ, He brings His *telos* to its planned fulfilment. This is, of course, through redemption.’ (p. 239)

‘We see then that at no time has God been a helpless King or Creator... [B]y the way of love and redemption...he brings all things to that end wherein His elect people are established, His true character is vindicated, and His Kingdom is established forever.’ (p. 239)

‘The Kingdom has always been. The Kingdom was there in Israel. The Kingdom was yet to come. It came in Christ and was secured. The Kingdom is yet to come.’ (p. 240) This coming is on a day set by the Father, that not even the Son knows. And for all its mystery, it is the day that contains all of our hope and desire. Hence we pray ‘Thy Kingdom come.’