

God's Eternal Plan

Lesson 5: The Kingdom

As we continue exploring the story of the Bible and God's eternal plan, we want to overview the kingdom Jesus has established and calls all people to be part of. While there is a sense in which God has always reigned over His kingdom (Psalm 103:19; Exodus 19:6), there is another sense in which a kingdom was anticipated in connection with the Messiah (Isaiah 9:6-7). While many misunderstand this kingdom (i.e. making it out to be a physical kingdom or lifeless institution), it simply refers to the reign/rule of God through Jesus Christ.

1) The kingdom in Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament did not just point people to a coming Messiah or new covenant, but also to a coming kingdom. Consider a few examples. Isaiah 2:2-4 pictures this kingdom as God's rule being like a mountain above all others that all people can flow to, identifies Jerusalem as the specific place where God's word would flow from, and as a kingdom of peace rather than one advanced by military strength (compare with Micah 4:1-8). Daniel 2:31-45 pictures an eternal kingdom God would establish during the days of a fourth kingdom (the Roman empire) that would be everlasting and fill the whole earth. Daniel 7:9-18 pictures the same four kingdoms (this time as beasts) and the everlasting kingdom that would be given to the Son of Man which would be a vast kingdom in which people from every nation and language would serve Him. While other passages could be considered, recognize that every prophecy made concerning the kingdom of God was fulfilled in the kingdom Jesus established. There is no other kingdom people should still be anticipating for God to establish besides the one that has been established!

2) The kingdom in the gospels. It's not just the Old Testament that taught about a coming kingdom. For example, John the baptizer taught that the kingdom of Heaven had come near, as the reign of the Messiah (King Jesus) was about to begin

(Matthew 3:1-2). Then, the kingdom is often the subject of the parables (Matthew 13:10-11, notice throughout chapter 13), revealing the secrets of the kingdom to those who were spiritually focused and concealing them from those who were not (vv. 12-17, 34-35). Through these, Jesus appears to teach about three primary aspects of the kingdom of Heaven: The nature of the King (i.e. Matthew 18:21-35), the nature of the kingdom (i.e. Matthew 13:44), and the nature of kingdom citizens (i.e. Luke 10:25-37). Then, even beyond parables, the kingdom was a common theme of Jesus's teaching (Matthew 6:9-10, 33; Luke 18:16-17, 24-30, etc.). And, Jesus also indicated that He would build His church and kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19). This kingdom would be in existence within the lifetimes of many who were living at the time (Luke 9:27).

3) The day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Something very special happened in Acts 2 as it related to God's eternal plan – touching all three points we've been discussing of the Messiah, the gospel, and the kingdom. The context of this day involves the time of the Roman empire and the city of Jerusalem. After Jesus had told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8), Jesus was taken up from them in the clouds into Heaven and took His seat on the throne at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-36; Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 1:8). After this, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, demonstrating something special was happening and fulfilling prophecy (Acts 2:1-4, 14-21; Joel 2:28-32). Now directed by the Holy Spirit, the apostles preached to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem about how God had fulfilled His determined plan through Jesus, who they killed but He has raised up to be King to sit on David's throne at His right hand (Acts 2:22-36)! Some who heard this message wanted to know what they must do to be saved from rejecting the Messiah and King (Acts 2:37). They were taught to repent and be baptized (submitting themselves to the King, Acts 2:38-41).

These who were humbly obedient to King Jesus were now counted as citizens of God's kingdom (those ruled by Christ) and members of His church (collection of Jesus's saved people)! Then, these citizens of Jesus's kingdom continued living for the King, with others who submitted themselves to King Jesus being added to His kingdom and counted among the saved (Acts 2:42-47) – continuing even today!

4) How the rule of Christ impacts each person. The rule of Christ should impact each citizen of the kingdom of Heaven in deeply meaningful ways. For example, those who submit themselves to the rule of Christ are transferred from the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan into the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). Christ should rule our thoughts so Christ's authority controls what we focus on (Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 4:8). Christ should rule our character so Christ's authority reigns in our lives so we become like Jesus (Colossians 3:5-10, 12-15; 1:27). Christ should rule our words and deeds so we only speak and do what the King approves (Colossians 3:16-17). And, Christ should rule our relationships so they will be useful in bringing glory to King Jesus through obeying Him (Colossians 3:18-21).

Christ's kingdom has now been fully established, with Jesus now reigning as King over a spiritual kingdom that will never end! Those who recognize Jesus as the Messiah and submit to His authority in their lives share in this kingdom. As we have watched God's eternal plan be accomplished, all people throughout this world can be saved through Jesus and be a citizen of His kingdom. These who submit to King Jesus while they live on earth will then be granted entrance into God's eternal kingdom in Heaven when Jesus returns (2 Peter 1:11)!

Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?