

The Kingdom of God

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TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

THE ETERNAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD

The kingdom of God refers to the rule of God, or the sphere of His rule or reign. His kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom. To be God He must rule and his authority and power must be unlimited, immeasurable and comprehensive. When God created the world and man to inhabit His world he gave him authority over all creation (Gen.1:26). God extended His rule to His creation through man. As Sovereign over all we speak of His sovereignty in action, which means His eternal rule. The sovereignty of God is the exercise of His authoritative rule and government. God's rule assumes His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. His reign is characterized by righteousness, justice and compassion. God's rule assumes His divine attributes. God's reign is God in action reigning eternally. Thus the kingdom reign of God is from eternity to eternity extending from the past into the future. The future gets lost in God's eternity which has no beginning or end. Time – past present and future is part of God's created order.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom" (Ps 45:6).

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty" (Rev.1:8).

In the beginning of creation God reigned from His throne surrounded by the angels who gladly bowed before Him as their Creator and Lord. Men and women were created to extend His government throughout His created world on the earth (Gen.1:26). Thus His reign was manifest from the beginning of the heavenly and earthly creation. Later Israel was chosen by God to demonstrate the holy and righteous Laws of their King and thus extend His rule and government throughout the nations of the earth. Israel was chosen by God to demonstrate his theocratic government or headship over them.

The New Testament opens with Matthew who begins his gospel with the birth narratives and traces Jesus' genealogy through the royal line of Joseph back to Abraham. This is significant because of Matthew's interest in the kingship of Jesus.

There cannot be a kingdom without a king. The kingdom is the embodiment and manifestation of the kingly rule of God. It is also interesting also that Matthew should choose to begin his genealogy with Abraham and not Adam like Luke. Adam had quickly thrown off the rule of God by complying with Satan's direct challenge of the word of God. This was an authoritative word to which he rebelled. Abraham spoke of himself as God's "servant" a designation that the godly king David also adopted for himself, a term that was later applied to Cyrus and to Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" in several songs. It finds its full expression in the key Christological passage of Paul,

"But (He) made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil.2:7).

The Jews' of the intertestament period had high expectations of a soon emerging Messiah who would break the power of their Roman overlords and restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus did not fit the bill. He shunned the title Messiah for this very reason. Immediately He recognized at Caesarea Philippi that Father had revealed His true identity to Peter ("You are the Christ the Son of the living God" Mat.16:16) Jesus began to teach about His sufferings and death. The Jews anticipated a liberating and triumphant Messiah not a Messiah who would be crucified in weakness.

Following His anointing by the Holy Spirit Jesus embarked on His ministry and declared that the Kingdom of God had drawn near. ***The power and authority of God's kingdom is manifested in the ministry of Jesus.*** Later the same marks of God's Kingdom were evident in the church as a result of the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of Father following His ascension. We anticipate a future manifestation of God's kingdom when Christ comes again in glory to earth. The Millennium reign of Christ for 1,000 years on the earth anticipates His eternal reign. The final judgment of all men and women is a manifestation of Christ's kingly reign. Jesus said,

"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (Jn. 5:22).

Only God has the ability and the right to judge the world. His ability results from His omniscience, and His right to judge is founded in His Person (who He is) and His

primary attributes which are holiness, truth and love. Of course these attributes constitute the inner being of God. When God said to Moses *“You cannot see My face: for there shall be no man see me, and live”* (Ex.33:20) he was referring to His inner being. Man waited for the coming of Jesus Christ who was the full and complete manifestation of God. Only the person of Christ the unique God-man could do this (see Heb.1:3; 2Cor.4:6).

The application of God’s holiness is shown in His righteousness and justice with regard to men and women. Jesus is alone qualified to judge because He took our sin upon Himself and suffered the judgment of almighty God that was against us. But for Christ’s redemption we could not be acquitted before the judgment seat of Christ. It is here where men’s eternal destinies will be determined. Our crucial justification will be pronounced here. At this most awesome moment we will tremble before the gaze of almighty God waiting His acquittal and His proclamation of our justification through Christ. We have been forgiven by divine pronouncement, read the book of Romans; not only forgiven but welcomed and reconciled to God. We enjoy His favour and patronage but we can never forget that our place at His royal table is by divine grace alone. Jesus has loved me I cannot tell why. Miracle of miracles I find myself at His banqueting house and His banner over me is love!

As the children of God John says that we are to come to Him now to be cleansed from our sin,

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn.1:9).

Note how our coming to Him for forgiveness is based on His faithfulness and justice, the very attributes that qualify Him to be the Judge on the great Day of Judgment (Ps.89:14; Mat.25:31-33; Jn.5:22; Rev.20:11-15). That great day will be the justification of God who has been vilified and scorned by wicked men. It will be the demonstration of His tender and gracious forgiveness to undeserving sinners and it will be the day of His vengeful wrath against those who have persistently blasphemed His Name. This day is the fulfilment of the prayers of Christians throughout the ages, *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is heaven”* (Mat.6:10).

THE VIOLATION OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND KINGLY REIGN

The first of God's created order were angels who inhabited the kingdom of heaven. Choice and elect archangels were close in to God's throne. The origin of evil was conceived in one of these high angels called then Lucifer and now called Satan, the devil, the old serpent and the dragon (Isa.Ch.14; Ezek.Ch.28; Rev.20:2). Rebellion is the rejection of God's rule as King and originated in the free will that is an essential part of being a person/angel. God chooses to give man/woman free will so that allegiance to Him is freely chosen by His subjects. As such I am responsible for my actions before God and thus I am responsible for my eternal destiny. Jesus urged men throughout His ministry to choose Him – "follow ME!"

It was a fallen archangel who boldly and subtly approached our first parents with guile and deception and then questioned the truth of the Sovereign's words. Adam and Eve chose also to rebel against their Lord; demonstrating the contradiction between the sovereignty of Almighty God and the sinful rebellion of His subjects. **Sin is a violation of God's sovereignty.** The whole of creation was affected and implicated in the Fall of Adam. Each person is accountable to God and responsible for their own sin. Guilt may be imputed to us through Adam (Rom.5:17-19) but every man has sinned as his first father sinned and for his own sin he is accountable and must repent. When Jesus called men to repentance he did not have in mind the sin of Adam but the sins of those to whom He spoke. Similarly when He addressed the woman taken in adultery He said to her, "*Go, and sin no more*" (Jn.8:11). He was addressing her adulterous behaviour which had nothing to do with inherited guilt from Adam. Nowhere does Scripture tell me to repent of imputed sin. The Calvinists have made far too much out of this. On the great Day of Judgment I will give account to God for my own sins and not Adam's; "*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*" (1Cor.15:3). Ezekiel says, "*The soul that sins, it will die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father*" (Ezek.18:20; see the whole chapter). This is not to deny the nature of sin in the human heart. In the next chapter Ezekiel refers to the hereditary reality of sin passed on from the mother, "*Your mother is like a vine in your blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters*" (Ezek.19:10 see also Ps.51:5; Isa.48:8). Link this verse with Paul's statement, "*But when it pleased God cut me off from my mother's womb and called me by His grace*" (Gal.1:15).

The words of the angel to Mary announcing the nature of the incarnation contains the statement, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you”* (Lk.1:35). The second part of that statement has been understood by Evangelicals to mean that Jesus was shielded from the entrance of hereditary sin from His mother. As Joseph was not His human father He did not partake of Joseph’s sinful nature or Adam’s guilt. Jesus Christ begins a new generation of sons, who owe their heredity to Jesus Christ. Matthew begins His gospel by referring to, *“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ”* (Mat.1:1; see Rom.8:29). Entrance into the kingdom of God is through spiritual birth and a cutting off from the old sinful heredity. The Jews of Jesus’ day boasted in their ethnic/spiritual heredity, *“We be Abraham’s seed,”* Jesus replied immediately by saying, *“Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin, and the servant abides not in the house forever: but the Son abides forever”* (Jn.8:34-36; 2Cor.5:17; 1Jn.3:9). Abraham’s seed was polluted because he, like each one of us was a son of Adam (Rom.5:19).

THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD’S KINGDOM BY CALLING

God chose to remedy the situation of man’s lostness from God by calling Abraham and by entering into covenant with him. Two important matters characterize God’s dealings with Abraham – the promise of a *land* and the promise of a *son*. Israel viewed Abraham as their father by their birth into the nation of Israel, Mary concludes *“The Magnificat”* by referring to *“God’s mercy to our fathers, to Abraham and to his **seed** forever”* (Lk.1:55 cf. Mat.1:1). Nevertheless, Israel looked to David, not as their hereditary or biological father but as their king. When God spoke His covenant to Abraham he prophesied that *“kings shall come from you”* (Gen.17:6). When Peter preached his first sermon he referred to a prophecy of King David,

“Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30).

The Jews looked to Abraham as their biological father, he represented their Jewish ethnic origins, but David was their king and he was the biological father “according to the flesh” of Jesus Christ who after His resurrection would “sit on his (David’s) throne.” Although kingship in Israel is viewed by many Christians as incompatible

with Theocracy, nevertheless the imagery of kingship is freely applied to God throughout Scripture. The Messiah will come of the Davidic line.

ISRAEL ESTABLISHED AS A THEOCRACY

The purpose of God was to establish a nation that would again own Him as their sovereign Lord. Israel was to be that a theocracy, a nation whose king was God and a people who lived according to His Laws, a holy nation and a special people separated unto the LORD. The special relationship is described in (Deut.7:6-8). Following the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea Israel journeyed towards Sinai. On their arrival God assembled the nation and spoke to them of His tender love in the “Eagles’ Wings Speech” (Ex.19:4-6). God entered into covenant with them and gave to them the Law embodied in the “Ten Commandments” (Ex.Ch.20). Reacting with fear to the manifestations that they witnessed on the mountain Israel sought to distance themselves from God, saying to Moses, *“You speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Ex.20:19). The LORD recognized in these words that Israel had no heart for God or His Law (Deut.5:5, 23-29).

The Golden Calf, the refusal to enter the Promised Land and their total rebellion against God and the leadership of Moses (Deut.9:24) throughout the book of Numbers resulted eventually in loss of their land, the temple and its priesthood and the ending of the royal line of kings. They found themselves as exiles in Babylon for 70 years. The return to their homeland precipitated a new restoration that had been fuelled by repentance in Exile and a re-examination of their sacred literature. The close of the Old Testament marks an end not only of the Bible as it was known to the Jews, but also an end to the prophetic voice. No further Scripture could be written without the continuance of the prophetic voice.

The long 300 year silence was broken by John Baptist,

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight’ (Mark 1:3; Isa.40:3).*

Note John’s first words,

*“Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (Mat.3:2).*

The Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew) or the Kingdom of God is also at the heart of Jesus' teaching. It is the sphere in which He reigns. John saw the coming of God's kingdom in terms of end time judgment for Israel, "the axe is laid to the tree," but Jesus came not to wreak vengeance but to speak forgiveness and to show mercy. Jesus said that the yolk of His kingship is easy and the burden He imposes is light. The nature of the King is gentleness and lowliness (Mat.11:28-30). David testifies to God's providential care of him during the years Saul sought his life in the wilderness,

*"You have also given me the shield of Your salvation;
Your right hand has held me up,
Your **gentleness** has made me great" (Ps.18:35).*

I have always loved this verse as showing the character of the warrior King. An alternative translation for gentleness is humility, which has profound significance in the light of Phil.2:5-8. The king comes among men as a servant!

THE BIRTH OF THE KING

Here we return to Matthew's gospel and his emphasis on the kingship of Jesus.

Prophecies and Scriptures were spoken about Him (Mat.1:1; 2:1-2; Lk.1:32-33; Isa.7:14; 9:6-7). The angel spoke to Mary quoting from the prophet Isaiah,

*"For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:6-7).*

Most important is the statement that *“the government shall be upon His shoulders* and that there will be *increase of His government* and that His government will *have no end*. It is eternal government. Significantly, the magi followed the eastern star and requested to know the whereabouts of the new-born KING! (Mat.2:2). Prince Charles was not born King of Britain and he has to wait in the wings for his mother Queen Elizabeth’s death before he can ascend to the throne and the monarchy.

Matthew introduces Jesus as the son of David, a clear reference to His royal lineage. Jesus is great David’s greater son. He is seated (enthroned) on the mountain and His disciples come to hear His teaching as he opens His mouth (Mat.5:1-2; cf. 15:29) to speak of the blessed ones who are poor in spirit and persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (vv3, 10). Jesus speaks with authority and continues the traditions of Israel’s spiritual leaders who were teachers of the Law but He speaks with added authority, *“but I say to you ...”* He was speaking as the King (Mat.5:20, 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6:5, 16, 25). He fearlessly makes authoritative pronouncement on a multiplicity of subjects as One who is used to power and government. Later we find Jesus seated in a boat teaching those who gathered round Him to receive His teaching and His wisdom (Mk.4:1). The subject of His teaching was the Kingdom (Mk.Ch4; Mat.Ch.13). In the last week of His life He takes up residence in the temple demonstrating still that He is king in Father’s house. Disillusioned and recognizing that in His final hours he faced rejection by the nation of Israel He departs from the temple declaring His rejected love and the desolation that would follow His rejection (Mat.23:37-39; Ch.24).

One of the rare glimpses of Jesus that we have in His childhood is the occasion when he is found by His parents conversing with the teachers of the Law. Jesus is also the son of Abraham the father of the Jewish race (Mat.1:1). Jesus is the unique Son of God but He is also the *“firstborn”* through the incarnation (Heb.1:5-6), a situation in which Father addresses His Son by employing prophetic words from Ps.2:7 and 2Sam.7:14) and commands the angel hosts to worship the new born Son. The second birth of the son refers to His resurrection from the dead and anticipates our second birth from spiritual death which was the direct consequence of man’s rebellion against the rule of God (Gen.2:17; 4:19; Ezek.18:4, 20; Rom.6:23). Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus as a second birth that is a prototype of our own *“... that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”* (**Rom.8:29**). Jesus is the first of a new generation of sons (Mat.1:1) who enter God’s kingdom by spiritual birth (Jn.3:3, 5).

THE ANOINTING FOR KINGSHIP

(Mat.3:11-17; Ps 2:6-8)

*“Yet I have set **My King**
On My holy hill of Zion.”
“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
You are **My Son**,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations for Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth for Your possession” (Ps.2:6-8).*

Psalm 2 is a wonderful Messianic psalm about the kingship of God’s Son. Jesus Christ is the true heir to God’s throne because He is His true son by birth. Similarly God promised to Abraham a true son, *“he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir” (Gen.15:4)*. To be King Jesus must be the Son of God. There is ample evidence of this in the gospels; apart from the teaching of the gospels and the words of Jesus, there are the evidences of omnipotent power (miracles) and omniscient knowledge (teaching), but the human Jesus can only be in one place at once, so there is no omnipresence possible!

Our next link in the chain is King David bringing us back to (Mat.1:1; cf. 9:27). The prophet Nathan had responded to David’s request to build a house for the ark of God. Indulgently, the prophet encouraged him to go ahead. However, God said no! David’s hands were soiled with blood resulting in God’s prohibition. Accompanying David’s disappointment at not building God’s house is a word from God which is of great significance and importance. God said, *“Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house” ... “I will set up your seed after you, which shall proceed out of your bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. **I will be his father; and he will be my son” (2Sam.7:11-14)***. Not only do we see the repeated fact of true sonship through natural generation but also the anticipation of true sonship through spiritual birth. Jesus taught the necessity of spiritual birth when he declared to Nicodemus *“you **must be born again” (Jn.3:7)***.

The last reference that links with 2Sam.7:14 is found in Revelation where Jesus is speaking prophetically as the King seated on the throne to those who are overcomers in battle. He promises His warriors that He will give to those who are thirsty of the water of life (Rev.21:6), reminiscent of David's anguished cry for pure refreshing water from the well of Bethlehem to assuage his parched thirst in the heat and sweat of the battle (2Sam.23:15; 1Chron.11:17). Immediately following the promise of pure living water for the thirsty souls is the statement of sonship exactly in the words that the Lord spoke to David. We like David's son Solomon are the heirs of the kingdom through spiritual birth. Actually this formula is at the heart of the Davidic covenant as it is at the heart of the new Covenant. Paul says,

"But you have received the Spirit of sonship, whereby we cry; Abba Father. The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ"
(Rom.8:15-16).

John says, *"Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God ... Beloved, now we are the sons of God"* **(1Jn.3:1-2).**

Reformed theologians make much of adoption, rather than sonship. It is only the heir that at the appointed time (adoption) can enter into the full inheritance rights into which he was born. New birth must precede the truth of adoption.

The Father's declaration of Jesus' sonship at his baptism, *"You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased"* (Mat.3:17) also points back to His birth, *"You are my Son, today I have begotten You"* (Ps 2:7). In words of rich Messianic significance the Father requests Jesus to ask boldly for His inheritance which is the nations of the earth for His possession. This psalm makes Satan's temptations to have no credence; in fact they look shabby and pathetic in the light of Father's promise. Turn to Hebrews 1:5-9, 13; and you find the same reference to Ps 2:7 and further references from 2Sam.7:14; Ps 45:6-7; Isa.61:1, 3; and Ps.110:1. Each of these verses are prophetic references from the Old Testament about the kingship of the Son, who is spoken of as God (Heb.1:8).

King David was anointed three times (no theological significance!), but the first anointing by Samuel in the context of his family anticipated his kingship over Israel. The second anointing was over Judah and the third over the whole nation of Israel.

Jesus also was anointed and was immediately compelled by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to face Satan, the original violator of God's kingdom rule in heaven. The treachery of Satan was conceived in God's throne room by the archangel who was so close to Him.

THE TEMPTATIONS

(Mat.4:1-11).

The archangel so close to God (read again the description of Lucifer in Ezek.Ch.28, he is describe as perfect in his creation and "the anointed cherub that covers" v14). He conceived his treachery from his privileged place in the throne room of heaven where the seed of pride was born in his heart resulting in his inordinate desire to grasp deity, to grab the crown which God had designated for His own son and heir. He challenged God's rule and authority and subsequently in the Garden of God he seduced our first parents to sin. The root of sin is rebellion against the claims/rights of God over His creation. You can disassociate yourself from being a child of rebellion and you can return to your Lord and King and submit to His Lordship and government.

I want us to look at the third temptation as it is presented to us in Matthew,

*"Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him **all the kingdoms of the world** and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only you shall serve'" (Mat.4:8-10).*

The kingdoms of the world were those nations and peoples that had chosen to reject the rule of God. The citizens of Babel had revolted against God and God had brought judgment. The twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were judged by fire and the nations of Canaan were to be destroyed by war. Jesus was not going to win the nations by war but He was going to disarm His enemy by His death and he was going to win the nations back by stripping Himself of His royal robes and by dying the death of a supposed criminal. Satan was deceived by his own lust and vengefulness into crucifying the Lord of glory to his own eternal undoing. Jesus was going to win back the rebellious nations through pouring out His life in death and thus providing redemption. It was love that would win the hearts of the lost and bring them back to

God. This has proved true. It has happened and a rich harvest is being constantly reaped resulting from the death and resurrection of the King. One of the primary signs of the end times is the universal proclamation of **“the gospel of the kingdom”** to all nations (Mat.24:14)

THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS DEMONSTRATES THAT THE KINGDOM HAS COME

(Mat.4:8-10; Mk.1:14-15).

Following His anointing for kingship and the temptations that immediately followed He embarked on His ministry. His first words point to the arrival of the kingdom,

*“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God**, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God is at hand**. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). (NKJV)*

The birth of the king of Israel and the commencement of His anointed ministry heralds the coming of the kingdom of God with regard to men and women. The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God. Closely linked with the gospel is personal salvation and Jesus introduced Nicodemus to the need for new birth as the key to entry into the kingdom,

*“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, **he cannot enter the kingdom of God**” (John 3:5).*

New birth refers to regeneration and a change of nature or heart. It is the transformation of the heart restoring it to the Divine image. Peter says that we have become *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2Pet.1:4). I particularly love the way this heart renewal is described by Ezekiel.

*“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 36:25-27). (NKJV)*

David describes the new birth as a “*clean heart*” (Ps.51:10).

The verses in Ezekiel show to us that into the new heart, renewed in spirit, is implanted God’s Spirit - the Holy Spirit. There is a wonderful compatibility between the renewed spirit and the Holy Spirit; this must be true for the indwelling of God’s Spirit to be a constant reality. I would like to put alongside this verse the single reference regarding the interiority of the kingdom of God, “*the kingdom of God is within you*” (Lk.17:21). The new heart is ruled and governed by God. The Christian recognizes that the King is enthroned within. The two things go hand in hand, the new nature and the new government. This fact reflects on the King who rules with authority but is also worthy to rule because of who He is. He is holy and He is love. He is just and righteous in all His actions because He is holy in His nature. He is merciful and kind to all because He is loving in His nature. We recognize His absolute rule because of His power and authority but we also worship our King because of the Divine nature and its glorious perfections. David was a mighty King, unconquerable in battle but he was also a very loving man who cherished friendships. God rules from the centre of our hearts and extends His government from within us outwards to the world. Thus we are salt and light in our communities. Our salt is the savour of life to Christ and to men who are coming to the light (Jn.3:19-21) and our light shines into the darkness which is unable to overcome its shining. To those who heed our message we are “*the savour of life*” and to those who reject the truth we are “*the odour of death*” (2Cor.2:1`5-17).

Jesus also presents a child as exemplifying the heart required for entry into the kingdom,

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat.18:3-4 cf. Lk.18:16-17).

He also warned that riches are a hindrance to entering into the kingdom of God (Lk.18:24-25).

Those who will enter the kingdom must count the cost of discipleship. The hard sayings of Jesus must be viewed in the context of His journey towards Jerusalem and the cross. The confession of Peter regarding Jesus’ Messiahship resulted in Jesus

teaching about the cross and His death. Many sayings of Jesus underline the cost involved in embracing the kingdom. Similarly Paul at the height of persecution exhorts believers at Derbe, Iconium and Antioch to *“continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).*

THE MINISTRY OF THE KING WHO USHERS IN THE KINGDOM

The entrance of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus is marked by,

- Repentance and preaching the gospel (Mat.4:17-22; Mk.1:14-15); entrance into the kingdom (Mat.13:23; 19:14; Jn.3:3, 5; Lk.12:31).
- The teaching of the truths of the kingdom by parables (Mat.Ch.13) and the parables of the king (Mat.Ch.25). The parables reveal to the disciples *“the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”* which are hidden to others (Mat.13:11-13).
- The works of the kingdom – healing and exorcisms (Mat.10:7-8; Lk.11:22),

*“And as you go, preach, saying, ‘**The kingdom of heaven is at hand.**’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Mat.10:7-8).*

*“But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely **the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20).***

The kingdom of God is sustained by His power which is demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus. The ministry of Jesus was marked by immeasurable power which we glimpse on several occasions. When He turned water into wine which was the first manifestation of His power (Jn.2:11). He fed 5,000 men, plus unnumbered woman and children with 5 loaves and 2 fish! He stilled the storms in one moment with a word of command. And here is the secret! They went out under His authority represented by His Name (Mat.10:1; Mk.3:15; 9:38). Behind the authority of God is the power of the Almighty. The King created the universe with a word, God SAID and it came into being. The centurion recognized this authority when he said to Jesus *“... only speak a word, and my servant shall be healed” (Mat.8:8).* This military man had understood the ground of faith for the release of God’s healing power.

THE KING CALLS HIS CHOSEN DISCIPLES TO FOLLOW HIM

(Mat.4:18-20).

“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers; Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (Mat.4:18-22).

In the text of Matthew these verses follow directly after the temptations and follow the first reference to the preaching of Jesus saying, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (v17). I am always amazed at Jesus’ approach to these fishermen. The two brothers are in the act of casting their net into the lake when Jesus calls them to follow Him. This is not the right moment to call them from their work! Their response is *immediate* - they leave their boat and follow Jesus! Jesus did not come to them and reason with them, or offer them terms of employment, He did not suggest they go home and think about it and that He would return the next day for their reply! No! There is only one explanation to His behaviour and that is the fact that **they recognized His authority** and they obeyed Him instantly. His command was imperative and they instinctively obeyed as did the other brothers in the adjoining boat who were mending their nets when Jesus approached them. Of course these men had already met Jesus and stayed overnight with him before returning to their boats (Jn.1:35-42).

The further incident recorded by Luke (5:11) must be placed as following Matthew’s account of the call of the four fishermen. The reluctance of Peter to obey the Master’s command is not veiled in the text. Disgruntled and out of sorts with himself he questioned what Jesus knew about fishing! Jesus had commanded him to let down the nets (plural) in anticipation of a catch. Peter had been fishing all night and not caught one fish! The words are significant in the light of what we have already said about the authority of the word of the King, *“nevertheless at **Your word** I will let down the net (singular)”* (Lk.5:5). Obedience to the authoritative words of Jesus produces an instant miracle – the net is filled with fish and others have to assist in

gathering in the haul of fish. The conclusion to this incident was the willing abandonment of the disciples to follow Jesus, leaving all behind (v11). God's government demands complete submission to Him. The rich young ruler was not prepared to give away his wealth and therefore was unable to meet Jesus' terms of discipleship (Mat.18:21-24 cf. v27). God is not asking obedience for obedience sake but obedience to His word always results in the accomplishment of His will. We often look at the amazing sacrifice of Abraham as a test, which Scripture affirms (Gen.22:1, 12) but it had a much more significant objective in anticipating the death of God's own Son. Abraham rose as a result of this testing to a new level of faith and belief (Heb.11:17-19).

The Sermon on the Mount immediately follows (Mat.Ch5-7) which we have already discussed (p6) and in the next chapter we read of the Roman centurion who pleaded with Jesus for his tormented servant. Central to this story is the word of authority and I believe points to the kingship of Jesus. He offers to accompany the centurion to his home, but he says to Jesus, *"I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But **only speak a word** and my servant will be healed"* (Mat.9:8). The centurion knew the power of authority due to his own position, how much more the authority of Jesus' word. This incident also demonstrates the authoritative word of Jesus regarding sickness and demonic possession. Devils never failed to recognize that they had come into the presence of the Son of God who rules in God's kingdom. Their submission is not a willing one, but one of necessity – they are in the presence of the King who is Lord of all. It is interesting what Paul says about the reign of Christ,

"Then comes the end, when he will have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father; when he will have put down all rule and authority and power. For he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

For he has put all things under his feet. But when he says all things are put under his feet, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

And when all things shall be subdued unto him then will the Son also himself be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all”
(1Cor.15:24-28).

These verses require a careful and detailed exposition which is beyond the remit of this article. I was drawn to these verses when we considered the absolute power of Jesus over the demons and in contrast the seeming liberty of Satan to wander where he will (Job 1:6-12; cf. Rev.Ch.20; Mat.12:29). Linked to this the exchange between Jesus and Satan in the Temptations (Mat.4:1-11). Matthew brings out the effrontery and boldness of the devil to challenge Jesus about His sonship! We read Father’s affirmation of His Sonship, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (3:17). The tempter’s first words to Jesus are, *“If you be the Son of God”* (v3). If He is not the Son of God He cannot be the king, but everything we read about Jesus in the gospels affirms His kingship. The Son of God will accomplish Father’s purposes through His humanity. That is a mystery beyond Satan’s comprehension.

Early in His ministry Jesus sent out his 12 disciples on mission (Mat.Ch.10). His mandate to them was to heal the sick and to cast out demons. They were to go to Jews only because Jesus had come to Israel to be their king. Tragically the words of John were true, *“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not”* (Jn.1:11). Jesus also told His disciples to preach saying, *“The kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Mat.10:7; Lk.9:2). Then Jesus immediately repeated His mandate to the disciples that they were to *heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils”* (v8). Preaching the kingdom is accompanied by healings and exorcisms. According to Luke the disciples were given power and authority over all demons, and to cure all diseases (Lk.9:1). The church is to preach the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world fulfilling Jesus’ mandate of Mat.28:19-20 and only then when the task is complete will the King return for His church.

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The parables are meaningful stories about the Kingdom of God (Mat.13:3, 11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 41, 44, 45, 47, 52).

And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables"
(Mark 4:11 see also Jn.16:12-15; Lk.24:31-32).

Jesus anticipated that those in the kingdom of God would have insight and revelation concerning the true meaning of His parables. When Jesus realized this illumination was happening through His teaching He spoke out in thankfulness,

"I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes"
(Mat.11:25).

Paul prayed for this same insightfulness and revelation to illuminate the minds of believers in Eph.1:17-18.

The parables at the end of Matthew deal with the future aspect of the Kingdom of God. These follow Jesus' prophetic discourse (Mat.Ch.25) about the signs that precede the return of the King. The future aspect of the Kingdom of God will be discussed in a further study.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF THE KING

(Mat.21:5, 8-11).

Matthew makes it very clear that the entry of Jesus the King was foretold by the prophet,

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your **King** is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey"* **(Zech.9:9).**

The entry of Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem was marked by a public outburst of joyful praise. This surprising episode was an outbreak of the Holy Spirit among the

crowds as some spontaneously laid out a pathway for Him of their clothes and others cut down branches to spread on the road. They were making a way for the King. This was a fitting climax to His brief ministry on earth among these Jewish people. But it was a welcome to the holy city. The crowd found upon their lips prophetic words, and that is why I say that this was a spontaneous outbreaking of the Holy Spirit. The crowds were caught up in rapturous praise as they sang in unison to the Son of David the words of the royal Psalm,

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is He who comes,
in the name of the LORD!
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD!”
Hosanna in the Highest!” (Ps.118:26).*

I don't think anyone could fail to see the significance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with the associated ideas of Davidic kingship. Jesus chose a humble beast of burden to carry Him into the city of David. Humility had marked his pathway through life from birth. He had been born into a poor family, that of a carpenter in a rural village. The choice of riding on a colt the foal of an ass was purposefully chosen, reminding one of Christ's self-chosen path to the cross, **“He humbled himself, and became obedient, even to the death of the cross”** (Phil.2:8). His rejection by the Jewish nation was sealed by their clamour and demand for His crucifixion where Christ was humiliated, despised and cruelly killed.

Each day Jesus during the final week He returned to the city from Bethany to heal the multitudes from inside the temple. As the power of the kingdom had continually broken out among the multitudes, so it happened again in the temple,

“The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple and he healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant” (Mat.21:14-15).

When the children witnessed the powerful healings that were taking place in the temple they spontaneously broke out in rapturous praise and found on their lips similar words to the crowds of yesterday. They were beyond themselves with joy as they witnessed the inbreaking of the kingdom of God with power. Is it not amazing

that the religious leaders were incensed and outraged by the praises of the little children? Jesus quoted in reply psalm 8:2 which we have recognize as a Messianic psalm, *“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise”* (Mat.21:16).

THE KING IS CRUCIFIED

(Mat.27:11, 29, 37, 42; Jn.19:14-15).

As one observes events as they unfold during the last hours of Jesus’ life it becomes clear that despite the momentum of events that seem to carry Jesus inevitably to the cross He is in absolute control. He is taken captive, losing His freedom to go where He will, yet He is the King who may call upon heaven’s angels if He should so choose. Rather, He chooses weakness; He chooses not to defend Himself against abuse and injustice. His silence is self-imposed, perhaps due the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah where we read that,

*“He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth” (Isa.53:7).*

One of the central issues about the cross is the challenge to Jesus’ kingship. It is Pilate’s question, *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (Mat.27:11). It was the cruel taunt of the soldiers as they mocked Him, *“Hail King of the Jews!”* (v29) and the challenge of the crowd as they railed on Him, *“If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him”* (v42).

Pilate had written the accusation, the *titulus* above His head which read:

***“THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS”* (v37)**

The King is crucified and the divine authority and the unlimited power of God had not been employed to save Him. He had not called on His angelic hosts (armies) to defend or support Him in His hours of increasing weakness enduring painfully the cross. But at the end He cried out triumphantly, *“It is finished”* and He bowed His head and died. There was no outbreak of jubilation when Jesus was crucified. God’s

vindication of His act was to be seen on the morning of Christ's resurrection. None of the disciples new this was to happen.

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION/EXALTATION OF THE KING

(Mat.29:18-20; Acts 2:32-36; Phil.2:9-11).

The resurrection narratives of Jesus' comings and goings as He assures the disciples and affirms His resurrection are not part of our remit. He is among them for 40 days and then He speaks His final words to them, words that the church through successive generations has taken as the King's mandate for mission,

*"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, **All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

(Mat.28:18-20) (NKJV)

The kingdoms of this world have been taken back from Satan by the shedding of the King's blood and now His messengers are given the command to go forth in His name, as His ambassadors to win the peoples of the earth through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God. We are to go forth with the authority of His Name recognizing that the risen Christ has redeemed mankind for Himself. The strong man has not only been bound but he has been routed. His retreat is evident as the gospel takes root among the nations of the world – of the increase of His government there shall be no end! The devil had offered the "kingdoms of the world" to Jesus in exchange for His submission to the tempter. Jesus with severity and authority rebuked him. Luke says that *"when the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from him for a season"* **(Lk.4:13)**. God's plan to win back the nations by Christ's death on the cross was incomprehensible to the devil. Praise God that we live on the resurrection side of the cross and participate in its victory. Paul says about the victory of the cross over Satan, *"And having spoilt principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it"* **(Col.2:15)**. I think we will give to Paul the final word in this matter. The self-humbling of Jesus and the contrasting exaltation of Jesus by the Father is shown uniquely in the hymn that Paul transformed into one of the most important passages in the New

Testament regarding Christ, having described the sufferings of the Messiah he describes His exaltation,

“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil.2:9-10).

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