

"Your Kingdom Come"

Orientation – The Biblical Concept of the Kingdom

Psalm 2:6 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Isaiah 9:6,7 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Daniel 7:13, 14 *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Matthew 4:17,23 *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ... Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Matthew 21:43 *"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*

John 18:36 *Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."*

Luke 22:18 *"For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."*

Hebrews 1:8 *But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.*

Revelation 11:15 *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

Background: The Biblical View of Reality

The “Story” of Job

This well-known story was given, in part, to indicate the Biblical view of reality – what is “out there.” As one reflects on the story one become aware of (1) God and His plan, (2) Satan and his plan, (3) Job and his trial – which indicated the conflict between God and Satan. These three spheres of reality are still operative today.

If we were a friend of Job all we would “see” would be Job and his trial. We would not be able to understand what was happening to Job without an awareness of two largely invisible kingdoms: God and His plan and Satan and his plan.

To begin at the beginning the Bible indicates God created angels, the universe, including mankind, and it was good. The angels and mankind were created with free will in that God wanted them and us to receive His love and love Him in return.

Free will meant that angels and man, while created good, were given the ability – a potential – to choose not to love God. The one who is now Satan actualized that potential and evil came into existence. When mankind was created Satan knew how to trick Eve into making the choice he had made. The effects of these choices are well known: some angels followed Satan and some did not, entire mankind is in a fallen state of death, and the universe under judgment. *The whole world is under the control of the evil one* (1 John 5:19).

Today the Kingdom of God is an invasion into this world of the enemy. It is an invasion to rescue mankind through redemptive grace, to defeat sin and death, and eventually separate Satan, his kingdom, his followers, and all evil into a sphere of reality, created by God, and called Hell (Lake of Fire).

Corroborating Passages

Genesis 3:15 *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

John 14:30 *I (the Lord Jesus) will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,*

2 Corinthians 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Hebrews 2:14,15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

Ephesians 2:1,2 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

Ephesians 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Colossians 1:13 *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,*

Revelation 11:15 *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

Definitions/Descriptions of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God means primarily, the rule of God, the divine kingly authority.

The Kingdom of God is the divine authority and rule given by the Father to the Son.

The Kingdom of God is the reign of God in Christ destroying all that is hostile to the divine rule.

The Kingdom of God is the redemptive rule of God in Christ, defeating Satan and the powers of evil, and delivering men from the sway of evil.

The Kingdom of God is not an abstract principle, the Kingdom *comes*, it is God's rule actively invading the Kingdom of Satan.

The Kingdom of God comes at the end of the age, but the Kingdom has come into history. The redemptive rule of God has now invaded the realm of Satan to deliver men from the power of evil.

The Kingdom of God is supernatural. It is the dynamic activity of God's rule. Only the supernatural act of God can destroy Satan, defeat death, raise the dead in incorruptible bodies to inherit the blessing of the Kingdom and transform the world order.

The mystery of the Kingdom is that before the eschatological consummation, before the destruction of Satan, before the age to come, the kingdom of God has entered this age and invaded the Kingdom of Satan in spiritual power to bring to men in advance the blessings of forgiveness, life, and righteousness which belong to the age to come.

The Kingdom of God is not the Church. We may say the Kingdom of God creates the Church. The redemptive rule of God brings into being a new people who receive the blessings of the divine rule.

The Kingdom also works through the Church. The Disciples preached the Kingdom of God and performed signs of the Kingdom. The powers of the Kingdom were operative in and through them. Jesus said that He would give to the Church the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven with the power to bind and loose.

When the Church has proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom in all the world as witness to all nations, Christ will return and bring the Kingdom in glory.

(Selected from the article by George Ladd on “Kingdom of God” in Elwell, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*).

The Essentials of the Kingdom of God

The Centrality of the King – Jesus Christ

Psalm 2:6,10-12 *"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. ...Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."*

Matthew 17:5 *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

It is true, as many have pointed out – the kingdom is Jesus Christ. All facets of revelation and redemption are found in Him. His many titles all point to the way He is at the center of all of God’s work. No wonder He said *"I am the way the truth and the life"*
John 14:6.

When we fail to *"Tremble and kiss the Son"* and *"Listen to him"* we enter into a relationship with the Holy Spirit in which He is *"Grieved," "Resisted,"* and *"Quenched"* (KJV). To the degree we neglect the supremacy of the Lord Jesus **in practice** – to that degree – the Kingdom of God, in our own life and ministry, becomes more of a religion than relationship and more of an organization than an organism.

Neglecting the Lord Jesus in our daily priorities and ministry – is exactly what the enemy seeks to achieve. He cannot work against the Son of God directly but is very successful in working against Him in our daily life and ministry. Due to the way Satan always works through deception – we are rarely able to discern our loss of love, faith, joy, peace and power on our own. *"Samson ...did not know that the LORD had left him."*
1 Samuel 16:20

The Importance of the “*Gospel of the Kingdom.*”

Matthew 4:23 *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (KJV)*

1 Corinthians 15:2-4 *By this gospel you are saved ... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

The message of the Kingdom of God, as Paul clearly shows, is threefold: Jesus Christ, His Word, and His work. A belief in these three foundation stones of the Kingdom and their practice within the Biblical framework is what makes one an Evangelical. All neglect of these three – in practice – has disastrous effects: the Church become sick, barren, confused, and weak.

It was Soren Kierkegaard who said, “*Christianity is the profoundest wound that can be inflicted upon a man, calculated on the most dreadful scale to collide with everything...*” (**Attack on Christendom**, The Beacon Press, 1957, page 258)

The Plan of our Father – in His Kingdom

Psalm 2:6 *"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."*

Isaiah 28:16 *So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."*

Matthew 21:42, 43 *Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*

Colossians 1:16, 18 *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him ...so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*

There is only one all-inclusive plan for in the Bible: Our Father has made an unchangeable and powerful decree – that He will exalt His Son, the Lord Jesus. All creation, every angel, every person, and all events, both in time and eternity are included in that plan.

It is a great honor to be included in our Father’s plan. He is the One Who has established and declared the supremacy of His Son. We must make decisive and far-reaching decisions to make our Father’s # 1 priority our daily priority.

Much of the weakness in our daily life and ministry can be traced back to a failure to implement this truth in honesty, faith and love. All of us are extremely vulnerable to taking the control of our life and ministry away from the Lord Jesus for selfish and prideful reasons. That vulnerability to sin is often exploited by Satan. We need only consider the downfall of the one called Satan and the downfall of Adam and Eve to recognize that pattern. John testifies that it is also the very pattern with which the world operates
(1 John 5:19).

We must ask ourselves the question: “Are we producing the fruit of the Kingdom?”

The Manifestation of the Kingdom of God – in the Church

Matthew 16:16-19 *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

George Ladd, in his *A Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1975) summarized the relationship of the Kingdom and the Church under five headings.

“The Church is not the Kingdom.”

“The Kingdom creates the Church.”

“The Church witnesses to the Kingdom.”

“The Church is the instrument of the Kingdom.”

“The Church is the custodian of the Kingdom.” (Pages 111-116)

“It is therefore the church’s duty to display in an evil age of self-seeking, pride and animosity the life and fellowship of the Kingdom of God and of the Age to Come. This display of Kingdom life is an essential element in the witness of the church to the Kingdom of God.” (Page 115)

Some Characteristics of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is primarily spiritual

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14:17

The Kingdom of God is a radical-redemptive activity of God.

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Luke 9:1,2

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 1 Corinthians 4:20

The Kingdom of God is a call to repentance

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Matthew 3:1,2

The Kingdom of God is an invasion into enemy territory

But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. Luke 11:20

The Kingdom of God is characterized by great value

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46

The Kingdom of God is characterized by spiritual fruitfulness

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." Matthew 21:43

The Kingdom of God is a divine-human cooperative

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:19 (See also Matthew 18:18-20)

The Kingdom of God demands a radical – honest response

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell...." Mark 9:43-47

Summary – Conclusion

(The following is taken from Robert E. Webber, *Ancient Future Faith*, Baker Books, 1999, pages 53-55; 150-152) (Permission to quote received)

The Kingdom of God Is among You

The result of the cosmic work of Christ is that the kingdom of God, God's rules over all things, is now manifest. When Jesus began to preach, his message was the kingdom of God. Although John the Baptist preceded Jesus and had already preached the coming of the kingdom, Jesus' proclamation was something new. The Baptist was speaking as a prophet of the one who was to come. But Jesus was the event John proclaimed; the kingdom had arrived in him. To understand the meaning of the work of Christ, then, we must understand the meaning of the kingdom.

The basic meaning of the Greek word *basileia* (kingdom) is twofold. It refers to the realm of a king and to the rule of the king. These two meanings may be applied in three ways: Some passages refer to the kingdom as God's *reign*; others refer to God's kingdom as the realm of his kingship; and still others refer to a future realm after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ when all creation will be under his reign. These distinctions force the serious Bible student to examine every reference to the kingdom in its context in order to know which of the aspects of the kingdom is being mentioned.

Despite different usages of the word *kingdom*, however, three underlying themes permeate the *kingdom* uses. First, the underlying theme is the rule of God in Christ over all areas of life. It is this rule that Jesus proclaimed. In effect he was saying "The ruler of the universe has come to rule in your life. Turn away from all other demands for ownership of your life. Enter into my reign. Let me rule in the life of the world through my rule in you." Jesus called people away from following their false gods to follow the one true God manifested in himself.

To grasp the meaning of the rule of Christ we must take into account the New Testament contrast between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. We see Christ's kingdom as a "rule" more clearly when we view his kingdom over against the anti-kingdom of Satan. It is of primary importance to recognize that the contrast is between two rules in the world order.

Satan's rule in this world is not some kind of ownership of creation. (This is a gnostic doctrine which has crept into the thinking of many people, i.e., the world belongs to Satan and therefore everything in it is evil.) On the contrary, the ownership of the world belongs to God by virtue of creation. It is God's world and it is good! Due to the Fall, however, a new force or power has been unleashed—the power of the evil one who rules in the hearts of people and in the life of the world through them. So the conflict between Jesus and Satan has to do with reigning and ruling: By whom will creation be ruled? By the king of evil or by God's king, Christ, the victor over evil?

The next underlying theme of the kingdom is that it is a gift. Jesus pointedly emphasized that people must be born into the kingdom. The kingdom comes to a person without a person's help or actions (John 3:5-6,8; Mark 9:1; Luke 17:20-21). Although entrance into the kingdom is viewed as a gift, there are also correlatives that look at entrance into the kingdom from a person's point of view. The way a person is to receive the rule of God is as a child (Mark 10: 1 5). The self-righteous Pharisees and others like them won't get into the kingdom because of their refusal to repent (Matt. 21:31-32).

The third underlying motif is that Jesus himself is the embodiment of the kingdom (Matt. 19:29; 21:9; Mark 10:29; 1 1:9-10; Luke 18:29-30). It was the king-god who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). It is this king who was made flesh, who died and was buried, who was raised from the dead, who is present in the church, who is returning for those he rules. He is the one who is announced and is present in the proclamation.

To preach Jesus Christ, then, is to preach the kingdom. In Jesus both the publication and the actualization of the Good News are brought together. He not only proclaims the Good News but he *is* and *does* the Good News. He is the content of his message.

We should note, then, that it is this theme (Jesus – the kingdom) that the apostles preached. Jesus sent the Disciples "to tell everyone about the coming of the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2 LB), The ministry of the apostles began after Pentecost and as a result of the persecution "the believers who had fled Jerusalem went everywhere preaching the Good News about Jesus!" (Acts 8:4 LB). The Apostles were not preaching mere facts, but an interpretation of an event. The message was that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for their sin! Salvation is no mere assent to the facts about the king, but an actualization of repentance, faith, and obedience. This is the Good News that saves (1 Cor. 15:2).

The special feature of this new era is that God himself has entered into human history (John 1:15). It is the age in which the king of glory has appeared in human flesh and lived out before the eyes of people the rule of the king. Because he is that king, he calls people to follow him, to live under his rule, and to establish him as the Lord of their lives. The presence of his kingdom is within them (Luke 17:20-21) and someday will extend over the whole world (Rev. 11:15).

The full-blown development of this kingdom concept as it relates both to the presence of the kingdom in the here and now and to the ultimate fulfillment and establishment of the eternal kingdom means that there can be no area of life that escapes the rule of the king. His rulership extends over *all* of life. What we do, say and think must be executed under his rule. Our eating, sleeping, drinking, judging, and loving must all take place under the rule of the king. He is the lord of life—all of life. Thus the inauguration of the new age is not merely some intrusion into the secular world, or a spiritual component that runs alongside of life. It is the center through which all of life is interpreted. In the ancient world the Fathers of the church called this the theology of recapitulation and it is this theology which is pertinent to our postmodern world.

Evangelism in the Postmodern World

In a postmodern world the content and method of evangelism may creatively draw on that of the early church, a time similar to that of our postmodern world. Craig Van Gelder summarized the issue for us. He writes: "The emerging paradigm of mission to North America must be able to respond to post postmodernism and its accompanying relativity. To do so the following two issues will need to be addressed. Building communities of faith and addressing fragmentation and brokenness." My own conviction is that the postmodern world is fertile ground for the Christian message, but it must be the full message and not a reductionism to a decision without an in-depth follow-up to Christian thought and practice. If we are to evangelize effectively, we must set about building community and providing healing to the hurts of life.

The Content of Evangelism

If evangelicals are to build communities and address the fragmentation and brokenness of life, we need to look back to the content of evangelism in the classical tradition. First, there is a need to recover the emphasis that Christ's death is a *victory over the powers of evil*. In the supernatural world of postmodernism there is a new understanding of the powers of evil. People wrestle with the brokenness of society, with the constant violence of our inner cities, which has now spread to the rich suburbs. Numerous people deal daily with broken marriages, broken relationships, financial hardships, and the inner struggle with evil. *Christus Victor* makes connection with churched and unchurched people. It says that God has won a battle for us that we ourselves can't win. This message is the point of contact with people frustrated by the powers.

Second, evangelism in a postmodern world needs to restore the sense that a relationship with Christ demands radical obedience. This obedience begins by demanding full identification of the believer with Christ through baptism. Baptism in many churches has lost its meaning. In many cases the gospel has been reduced to "something good for you." To be baptized into Christ means to identify with his suffering, to enter into his death, and to be raised to new life with him. In this way the Christian participates in the victory of Christ over evil. Salvation is not only in an individual sense, but also in the corporate sense of the church as a witness to the kingdom.

Our message begins with the preaching of the kingdom, the future and ultimate reign of God. But the kingdom of God is more than an eschatological hope; it is a present reality as well. It is found now in the church, among the people God has called out and formed into the community of Christ's body.

Third, evangelism in a postmodern world will speak to all of human existence. "A Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt, and is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world. But a Christianity which would use the vertical dimension as a means of escape from responsibility for and in the common life of men is a denial of the incarnation of God's life for the world manifested in Christ." This statement contains in a nutshell the essence of kingdom evangelism. The whole person in all vertical and horizontal relationships is to be brought under the jurisdiction of Jesus Christ.

In summary, postmodern evangelism not only *announces* the kingdom but also seeks to *inaugurate* the kingdom in the biblical sense. Evangelism must stress obedience. True obedience is a call to forsake the false gods of culture. All too often we have identified false gods as personal sins only. There is no question that the Christian is called to flee the personal sins of immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, greed, anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, lying, and the like. To live by these values is to live under the rule of Satan. But when we fail to recognize the controlling presence of these sins not only in our hearts but also in the warp and woof of society, we miss both the depth of the biblical understanding of sin and the depth of the kingdom of God as the rule of Christ in every area of life.

The Method of Evangelism

At the time of this writing, few Protestant churches are aware of the local church evangelism of the third century. This form of evangelism has been resurrected mainly among the renewing Catholic churches in the missional approach known as the RCIA (Rites for the Christian Initiation of Adults). This third-century form of evangelism has unusual insights into the converting process and is characterized by high relevance to a postmodern world.

First, third-century evangelism is thoroughly evangelical. It preaches Christ. It calls people into the church. It demands radical obedience

Second, third-century evangelism is local church evangelism par excellence. It does not bring people to Christ at mass rallies on television and then turn them loose to find their way in the faith. Rather it emanates from the local church and manifests a personal caring touch in which a person is taken by the hand and walked the various stages of growth and development into conversion. The local church, therefore, plays a supportive role, not only for the community that is evangelizing, but also for the person being evangelized. One is not subjected to an individualistic salvation, in which one stands alone, but is introduced to a community of people who provide social, moral, and psychological assistance to the converting person undergoing a radical change in life. Thus, a symbiosis between the evangelizer and the evangelizee is attained.

Third, early church evangelism does not replace current forms of evangelism. Rather, it supplements them by providing a plan whereby converting persons can be brought into a deeper and lasting commitment to Christ and the church. Therefore, all the various forms of evangelism can be treated as the inquiry stage of evangelism. Evangelism brings people to the door of the church, where the process of continuing what has begun can be carried out.

Finally third-century evangelism meets the demands the postmodern world places on the church: It is personal, visual, developmental, communal, mystical and thoroughly related to a person's life in the world.

Victor Matthews