

# The Kingdom of Christ

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[ 0 : 00 ] Where of Jesus Christ, the child who was born to us, the son who's given to us, it is written, of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

According to the dictionary, a kingdom is a country ruled by a king or by a queen. In the Old Testament, kings David and Solomon ruled over the ancient kingdom of Israel.

Israel was a nation united and ruled by kings. The proper name for our nation is the United Kingdom, and we are ruled over by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Now, on Christmas Day at 3 p.m., families in the UK gather around their TV sets to listen to the queen's speech, her encouragements for her kingdom, and given her Christian dignity, we are never disappointed.

[ 1 : 32 ] Many, if not all of us here, have been brought up with that unbreakable connection between the queen's speech and Christmas Day, between royalty and Advent, between kingdom and Christmas.

However, the real kingdom we celebrate at Christmas is the kingdom of Christ, the spiritual rule and authority of the risen and exalted Christ through his word in his world.

That child, born of the Blessed Virgin and laid in a manger, was the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Wise men from the East brought him gifts, and they bowed down to worship him.

Angels adored him, and shepherds praised him, because he, the Christ King, has a spiritual rule and reign greater than any earthly sovereign.

To him has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. In this passage, Isaiah 9 verses 1 through 7, a passage we know all so well because we read it every Christmas time, our Lord is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[ 3 : 04 ] This is who our Christ is. This is our King. And he rules over the greatest of all kingdoms, a kingdom composed not of a thousand or of a million, but of a countless multitude, growing hourly, all of whom have God as their Father and Christ as their Savior.

But what kind of kingdom is this which was begun in a stable in Bethlehem and will be celebrated across the world in just three weeks' time?

In Isaiah 9 verse 7, we hear it described in five ways. Peaceful, growing, firm, righteous, and everlasting.

There is in many of our minds, by virtue of the Queen's Christmas speech, an unbreakable connection between royalty and Advent.

But now Isaiah tells us that as Christians, we are to form the ultimate connection between kingdom and Christmas. And that common thread is Christ.

[ 4 : 17 ] First of all then, from this verse, the kingdom of Christ is peaceful. The kingdom of Christ is peaceful.

Having revealed that that child given to us, that son born to us, is a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Isaiah now says of him, of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.

The kingdom of the Wonderful Counselor will be a kingdom of peace, a kingdom of biblical shalom. The English word peace means many different things.

The absence of hostilities, the presence of tranquility, and so on. But in the original Hebrew language, the word shalom, we translate as peace, is deeper still.

The closest we can get to it is the talk of wholeness, the fulfillment, the satisfaction of the whole person in every way.

[ 5 : 24 ] And for the Hebrews, peace wasn't just a feeling. It was far more than that. It corresponded to mind, soul, and body fulfillment and satisfaction. That sense that, well, life can't get any better than this.

So what do we see in the face of that child given to us, that son born to us? We see the ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction of all our deepest longings as human beings.

We long to be free from guilt and shame. And in this child, our longings for absolution and transformation are satisfied.

We long to know what our lives mean. That we're not just some kind of random space dust. And in this son born to us, our longings for meaning and for worth are fulfilled.

In these and a thousand other areas, in the face of that child given to us, we're ultimately fulfilled and satisfied. You see, in using this word shalom, the Hebrews wanted to speak about wholeness.

[ 6 : 42 ] The wholeness of the individual human being. A man is not a disembodied spirit. He is not an emotionless robot or a complicated molecular machine.

He is mind, body, and soul. Modern medicine has rediscovered this Hebrew notion of peace. It has been estimated that up to 40% of all visits to the GP in Britain today are stress-related. In other words, modern medicine is recognizing that a man is a hole.

And that if one of his faculties is broken, the others will soon break down also. If his mind breaks down, he will experience the crushing of his emotions.

He may also experience physical symptoms. You see, shalom, far from being a quaint concept, belonging only to the Old Testament, is now being demonstrated for what it really is.

[ 7 : 45 ] The truth about who we are as human beings. We need to be whole with every faculty of our beings working as it should.

But in using this word shalom, the Hebrews also wanted to speak of wholeness in relationship. That famous English writer, John Donne, once said, of course, no man is an island.

And shalom is wholeness in our relationships. Our relationships at home and at work. Our relationships with God. Our relationships with our fellow human beings.

Our relationships with Christians and non-Christians alike. And again, I know that broken relationships can lead to a horde of strange symptoms. Can't tell you how many restless nights of sleep and sore heads I've experienced on account of broken relationships.

I'm sure it's the same for all of you. Of course, the cardinal relationship we enjoy as Christians is that which we have with God himself.

[ 8 : 52 ] Flowing from that relationship comes our ability to relate to others with gentleness and meekness and humility, forgiveness and compassion and love.

In the Hebrew mind, without that fundamental relationship between a man and his God being fulfilled and satisfied, there is no hope either for personal, individual wholeness or wholeness in our relationships with other people.

In other words, for Isaiah, as he wrote these words, our relationship to God must come first. If we want to experience true peace for ourselves, we need to be reconciled to God first.

To be at peace with him first. Because only then can we be at peace with ourselves and with others. And so in the face of that child born to us.

We have all the answers to the problems of a humanity at war with itself and with God. Because this child will make peace between God and man by giving himself upon the cross to take away all our sins.

[ 10 : 05 ] As we read, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them.

In the Hebrew mind, a man's relationship with God was fundamental to his personal and relational wholeness. And in the face of this son given to us in the stable in Bethlehem, before whom the wise men bowed, we have peace with God.

We are reconciled to God. We're at one with God. This is the kingdom of Christ. A kingdom where the king has given himself for his subjects.

Where the king has given himself on the cross to make us whole and to give us shalom, satisfaction and fulfillment. You see, the peace of Christmas isn't the angelic scene of a family gathered round the tree in Christmas morning, opening presents, all smiles and laughter.

The real peace of Christmas is the kingdom of the Christ in whom our fundamental relationship with God has been restored.

[ 11 : 18 ] And therefore, in whom our relationship both with ourselves as individuals and with others can also be restored. He is the prince of peace.

And the kingdom over which he rules is peaceful because his peace fills his subjects. He rules his subjects in every way. We live in a world characterized not by peace, but by war.

On an individual, on a societal, on a national and international level, we fight and struggle against God and against one another. To hear the word of Isaiah about the kingdom of Christ is like cold water being poured out on dry ground.

There is peace available in the gospel of Jesus to all who will believe. As individuals and societies and nations believe, peace reigns over us.

The peace of Christ. The peace of Christ. Is that such a bad thing, really and truly? After a lifetime of war, isn't this what the weary warrior needs and longs to hear?

[ 12 : 40 ] Peace and goodwill to all men through Christ our King. The kingdom of Christ is peaceful.

And secondly, according to this verse, it is growing. It is growing. The prophet Isaiah, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says of the peaceful kingdom of Christ, of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.

In his public ministry, Jesus often spoke about the growth of his kingdom. He compared it to the smallest of all seeds, which grows into the largest of all trees.

He told a parable about a seed being sown on the earth and bringing forth a harvest, a hundred times that which was sown. The kingdom of Christ is growing.

Of its increase, there shall be no end. It will continue to grow and to grow and to grow. Throughout this coronavirus pandemic, we've heard of this mysterious thing called the R number.

[ 13 : 50 ] The number of people an infected person will infect in turn. When the R number is over one, the virus is out of control, the spread is exponential.

So everything our government has done, and we support them in this, is with a view to suppressing the R number and keeping it below one. And what Isaiah 9 verse 7 is telling us is that the R number of the kingdom of Christ has, is, and will always be above one.

But the growth of the kingdom of Christ is assured that the gospel of Jesus Christ is highly contagious and that more and more people are experiencing for themselves every day the shalom gospel peace of Christ.

How guilty we are of despair, of living in the so-called day of small things mentality, and of assuming that the government of Christ is in decline.

How dare we impugn the rule of our king? It is not declining. It is growing.

[ 15 : 04 ] Like the smallest seed placed into the ground, it is growing into the largest of all trees until finally, as we read in Revelation chapter 7, a great multitude, which no man can number, will be gathered before the throne of God in heaven, their hearts having been washed clean by their king.

Our Prince of Peace is the wonderful counselor, and his reign grows in the hearts of the children of men as through his word he subdues the nations to himself.

There is, according to Revelation chapter 1, figuratively, a sharp sword protruding from the mouth of the exalted Christ, the sword of his word, the sword of his gospel, which overcomes the rebelliousness of the nations against him.

Do you want to be part of something that's growing, something which has a real future? Then be part of the kingdom of Christ because the R number is growing still.

In fact, the gospel today is growing faster than at any other point in history. The news won't broadcast it.

[ 16 : 24 ] The media take delight in the failures of the church. But God's news is more reliable by far. He is bringing to himself millions and millions of people.

And in Christ, they experience of themselves the true shalom of Christmas, the government of our wonderful counselor, King Jesus. Tell me, are you genuinely laboring under the misapprehension that Christianity is in decline, that it belongs to this world's past and definitely not its future?

Think again. But at every level of British society, the gospel is taking firmer root than ever it has done before. Politics, sport, media, university, school, college.

That's in Great Britain. But the growth of the church here is dwarfed by its growth across the world. It is estimated that 15% of the world's population today is evangelical Christian.

In 1901, when the population of the world was a tenth of what it is today, that number was estimated to be 1.5%.

[ 17 : 37 ] But now, with a tenfold increase in population, it is 15%. There has been a ten times growth in 100 years.

That's huge. And it's grown in places that we would never have suspected it would. In Korea, in Latin America, in China, in Iran, even in Israel.

The word of Isaiah has been fulfilled before our very eyes of the increase of Jesus' government and peace. There will be no end.

Third, the kingdom of Christ is firm. Is firm. Isaiah proceeds to describe the inner workings of the kingdom of Christ, this kingdom of peace and growth.

He says, on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it. The kingdom of Christ will grow in its firmness and its solidity, its strength and its security.

[ 18 : 54 ] Behind our home, your house, the manse, is a great tree. It is nearly 70 feet tall and its trunk is probably 12 feet or so in circumference.

Not even the strongest wind can blow that tree down. It is one of the most magnificent trees I have ever seen. It stands firm against all the elements.

The kingdom of Christ is like that tree, so firm, so established, such that nothing and nobody can ever topple it.

The winds of this world's antagonism may blow, and they may blow hard, but the kingdom of Christ stands firm. The winds of this world's violence may blow, and they may blow fiercely, but the kingdom of Christ stands firm.

The kingdom of Christ stood firm against the emperors of Rome, so driven to destroy it. It stood firm against the stony formalism of dark age religion.

[ 20 : 08 ] It stood firm against the enlightened. It stands firm against the winds of extremist religious terrorism. And when Richard Dawkins is just a distant memory and his evangelical atheism, a thing of the dim and distant past, the kingdom of Christ, will continue to grow.

Jesus said of his church, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And why is that? Because he is our mighty God. Jesus, our mighty God.

He himself establishes and upholds his kingdom. He upholds it. He strengthens it. His glory is vested in the growth of his kingdom. The victory has already been won by our Savior on the cross and his resurrection on the third day.

The tree behind our home is home to a large variety of species of wildlife. Many different kinds of bird make their nests and its branches and squiggles run up its trunk.

Different insects find shade under its leafy needles. They're wise enough to know that this huge tree is a safe refuge against the elephants and that in its branches they are secure.

[ 21 : 27 ] Because you make your home when it's safe and secure. You build your nest in a big tree. And as Christians we build our nests in Christ and his gospel.

The largest of all trees having come from the smallest of all seeds. The kingdom of the mighty God. Isn't this where you want to build your nest? Isn't this where you want your security to be?

Contrary to all reports I'm actually not that old. But I'm actually old enough to have witnessed kingdoms growing and kingdoms falling.

Movements rising and movements dying. Fashions change and along with them worldviews change also. What was good yesterday is really bad today.

And what is good today will be really bad tomorrow. But Jesus does not change and his kingdom is forever sure.

[ 22 : 37 ] Is that not one reason we cling by faith to him? Why we drop our anchor on him and why we find our refuge in him? His kingdom is firm and our king is faithful.

Fourth, the kingdom of Christ is righteous. is righteous on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness.

The kingdom of Christ will not merely be peaceful. It shall not merely be growing. It shall not merely be firm. It shall be righteous. It shall be just.

There shall be no inequality or unfairness within this kingdom. Rather, the dignity of the lowest shall be that of the highest and the dignity of the highest shall be that of the lowest. All shall share in the kingdom inheritance of Jesus Christ for just as all entered the kingdom by the grace of the king, so all stay in the kingdom by the grace of the king.

Now, the people of Isaiah's day knew all about inequality and injustice. The rich bought their justice at the hands of Israel's crooked judges.

[ 23 : 56 ] The poor were victims of oppression and extreme poverty. They had no recourse to a higher authority to plead their case. They had to play the cards they were dealt. I often feel that as Christians we're like Mad Don Quixote.

We charge at all the wrong windmills when it comes to social justice. Right now, we're so fixated on the hate crime bill that we forget that according to UNICEF's agreed level of poverty, nearly a third of Scotland's children live below the poverty line.

We are so fixated on sexual deviancy that we forget the tens of thousands of victims of domestic abuse every year in our own city.

The kingdom of Christ is righteous, which means that it holds various injustices in proportion. There will be no unfairness in the kingdom of Christ, none at all. There shall be no unfairness nor inequality within this kingdom.

The dignity of the lowest shall be that of the highest and the highest of the lowest. We live in a world filled with inequalities and injustices. We long for an end to them all.

[ 25 : 16 ] We pray for an end to them all and we know that our great king is righteous and these days of unrighteousness and inequality and wickedness are numbered. there is no future and there is no future in them for the future even as it has begun to break into our experience today is Jesus' righteousness and holiness.

People die on Christmas Day. Hearts break on Christmas Day. Oppression continues on Christmas Day. But the Christ whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day is the king of righteousness.

Jehovah Tzidkenu and even now if we believe and trust in him our hearts change. We no longer want to walk in wickedness but righteousness.

No longer in hate but in love. No longer in hypocrisy but in sincerity. Isn't that what you want? Not just for Christmas but the whole year round. The righteousness of Christ changes our hearts and as a result it changes societies and nations.

The change starts here and now with us. A change of heart marked by faith in Christ. And then lastly and very briefly the kingdom of Christ is everlasting.

[ 26 : 44 ] Everlasting. Human beings are so very limited. The older I get the more I realize my own personal limitations.

The technical term for this is that we are finite beings. We are limited by these dimensions of time and space. It's impossible for us really to understand the meaning of the word infinity.

And that's why it's so difficult for us to take in what Isaiah says to us in verse 7. From this time forth and forevermore. You see the word forever may just have eight letters in the English language but it's perhaps the biggest word in all the languages of men.

The biggest and most difficult to understand. We have no experience of forever you see. we have only experience of being born of living and of dying.

We have no understanding of this word eternity. Kingdoms come and kingdoms go empires rise and empires fall but the kingdom of Christ is rising and rising and it will never fall.

[ 28 : 04 ] It was once said of the British Empire empire that we were so large the sun never set on the British Empire. Time has shrunk our empire so that what was once said of us can be said no longer.

That can never be said of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of that child born in the stable in Bethlehem and laid in a manger. His kingdom begun there in such humility, lowliness, and anonymity will never ever end.

There's a grain of sand on that seashore and it represents the average lifetime of a human being. But on that beach there are 10 million grains of sand.

10 million lifetimes of a human being. Think how long that beach is. And then realize that that length of beach is just one more grain of sand in an even bigger beach.

And then a bigger beach. And then a bigger beach. And so on forever. The kingdom of Christ is everlasting.

[ 29 : 23 ] But it begins here in a stable in Bethlehem with a newborn child. A royal child. The king who rules over a kingdom which is peaceful, growing, firm, righteous, everlasting.

This is the Christmas message. This is the kingdom I'm sure of which all of us want to be part. And we can be right here, right now, by faith in the king.

by faith in the king, that in his birth, life, death, and resurrection is the forgiveness of our sin and our eternal life.

Behold our king. Bow down and worship him. to Gom and God hold up.

Bye. Bye. Bye.