

THE KINGDOM: OUR INHERITANCE

In an early *Newsletter* we stated that in preaching, the subject of the Ascension of Christ was one of the most neglected subjects in the Bible. Another neglected subject on par with that is the subject of the Kingdom of God. Matthew mentions the kingdom 55 times; Mark 20 times; Luke 45 times; John 4 times; Acts 8 times; the epistles 17 times and Revelation 9 times. The Prophets in the Old Testament have much to say about the coming kingdom. Peter Wagner in his book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* cites George Eldon Ladd as saying that “modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus.” Wagner goes on to say “I cannot help but wonder why I haven’t heard more about it in the thirty years I have been a Christian. I honestly cannot remember any pastor whose ministry I have been under actually preaching a sermon on the Kingdom of God. I rummage through my own sermon barrel, I now realize that I have never preached a sermon on it. Where has the kingdom been?” How much of the kingdom do we hear preached in our churches today? The kingdom of heaven still seems to be a mystery in most of our churches. Charles Taber, Professor Emeritus of World Missions, Emanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tenn. is quoted in *Focus on the Kingdom* as stating: “I read with interest the nine statements attempting to answer the question, ‘What is the Gospel?’ I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus’ gospel in three of the four accounts: *the Kingdom of God*. Every one of these statements reflect the individualistic reduction of the gospel that plagues American evangelicalism.” Dr. Howard Marshall of the University of Aberdeen wrote in *The Expository Times*: “During the past sixteen years I can recollect only two occasions on which I have heard sermons specifically devoted to the theme of the Kingdom of God...I find this silence rather surprising because the central theme of the teaching of Jesus was the Kingdom of God.”

Mark 1:14, 15 states “Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God* is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.’” The word gospel means “good news”. So what was the good news Jesus preached? Salvation from sin? God’s love for mankind? That he would die for the sins of the world? These and other important subjects Jesus certainly taught, but they were not the main thrust of his preaching. Matthew states it this way: “And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the *kingdom*” (Matt. 4:23). Further: “Jesus was going about in all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the *kingdom*” (Matt. 9:35). In the parable of the sower the word that was heard was “*the gospel of the kingdom*” (Matt. 13:19). Jesus said: “And the *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in the world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt. 24:14). Luke’s words concerning the multitudes was: “He began speaking to them about *the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:11). In fact Jesus says the reason he was sent was to preach the kingdom: “I must preach *the kingdom of God* to other cities also, because for this reason I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). After his resurrection

Jesus “appeared to them (the Apostles) over a period of forty days, speaking to them of the things concerning *the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3).

If the message of Jesus was *the kingdom of God* then the preaching in the book of Acts must have been the same message Jesus preached. The Samaritans “believed Philip preaching the good news about the *kingdom of God* and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Paul’s message contained this same truth: Paul and Barnabas “encouraged the Disciples to continue in the faith, saying, ‘Through much tribulation we must enter the *Kingdom of God*’” (Acts 14:22). Paul “continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about *the kingdom of God*” (Acts 19:8). On his way to Jerusalem Paul told the elders at Ephesus: “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now I know that you all, among whom I went about preaching *the kingdom*, will see my face no more...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:24-27). These verses show that “the gospel of the grace of God” and the “preaching of the kingdom” were the same thing and are summed up in verse 27 as being “the whole purpose of God.” When imprisoned in Rome Paul “testified about *the kingdom of God*” and “preached *the kingdom of God*” (Acts 28:23, 31). The Jews did not accept his message so he said, “Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles” (ver. 28). This equates “this salvation of God” with “*the gospel of the Kingdom*”.

The secular definition of a Kingdom is: “A particularly organized community or major territorial unit having a monarchical form of government headed by a King or Queen” (*Webster*). The Biblical meaning of the term Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven is defined in *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* as: “Royal power, kingship, dominion, rule...the perfect order of things which Jesus was about to establish, in which all those of every nation should believe in him were to be gathered together into one society, dedicated and intimately united to God, and made partakers of eternal salvation...the perfect order of things which already exists in heaven, and into which Christians will inherit at the resurrection in the last day.”

By comparing parallel passages of Scripture we get an idea of what the Kingdom really is. (1) Matthew 20:21 in answer to the request the mother of James and John that he “command that in your *Kingdom* these two sons of mine may sit on your right and on your left.” Mark 10:37: “Grant that we may sit in your *glory* one on your right and one on your left.” The disciples understood his kingdom to be his glory. Luke 24:26 states: “It was necessary for Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory.” *Thayer* (*Ibid*) defines glory as: “The kingly majesty which belongs to him as the supreme ruler...the kingly majesty of the Messiah which belongs to his kingly estate...In this sense it is said of Christ who will come hereafter to set up the Messianic kingdom.” Hebrews 2:10: he is “bringing many sons into glory,” that is, his kingdom. Numbers 14:21 states: “As I

live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. This means all the earth will be filled with the Kingdom of God. (2) Matthew 18:8, 9, Mark 10:43, 45: "It is better to enter into life." Mark 9:47 "It is better to enter the *Kingdom* of God." These scriptures show the alternative to life (the Kingdom) is to be cast into Gehenna, the eternal fire. Jesus said "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves being cast out" (Luke 13:28). To many the most beloved passage of scripture is John 3:16, which speaks of eternal life in contrast to perishing. This is in the context of Jesus speaking to Nicodemus about entering the Kingdom of God. Entering the kingdom is entering into life (being born again). (3) Matthew 23:13: "woe unto you because you shut off the *kingdom* of heaven from men, for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." Luke 11:52: "woe unto you for you have taken away the key of *knowledge*, you did not enter yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered." Luke 12:32 states that the "Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom." Entering the kingdom means God "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true *knowledge* of Him who has called us...to become partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:3). "The spirit of wisdom and revelation" is given in "the *knowledge* of Him" (Eph. 1:17), that is in the *kingdom*. Habakkuk 2:14: "For the earth will be filled with the *knowledge* of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Someday the *kingdom* will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

When Jesus ascended to the Father he "received the kingdom." Daniel 7:13, 14: "And behold with the clouds of heaven one like the Son of man was coming. And he *came up* (not down) to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a *kingdom* that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his *kingdom* is one which will not be destroyed." Not only was Jesus given a kingdom, but "then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:27). The Hebrew writer tells us: "For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him, but *now we do not yet* see all things subjected to him..." (Heb. 2:8). The above scriptures from Daniel 7 will be fulfilled in the future when the Kingdom will be fully and visibly established on earth. However, according to Colossians 1:13: "He delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son." This means Christians already experience something of which they will partake fully "when Christ, who is our life is revealed (and we) will be revealed with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

Let's turn now to the Christian's inheritance. The Apostle Peter states it in these words: "Blessed be he God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an *inheritance* which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away reserved in heaven for you...ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:3, 4, 5). The Apostle Paul states that "In him we have obtained an inheritance" and "the

Holy Spirit of promise is given as a pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:11, 14). Hebrews 9:15 shows that this is "the promise of the eternal inheritance," and it is through "faith and patience" the promise is inherited (Heb. 6:12). Just what is this inheritance that is promised? The answer is found in Matthew 25:34: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed of my Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" We stated above that Matthew 18:8,9 and Mark 9:47 equate the kingdom with life. So we read in I John 2:25 "And this is the promise which he himself made to us: eternal life." To inherit eternal life is to inherit the kingdom.

Romans 8:17 states that if we are children of God then we are "heirs also. Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." Being joint-heirs with Christ, his people inherit the same thing. Psalm 2:8, 9 reveals what the inheritance of Christ will be: "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthen ware." A joint heir shares everything the heir inherits. If Christ rules the nations of the earth, then we will rule the earth with him. "He who overcomes and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26, 27). This is a quotation from Psalm 2:8, 9, and is further stated in these words: "you did purchase for God with your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will *reign upon the earth*" (Rev. 5:9, 10). The religious world has been so absorbed with walking the streets of gold with Christ in heaven, they have never considered ruling with him on earth. Jesus never said we would inherit a city in the sky, rather "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

This is seen in God's dealing with Abraham when he gave him a promise: God promised: "I will establish my covenant between Me and you and *your seed* after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to *your seed* after you" (Gen 17:7). The commentary on this verse in the New Testament is stated by the Apostle Paul in these words: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed' that is, Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Paul goes on and identifies the "seed of Abraham": "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:26-29). Note he says "*if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.*" In Romans 4:13 we are told what the promise to Abraham was: "For the promise to Abraham and his seed that he would be *heir of the world* was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith." Luther in his commentary on Romans leaves out the words in Romans 4:13 which state that Abraham "would be heir of the world"! This meant losing the central truth that the earth is the inheritance promised as the destiny of believers! It meant leaving out the promise of the kingdom, which is the basis of the Gospel.

...The Kingdom...continued next month.