

The Mission of the Kingdom (Part 1)

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Date: 27 November 2016

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to look at the theme and the subject today of the mission of God as it's expressed in the whole concept of the Kingdom and look at that this morning and also we hope next week as well.

Because I think for some of us, at various points, probably for all of us, at various points in our lives we have a lot of different questions about our Christian lives and Christian faith.

You know, if Jesus is the King, why is my life so tough? If I'm rescued by the Lord God, why is it that I feel so often like I'm drowning that I'm struggling in my Christian life, that so many things are going wrong, that it doesn't seem to be that Jesus is King of His Kingdom and that I am one of His citizens?

Why is it when I look at Scripture it's dull or dry or difficult to understand? Why when I look around at other Christians is that their lives seem so, or their faith seems so balanced and strong and together and I don't have that reality, that feeling in my Christian heart.

I feel different from them. I don't feel that I am a strong Christian. And it may be thrown into the mix, may be issues of injustice in the world in which we live.

[1 : 3 3] The fact that we read the news or we hear about political realities and wars and rumors of wars and we think, well, it doesn't seem like Jesus is in control.

It doesn't seem like He's sovereign. It doesn't seem like He is enthroned on heaven and bringing all things under His dominion. It just simply doesn't feel like that.

And so I do believe that many of us at different points in our lives struggle with the reality of our Christian faith. It is that Jesus Christ doesn't feel real. The everyday ordinary things of life feel much more real, much more in my face, much more immediate.

And I think part of that is that we misunderstand or fail to appreciate what the Bible teaches about Christ's reign and the kingdom of God.

I think it's absolutely okay to think like that as long as we take it to God in prayer, as long as we deal with it and wrestle through it. God knows that.

[2 : 4 0] And one of the great things about the Bible for us to remind ourselves of is that the Bible deals with these issues. The truth of God's word faces up to this. We don't have something that's sickly sweet in Scripture, which might often be, possibly, this time of year becomes a little bit sentimental and sweet for us in our understanding of Jesus Christ and of the nature of salvation.

But the Bible is absolutely black and white and clear and wants to make known to us that God in His word understands and God reveals His truth to us and shows us that you are right in these wrestles and you're right having these battles and you're right taking them to God and recognizing your need of God through them, because that is the day and the generation in which we live.

So I want to look this morning a little bit at God's kingdom as we have it in the Bible and the fact that Jesus ushered in God's kingdom. We've been looking at the Old Testament, we're looking at the coming of Jesus, we've been looking at the death and resurrection of Jesus and the teaching of the church.

And we recognize that the coming of Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God in a very powerful way. And that is very much the focus of the Old Testament. There's a couple of texts from the Old Testament, one from Isaiah chapter 9, which is well known at this time of Advent, for unto us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful, counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

And then in Daniel chapter 2 and verse 44 we have these words, and in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.

[4 : 38] It shall break in pieces all those kingdoms, bring them to an end and it shall stand forever. Really? Really? Is that what Jesus ushered in? Is that the kingdom that He ushered in?

Is that prophecy fulfilled in Jesus? Do we see our nation subject to Jesus Christ and His rule? And as we look at that we think, well, that isn't the case. And we sometimes will struggle with that.

But I think what is clear from the Old Testament, I'll go on to say a little bit more about that, but also from what Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God, it's never what we expect. It's never quite as clinical or as clear cut as we expect it to be the reign of Jesus and the rule of Jesus.

In Matthew chapter 13 you have a whole lot of parables that Jesus tells and they're all about the kingdom. They're all about the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God and they're simply not what the disciples expected.

The disciples were looking for Jesus to come and reign on an earthly throne and Jesus tells them all these random parables that reveal that His kingdom is very different and is quite mysterious to what they expected.

[5 : 45] He talks about the sower, that the seed will be sown and it will spread in lots of different ground and many people during the coming of this kingdom will be unmoved and untouched by the Lordship of Jesus and will not follow Him and will not be redeemed and will not be brought back.

He also mentions the parable of the wheat and the tares that until judgment day that in His kingdom good and evil will grow up together and there will be this kind of reality that His rule will not be evident to all and He speaks about the mustard seed, that tiny little seed that grows unnoticed and quietly grows into a big tree almost unseen and speaks of the kingdom in these terms underground, unnoticed, small, insignificant, apparently not a great big oak tree.

And then another time He speaks of the kingdom and speaks of Nicodemus who was also asking about the kingdom of God and he says that you will not see the kingdom of God unless you are born again and he brings in this mysterious kind of spiritual element of rebirth, of renewal, of something personal, of some heart change that ushers in the kingdom of God and so we see from, and variously and elsewhere, the teaching of the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus is already reminding us that the kingdom of God isn't exactly what necessarily we expect it to be, but what the teaching of the New Testament is clear about is that the kingdom of God has arrived and also is arriving and even will arrive.

Okay, so you've got that, these elements within the teaching of the New Kingdom is that Jesus has been and Jesus has risen but has left us with the Holy Spirit and Jesus is coming back.

So there are different elements to the kingdom and the New Testament that helps us to understand the teaching of the Bible and understand why we struggle and battle in our lives and what Christ wants us to do about that and how He wants us to overcome that.

[8 : 13] Jesus has been, we know that, we know that the kingdom of God has been ushered in, that He has died on the cross for our sins and He rose in the third day and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven ushering in His kingdom.

He has paid the price, He has defeated the power of sin and death, He has risen, His kingdom is established and the world in which we live is different.

Post-calvary, pre-calvary, the world is hugely different. It's not only different spiritually but it has been massively changed by the coming of Jesus Christ and by the millions of people whose lives have been turned upside down, who have been converted to Jesus Christ and who have changed this world in which we live.

And we as believers, having come to know Jesus Christ, know the righteous life, we know that we are covered in what Jesus has done. The price has already been paid.

Jesus says it's finished for us, that we have been taken from darkness to light, from death to life, that we have the Holy Spirit gifted to us and we can transform, be transformed and be in transforming communities because of what Jesus has done for us.

[9 : 27] That has all happened. His kingdom has come at that level in your life and in my life and in our church and in every church. His kingdom has come.

But yet Jesus, He also says, is coming back. Jesus is returning. This is clearly New Testament perspective. John chapter 3, sort of John chapter 14 and verse 3, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am, you may be also.

There's lots of texts that speak of Jesus coming back. Kind of unpopular to speak or, I don't think we think about it or speak about it nearly as much as maybe it used to be the case.

But we know that the kingdom at that level has not yet come. The kingdom has arrived but the kingdom has not yet come. The victory of Jesus in other words is not yet fully realized and revealed to us.

So in common terms we put it that evil has been defeated on the cross, Satan and death and its power has been broken on the cross but it is not yet destroyed.

[10 : 40] There is a future when God will subsume and take all the power of darkness and evil and it will be utterly expunged from the universe as the new heavens and the new earth, which is the home of righteousness, will be our home.

And Corrie, God willing, next Sunday morning will speak about that second element of the kingdom of God which is still to come. But can we maybe put it this way?

And this is a rather imperfect illustration but maybe will help us a little bit. When D.D. happened and we celebrate and remember these things at different times, when D.D.

happened on June 1944 that in many ways was the great marking of the defeat of the imperial forces and it was the beginning of victory, the pushing back by the allied forces of the enemy.

But it wasn't until June 1945 that V.E.D. was declared over a year later and there is a kind of similarity there, don't take it too far, it is only an illustration, where there was a tremendous and powerful victory on the cross where evil was defeated but its ultimate destruction will not be until Jesus Christ returns to usher in his kingdom.

[12 : 05] The battle was won, the war continues, it is in its death row, Satan is thrashing around in his death row seeking whom he may devour and that spiritual element of our lives is made clear scripturally and Jesus knows that and he wants us to know that ourselves.

So we have another illustration here which I have used before here which sometimes helps because in the Old Testament you had these texts that we looked at at the beginning which talked about Messiah coming, Jesus coming and government will be in his shoulders and all the nations will bow down to him and it had this amazing kind of picture of the Lordship and the kingship of the Messiah who would come and it seems just too great for us because we don't see that.

And a good illustration of that is if you are climbing, I wouldn't use this illustration with Graham Thompson, if you are climbing a hill that is really, well not dangerous but it is a bigish kind of hill, my technical knowledge of mountaineering, a bigish kind of hill and you can see the peak of that mountain here, we will call it Amon Row, a mountain over 3000 feet and that is what you are going to climb that Amon Row today and it is quite a long walk in and you walk into the hill and you climb and you get to the top of the Amon Row but there is actually two Amon rows that you have been wanting to climb and when you are at the bottom they both look absolutely just beside each other and you think I will just climb the first Amon Row and I will just jump up a bit and that will be the second Amon Row but when you get to the top of the first Amon Row there is a huge glen and a long distance before the second one, you know it is visual foreshortening so that from a distance they look like they are just dead close but when you actually get to the one there is quite a great distance to the other, very soul destroying if you are a climber, when you think you can climb two or three peaks in one day and it maybe wouldn't happen, so I am told and that gives us a picture of in the Old Testament they looked forward and almost always in the Old Testament the kingdom of God is seen as one great event and yet as history and time unfolds and as the teaching of the New Testament unfolds we recognise it as two events with Jesus first coming and his second coming with a time in between and that is the time in between which we live.

So the old man with a sandwich board that goes around Princess Street saying the end is nigh should really have three saying the end has actually come, the end is near but the end is not yet so it is not quite as simplistic sometimes as we think this kingdom of God because we recognise that we are in a period between the first and the second coming of Jesus when the battle is won but there are still warish skirmishes as Satan and evil thrashes out its death throes.

So for us what is it like today? What is it like? What does the kingdom look like for us when we talk about the kingdom of God? What do we mean by that for us today in our lives and in the world in which we live?

[15 : 28] Well it must mean for us, it means more than the church, we talk a lot, I talk a lot about the church, the church is very important, the church is the body of Christ but the kingdom is the rule of God.

The church is to witness to the rule of God, the church is the body of Christ, is the people of Christ, is the instrument God uses to further His kingdom but His kingdom is His rule and it is cosmic, it is a great thing, it is the Christ, the ascended physical Christ reigning for that looks like physically and in reality the resurrected Savior.

But it is a reminder to us because very often in our church lives we can be very parochial and very insular in our thinking and we can think it is just all about us, it is all about my church, it is all about my local church, it is all about my denomination maybe sometimes even but we need to remind ourselves that we are part of something greater and something bigger that is being ushered in by this resurrected Christ who has been vicked, gained the cross is the core because in that moment He has defeated the power of darkness and death and sin and the grave.

So this huge universal element to our belonging, to the work of God but there is also something I am going to make alluded to in prayer, there is something intensely personal in Luke chapter 17 and verse 21, being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed nor will we say look here it is there for behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you or is in you, is not only Christ living among them but is in our own beings as we submit to His Lordship and as we submit by faith to His salvation in our lives, in our conscience.

So you see there is a distinction between belonging to Jesus by taking Him as Lord and even belonging to the church. So we can belong to the church and not be part of the kingdom, we can belong to the church and not be Christ's so that Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7 verse 21, many will say on that day Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, not everyone, not everyone who confessed Him as Lord publicly or by declaration but it will be those whose hearts have been turned and whose wills are molded to His Lordship and to His kingship and to His sovereign power.

[18 : 30] It is that reality of something rather invisible, something glorious and something great, bigger even than the church.

If you were, if I was to summarize what it is, I guess it would be the teaching we've looked at a lot through this mission of God, it is God with us.

It is God with us. Matthew, I'm not sure if I've got this on the screen, Matthew 28, have I got that up? No, it's the next one, John chapter 6, 14, okay John 14, I will ask the Father in the upper room, I will ask the Father and He will give you another helper who will be with you forever even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.

And that really, isn't that, that's the essence and the reality of the kingdom of God, it's the Emmanuel principle. So when we speak about it so much at this time of year, that Jesus Christ comes to us, comes up and lives among us and becomes one of us and then redeems us and sends His Spirit into our hearts.

God with us, the Spirit is the deposit guaranteeing what is to come. So as believers we always have a future perspective in our lives and we see that in this chapter in Romans chapter 8, finally she gets to this chapter because this chapter and the real lives of the people that were being dealt with here needed to know these truths because they were having the same battles and struggles that you and I have in our Christian lives.

[20 : 11] And so they needed the truth of this kingdom coming, kingdom come, kingdom coming to comfort them and to remind them that this is God's mission, this is part of God's plan, part of God's purpose.

So it's God with us as we wait, see he says in verse 23 of this chapter and not only the creation but we ourselves have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So we've got this knowledge that we are in a waiting room at the moment in a sense, not inactive but a waiting room when there is something better to come. And the groaning that we have, the groaning of this universe that we are part of will one day come to an end and we will have resurrected glorious redeemed bodies in this new universe as we wait, as we wait for his return.

And you know the language here is of patience, of groaning. You know, isn't the language, you know, isn't the language of skipping? It's not the language of hoopla.

It's not the language of unending praise in this life because of the wonders and glories of every moment of every day. The realism of the word is that there's groaning and there's waiting but of course it's not the end of the story.

[21 : 44] But that is where our faith comes in, isn't it? That's where our trust comes in. If we get everything we want, if everything is perfect for us, we will never have any need to trust anyone or anything.

Because usually we're trusting someone to do something that either we wouldn't do or we're unsure about. That's where trust comes in, isn't it?

And so God is saying to us as we trust Him by faith because He's already shown us what He's done and He's going to come back and receive us to be with Himself and in the midst of our groaning and battle and warfare when we're the object of attack, He wants us to trust Him because we're not alone.

He is also waiting. We wait with Him. He is waiting for His, He's waiting because He wants no one to perish and He is waiting until everything is, His plan is perfected and worked out and we wait with Him.

And that's a great thing, isn't it? I can imagine the worst thing for Kirsty when she found out that Graham potentially was seriously ill, would have been if she was waiting alone.

[23 : 04] The first thing she said was it was good. I had my friends were waiting with me. And that's a great thing when you're stressed or fearful or struggling.

And it's not just friends, although friends are very important and God gives His friend. He says, I am with you as we wait. And that requires patience. But also as we suffer, you know, the beginning of that section, Paul is speaking to that church in Rome and saying, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.

And that we can't get away from suffering as being a theme of the New Testament for believers. So it's not a surprise. So we shouldn't be surprised when we suffer in our lives because that is clearly what God is reminding us about His kingdom come and His kingdom still coming.

Look, there's never any easy explanations for suffering. We mustn't be trite and unsympathetic and lacking empathy or whole air than now or smart allocate in the answers we give to people or even the stoicism sometimes with which we suffer because sufferings bad at that level.

And it will be taken from us. It is temporary. But at the moment in the battleground that we live, it's the air we breathe.

[24 : 35] And Christ is readying us for glory. Readyng us for His fullness of His kingdom. Second Corinthians 4, 17-18, I think. There's only a couple more after that.

For our light and momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. You see that the emphasis of the New Testament is always encouraging us to focus on the unseen – not just what we do today and what we do tomorrow and what our mortgage is like and what our meal is going to be.

These things are all important. The things that are eternal unseen and the afflictions we are struggling with are preparing us for something ultimately far greater.

And as we suffer in this life, we are to use that suffering to become like Jesus as burden bearers.

He was a great burden bearer. And often we implode our suffering into something very personal and something very self-absorbing.

[25 : 46] Yet He wants us to use our suffering to prepare us to be burden bearers for others who are suffering. So we have empathy and community and grace at work like Christ did.

We will suffer because we will be rejected like Christ was. We suffer because we have to die to sin and say no to our own pleasures and desires that are sinful because we trust Jesus is right even though sometimes we struggle with that battle of His will and our will.

But we die to sin because He died on the cross for sin. And the difference is He did it alone. He resisted temptation alone in the desert.

He went to the cross alone on our behalf. We are never in that condition, we are never like Jesus in that way because He says I am with you in this and I have the victory.

The channel of victory through suffering and through waiting and through being alone is in Jesus Christ. And Romans here tells us therefore this pain, this suffering is redemptive in the sense that it is life giving.

[27 : 03] It is like and many of the mothers here can associate that. It is like the pain of childbirth that is spoken of here. It is great pain but it ushers in life.

That is a great spiritual philosophy that underpins the suffering that we go through. That it is not negative and it is not random but it is to bring victory and end in life for us, not death.

So Christ is with us as we suffer and as we wait. And Christ is with this world in which we live. And I think that is a really important emphasis as we draw things to conclude here as well.

So wonderful passage about the world in which we live that is in bondage to corruption, the created universe. It was impacted by our rebellion right from the very beginning.

It came under the judgment that is our judgment and yet this world has a glorious, has a glorious environmental future in the coming of Christ as He returns and His mission and His purpose.

[28 : 20] And I think it is right for us now to seek the good of this creation and long for this creation to be redeemed. And the great thing is that because of what Christ has done and our redemption, the world will be drawn in with it.

The trees and the mountains and the animals and the fields and the rivers and the seas will all be drawn into this redemption because of Jesus Christ. It was all part of the fall but it will all be part of His redemption as it groans currently and as we recognise that groaning in the world in which we live.

It is not easy and it is not a please, never think it is trite but it is our hope. It is our hope. So can I just in closing reiterate that this passage and the teaching of the New Testament and the battles of struggling and suffering and waiting are part of the Kingdom come, the Kingdom coming and us being in that intermediate place as it were where the war has been won but there are still battles to be faced until He returns and that He is with us.

And this passage here brings that to conclusion by reminding us He is with us by His Spirit in verse 26. He says that He brings that as comfort to the people.

He talks about our weaknesses. Now it is not interesting that in verse 26 He says likewise the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. It does not say the Spirit helps us in being mighty men and women of valor.

[29 : 58] It does not help us as we battle and win in every victory. It does not say it helps us in our great strength. It helps us in our weakness. I take great comfort from that.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness and it lives in us and empowers us to be victorious. So the strength is not in our intellect and is not in our knowledge and is not in our gifts and is not in our careers.

Our strength is in the Holy Spirit. As we channel weakness to Him we find great strength and great belonging.

1 Corinthians 4, 20, this is the last text today that we look at. For the Kingdom of God does not consist in top but in power and He gives us power.

That is the victory. That is why we are not alone. That is why the suffering and the battle and the struggle is channeled to Jesus Christ. What is our greatest temptation in suffering and struggle?

[30 : 58] Leave Christ out, isn't it? I am not going to pray anymore. It does not work. It is useless. That is when we need to apply for the recognition of His power and of His victory.

Because He is with us not only by Spirit but He is with us in His love and that whole last section from verse 31 to verse 39 tells us that we are kept by His love.

Neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He has already given us His Son whom He loves as it were as the down payment that He holds us and that He loves us.

This passage speaks of the great and unique and mysterious Trinitarian involvement in our salvation or in keeping us.

The Father has given us the Son and the Son is the one who intercedes for us and the Spirit is the one who groans for us. The Spirit does not even need to speak.

[32 : 04] He just groans like we groan because sometimes we cannot verbalize the battles that we have. The mission of God is there is this Trinitarian desire and commitment to keep us and to renew us so that we can be more than conquerors.

That we are more than conquerors in our relationship with Him and He asks us to trust that that is the case that we can be more than conquerors.

So I encourage you today not to give up your Christian life. There is just nothing on the other side. There is nothing outside of Him. There is nothing outside of grace.

And He encourages you not just to stand still and as it were tread water till His second coming. It is not what He wants us to do either.

He wants us to be more than conquerors. He wants us to recognize His huge love and power that is extended to us, sealed in His death and resurrection, promised in His return.

[33 : 19] And all of the battles and struggles in the meantime are subsumed into and under that and we trust Him that He knows what He is doing and He will take us through and make us more than conquerors to His glory.

Let's pray briefly as we conclude. Father God, we ask and pray that You would enable us to be strong, that we would be victorious in our lives and we know often that that in itself will look different to what we sometimes think.

We know that sometimes it will be survival. We know that sometimes it will be unseen and unnoticed. But we know that as we rely on You that we will come through the most remarkable opposition.

And each one of us here today as Christians are a living testimony to the remarkable commitment and determination of Jesus to not let go of us, to save us, to redeem us, to buy us back when we had no interest.

And may we understand that great love and live in response with great love and live to bear one another's burdens.

[34 : 44] So help us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.