

The Kingdom of God

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[0 : 0 0] is to turn for a short while to the book of Acts and the first chapter, but I want you to keep your finger on the chapter we have just read together, John chapter 18. I just want to read the first few verses of Acts chapter 1. The book of Acts was authored by Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, and he refers to the Gospel narrative, the Gospel that he had written in the first verse of this first chapter of the book of Acts. Acts chapter 1, verse 1. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God, and so on. Particularly these last words in verse 3, where we read that Jesus, he presented himself alive, and we read at the end of verse 3 that he spoke to the disciples about the kingdom of God. That's during his last 40 days on earth. So I want to speak about

Jesus, and I want to speak about the kingdom to which Jesus was referring. What we find very interesting here after his resurrection, at the beginning of the book of Acts, we are reminded that Jesus was continuing effectively what he had been doing before he had given himself as a sacrifice on the cross. And that is, he was speaking about the kingdom of God. You'll find many references, particularly in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, of Jesus speaking about the kingdom of God, and how he spoke about what the kingdom of God was like, using parables to try and explain that. So the kingdom of God is the central theme of the preaching of Jesus. And in a very real sense, after Jesus left, when he had ascended to heaven, this is what he charged the apostles to do, to spread the news of, the good news of the kingdom of God. And we have to unpack what that phrase means.

It trips off our lips very easily. But what do we learn about it? There are various things, lots of things that we are taught about it, particularly in the New Testament scriptures.

And of course, going back to the Old Testament scriptures, the kingdom of God was typified by God's people, the Israelites, down through the centuries of the Old Testament. It was a type of the people of God, of the kingdom of God, because of the kings that ruled over the children of Israel. And perhaps one of the best types of the king of this kingdom was King Solomon, who is like the other kings, particularly David, and the others, and particularly the good kings, those who followed after the ways of the Lord.

[4 : 0 1] We know that there were many kings who were disobedient to the Lord. But this kingdom of the, the kingdom of the Old Testament was a type, if you like, it was a shadow of the kingdom that really was to exist. So this idea of a divine kingdom, which is what it was to be, it's referred to often in the Old Testament, in the history books of the Old Testament, in prophecy, and we find it also referred to in the Psalms, which we sing. And Jesus himself clearly referred to this kingdom in the gospel accounts, as I've already mentioned. And the apostle Paul, although not very often, he also makes reference to the kingdom of the Lord. When he was writing to, what was it, speaking about being taken away from the dominion of darkness and being translated to the kingdom of the son, the dear son of God, that's what happens when a Christian, when a man or a woman or a boy and girl is converted, when the spirit of regeneration takes, makes his effect, we are translated from the kingdom of, from the dominion of darkness to the dominion of the kingdom, kingdom of the influence of the spirit of God and of the king of that kingdom.

The disciples are curious about the next stage of the ministry of Jesus. They're wondering what's going to happen. He had risen from the dead. They were still bewildered by all that had happened. And as we approach Easter time in the time of year, I think it's very pointed that Jesus, having risen from the dead, the disciples were still confined to things earthly. They were very much with their eyes focused, thinking that Jesus had risen from the dead and was going to set up, still set up, still

set up an earthly kingdom. This was in their own minds. They expected an immediate reinstatement of an earthly monarchy by Jesus over which he would be the sovereign.

And one of the things we find when we, when we look closely about the idea of the kingdom of heaven in the Bible, the kingdom of God particularly, there are various aspects that we can associate with it.

For example, we can look at the kingdom of God and we find that it is not what the apostles, the disciples were thinking. It's not an earthly dominion that Jesus is speaking to. It's a dominion that belongs somewhere else. If we go back to what we were reading in John chapter 18, look at what Jesus said to Pilate. Pilate in verse 34 of John chapter 18. When Pilate asked him, are you the king of the Jews? Jesus answered, do you say this of your own accord? Did others say it to you about me? Now there's Jesus being referred to as king, king of the Jews, the Jewish nation, which they were in their minds just confining themselves to. But later on, a few verses down, Pilate answered, am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done? And Jesus answered. And these words that Jesus answered are very poignant. He says, my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world. So he speaks there about the nature of the kingdom on the one hand and the actions of the subjects of that kingdom on the other hand. He says, my kingdom is not of this world.

He doesn't go into detail about that. But the rest of the Bible tells us a lot about what Jesus meant when he said, my kingdom is not of this world. And then he said, if my kingdom were of this world, we're talking here about different values. What some commentators refer to as kingdom values, that is the kingdom of God values, and worldly values. They're absolutely diametrically opposed to each other. The values of the world, and the values of the kingdom. That's why Paul and his companions were accused of turning the world upside down. That's why they were accused of doing what was contrary to the thinking processes of the people of the time. And that's what the kingdom of God does. As Jesus himself said, hinting at the nature of the kingdom, the first shall be last, the least shall be the greatest.

[9 : 46] So there are the two, the type of contrast that the values of these two kingdoms bring to our minds. the disciples of God the Father, to whom he is subservient in kingdom matters. When he came to the world, he came as a servant. And Isaiah calls him the suffering servant. And that is what he was before he died. And in a very real sense, although Jesus has risen from the dead, he still serves his people as their great high priest at the right hand, having ascended into the into heaven to the the majesty on high. Now having been speaking about the kingdom as not being of this world, the kingdom, note it's very interesting that Jesus is, he defines it in a negative way. It's not of this world. And reading between the lines, what he's saying is, it's from somewhere else. And the Bible makes it perfectly clear that the kingdom, its origins, its values have their origins in the bosom of God the Father in heaven.

This is a glorious kingdom. And what we can learn from it in the first instance, and there are many other things, if we had time, we could look at. The most important thing, I think, that belongs to this kingdom is that it is spiritual. And that's spiritual with a capital S, referring to the divine nature of the spirituality of this kingdom. It is holy spiritual in character. And that's the way it was to be revealed after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. 50 days after Jesus had risen from the dead. He had been with them for 40 days. Then he left them to ascend up to heaven. And 10 days later, there was this Pentecostal outpouring outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And this was to characterize the nature of the kingdom from then on, right down through the ages. And that's not to say that it didn't have a spiritual character before that. If we go back to the Old Testament, there were external rituals being carried out.

But God the Holy Spirit was present with his people then as well. But here in New Testament times, there was this special outpouring, this Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Going back to Pilate's conversation with Jesus, and focusing on this spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. This conversation gives us some insight at least into what this means.

And when we come to Acts chapter 1, Jesus speaks of this kingdom. He doesn't refer to it directly as spiritual, but that is what he wanted the disciples to know. And later on in the chapter, he reminds them that the Spirit would come and that he would be outpoured with power.

[13 : 27] Now when we say the word spiritual, we can be very glib about the use of that word. And that's why I like to qualify the use of this word by using the capital S spiritual, which points straight

away to the divine nature of the kingdom. And we don't just mean non-material, although that is true of it.

It's not just that. But we mean that it is Holy Spirit, the kingdom referred to is Holy Spirit directed. Holy Spirit. This is the central nature of the kingdom. The Spirit of God outpoured in Pentecost. And of course, active in all that is done by the Spirit are the Father and the Son. There is nowhere but the three persons of the Godhead are at work in the work of salvation.

And because it is Holy Spirit directed, he is the agent of the salvation that the proclamation of the word of God will be used, when proclaimed under the Spirit's power will effect as God wills, the salvation of his people.

[14 : 58] It's like a seed, the word of God. The apostles were charged in the great commission to go into every part of the world. And being spiritual in nature, it's this spiritual seed that was to be sown.

And from the book of Acts onwards, the church, the growth of this spiritual kingdom can be seen. It's almost like a plant. Something of an agricultural nature is taking place to explain to us what is happening deep down in the lives of individuals and in the lives of collective people as the churches of God grow from place to place, as we see. It's very interesting also, I'm sure you've heard commentators speak of this before.

Or the book of Acts is very interestingly called the Acts of the Apostles. But perhaps behind these words, the book of Acts is more the Acts of the Holy Spirit through what the Apostles were enabled to do.

It wasn't their own doing. It was the doing of the Lord and in power as well. So this work, this growth of the kingdom, this germinating of the kingdom, if you like, it's like a seed. It yields a certain type of flower, a plant or a tree, a vegetable, whatever it is, it has a nature. And its nature is not from this world. The values, the characteristics that belong to this kingdom are not what we see round about us in our varied lands.

Now there are other things that I could have spent time on. For example, the kingdom of God is, by all accounts, it didn't happen just at the snap of a finger. It's taken time for the church of God to grow, for the gospel to be broadcast and proclaimed and for it to be propagated throughout the world.

[17 : 18] Here we are about 2,000 years on from the time of the gospel and the gospel is still, as God allows and as God has purposed, the gospel is still being proclaimed until that point in time when everyone will be brought in, when every person, every person that God has chosen to be saved will be brought.

Now nobody knows when that time is, but as long as we are alive, as long as this world exists, and as long as there are people to be saved by God, the gospel will go on and on and on being proclaimed.

And that's what we have to do. And that is what the purpose of the church is, to proclaim the merits of the Savior and to proclaim the good news of the gospel.

It's interesting how, going back to the Old Testament again, we find references to the work of the Spirit, the growth of this kingdom, again being referred to in an agricultural metaphor.

In Jeremiah, it's like a tree that grows. And Psalm 1, like a tree that grows near planted by a river, starting off with a seed. And then the roots go down and the shoot comes up.

[18 : 44] Is that not the way the kingdom of God functions? Is that not those who are subjects of the kingdom of God, they have the roots within their heart, and the shoots, the fruit of the root, the nourishment that they are given ought to be shown in their lives.

Paul the Apostle speaks of this fruit as the fruit of the Spirit. So that the kingdom of God is to be understood as the work of the Spirit of God.

It's an influence, if you like, the reign of God, dynamically, in human history, through Jesus Christ. It works, it starts off with the individual.

Remember Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus. Born again. And that when you multiply that amongst people and in different eras, this is the way the kingdom is being built up.

With the king at its head. And that is what we always have to bear in mind. That the kingdom of God is effectively the church of God.

[19 : 58] It is the church militant, but particularly the church invisible. We don't know who God's people are, really. Only God knows that.

But the kingdom of God are those who are the subjects of this kingdom, who have tasted and seen that God is good, who have been brought from darkness to light, and who are now serving in the kingdom as the servants of the king.

There's a man who is with me in Dundee. He's a lecturer. He does part-time lecturing in Hebrew in the Free Church College.

And whenever he writes letters, and I admire him for this, he always signs his emails of, in the service of the king.

And wouldn't it be good if we could all have that sort of idea in our own minds, that if you are a Christian here today, you are a servant of the king.

[21 : 06] You are a prince. You are, as we read in Peter's letters, you are a special person, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood.

It's amazing, the titles, the names that are attributed to those who are the subjects of this kingdom.

And when we pray in the Lord's Prayer for Jesus, may his kingdom come, I think we're talking about asking for God to bring his spiritual influence to bear in the hearts of people who are already subjects of the kingdom, but to have more of that kingly influence in their lives.

And it's a saving influence, saved by King Jesus. And we pray that his kingdom would come in salvation for those who have not yet tasted of that salvation.

May your kingdom come. Your kingdom come. And following on from that, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven, giving us some idea of where the origins of this kingdom have come from.

[22 : 28] May the heavenly influence come down to earth as well. And that's what we find happening at times of awakening and revival.

God hears the prayers of his people. And when he sovereignly works mightily by his spirit, opening hearts and eyes and enabling people to see more of their need for a savior, weeping because of an awareness of sinfulness and coming to the king in repentance, believing that he will give forgiveness.

The kingdom then is Holy Spirit driven. And Jesus had promised that he wouldn't leave his disciples as orphans. He wouldn't leave them alone, even though he was going to die, rise again and go away in a body, a human body that he didn't have until the Holy Spirit made the conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

But he's going to come back and he's going to come to judge the world. The Holy Spirit would come then at the time of Pentecost with power into the lives of the apostles who were to be the pillars of the early church.

And what would happen as the word of God was proclaimed, and we see that in various ways, particularly at the time of Pentecost itself, many would be brought under the power of the Spirit and be born again into the kingdom of the Son of God.

[24 : 19] The kingship of Jesus would be evident in lives. And here's a question that you and I, who profess to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who profess to be princes and princesses.

It's a real profound thought, that. We don't attribute that to ourselves very often. But that is what the word of God teaches us, that if you are a Christian, you are a prince or a princess.

You have been adopted into a royal family by the work of the Holy Spirit. And you have been endowed with kingly virtues.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom that has been bought with a price. We have to ask ourselves, am I a subject of this kingdom?

I have to ask myself, we all have to, who is ruling my life at this moment? Who is enthroned on the throne of my life?

[25 : 35] How is my life being directed? What is my reason for existing? Going back to the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the very first question, what is my reason for living?

Is it to glorify God and to enjoy him forever? Is that your reason? Or are you living for yourself? Or do you not think that you merit even being invited to enter this kingdom?

Nobody is worthy to come into the kingdom. But the willingness of the Savior to receive, repent, penitent sinners, it's quite amazing.

It's quite amazing that he receives those who are limping like Manasseh to the table of the king. And that's because of what he himself has done for us.

It's nothing to do with me, nothing to do with us. So who is it that rules over our lives and the course it is now taking? And why, if we haven't, have we not submitted to the perfect, to the just, to the

