



THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM (cont.)

The kingdom of God, the story behind it in the New Testament. Look at the gospel. We have seen the Gospel of the Kingdom. The King has come and the King has conquered. Here is the question that I want to ask you based on that:

Have you accepted the Kingdom?

Before you answer that question, I want us to look at what it means to “accept the Kingdom.” Have you accepted the Kingdom? Basically, a word for “Have you received the Kingdom.” What does that mean?

Well, I think it can boil down to a couple of things. First of all, to receive the gift of the Kingdom. When you look at the New Testament and teaching of Jesus, the Kingdom is mentioned as a gift in five different ways. First of all, it is a present and a future gift. The kingdom of God in the New Testament is a present and a future gift. What I mean by that is it is a gift that is a reality now and in the future. Sometimes when we think of the Kingdom of God, we think it is something that is coming. Well, it is something that is coming, but it is also something that is here, and that is what Jesus emphasized over and over and over again. In Luke 17:20-25, He says, basically, to the Pharisees He is teaching, he says, “The Kingdom of God is among you, it is right in front of you.” Then He starts talking about how the Son of Man is going to come. So, you kind of see, it is right here and it is coming. You get to Matthew 5:3-10, and it is the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3 start with *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the”* What? *“The kingdom of heaven.”* So, there it is. Then, you have the Beatitudes in between that says, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”* So, you see this future thing. They will be. They will have this. Then, you get to verse 10, and it says, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* So, you see this picture of the Kingdom being here both here now and in the future. It is a present and a future gift.

Next, it is a free gift. Luke 12:32 says, *“...your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”* He is pleased to give it to us.

Third, it's a gracious gift. That is where Luke 10:21 talks about how the Kingdom has *“been hidden from the learned and the wise, but it was the Father's good pleasure to reveal it to you.”* It was His pleasure. He takes great pleasure in showing you His reign, His greatness and His mercy. It is a gracious gift.

Fourth, it is a valuable gift. Matthew 13:44-46 gives two pictures of the Kingdom. *“It is like treasure in a field that when you find it you go sell everything you have got because you want the treasure. It is like fine pearls when you sell everything you have got to get this.”* It is worth everything. We have found something in the Kingdom of God worth losing everything for. That is the testimony across this night. There is something worth losing everything for. That is what the New Testament Kingdom is about.

Finally, it is an eternal gift. Mark 10:17-31 is the conversation Jesus had with the rich young ruler, and He talks in verse 17 about eternal life. *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* Then later, He says that is what happens when you enter the Kingdom of God. It is an eternal gift. This is not just a gift for now; it is a gift for the future. So, it is all these things. We receive the Kingdom as a gift. God gives it to us. His reign in our lives, and the way that we are seeing in Jesus' preaching, He gives it to us.

We, also, as a part of this gift, we enter into the life of the Kingdom. We enter into the life of the Kingdom. I want you to think about this in a couple of different ways. First of all, it involves a radical turn to the King. A radical turn to the King. "Repent" is the theme word of the preaching of the Kingdom. Why is that? Because it is the turning from all the kingdoms of this world to His Kingdom. It is acknowledging the reign of Jesus Christ in our lives above everything else. He is the Lord. That is why, even after the Gospels, we are going to see *"if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead."* Acts 2:36. First Christian sermon lifts Jesus up as Lord and Christ, and then Peter says, "Repent and believe this. See Him as Lord. See Him as the King."

We miss this sometimes with the way we even talk about salvation. We often talk about salvation as "I invite Jesus into my heart." Well, you ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins. Yes, that is a crucial part about salvation, but that is not all that salvation is. Nowhere in the Gospels and the New Testament to follow do we see people going to Jesus for forgiveness and then leaving Him after that to go on and live life like they want. It is submitting your life to his Kingdom, and, yes, it is forgiveness of sin, and, yes, that should be primary in our understanding of salvation. No question. However, we are also subjects of a king. We submit our lives to a king. So, maybe "invite Jesus into our heart" may not be the best way to describe what it means to follow a king. That is what the message is right here. Dallas Willard, just a quote here, he says,

We are guilty of vampire Christianity today that says, 'I would like a little of your blood please but I don't care to be your student or have your character. In fact, why don't you just excuse me while I get on with my life and I will see you in heaven.'

God help us not to live apart from a Kingdom of Christianity. A radical turn to the King.

Second, a radical trust in the King. A radical trust in the King. Matthew 18:2-4 is talking about Jesus bringing the children to Him, and He says, "If you want to enter the Kingdom you need to be like these." That can be really skewed in that picture. It is a beautiful picture, but this can be really skewed as immaturity in the faith, and that is a part of this picture. Sometimes we see that picture, and we think, well, and it is, Jesus is saying it is the simplicity of a child, but it is not the simplicity that says, "I don't need to know a lot of things, and so I am in the Kingdom, so I can kind of sit back and coast through this Christianity thing without diving deep into the truths." The challenge of the New Testament is to get to know God's Word, and the more you know it, to grow deeper in a humble trust just like a child and a father. It is not immaturity in the faith. It is complete and total trust in the Father. It is the face I see when I go home now, and this little guy comes crawling up to me, and he has got that big open mouth smile on his face, and he reaches up his hands and he jumps into my arms. It is radical trust in the Father, and here is the deal. The more we study the New Testament, the more we study the Old Testament, and the more we dive into the knowledge of God, the more that kind of simple abandonment and trust should grow. So, not immaturity in the faith, but total trust in the Father. The gospel calls us to trust Him with everything, everything in our lives.

Finally, a radical turn, a radical trust, and third, a radical transformation by the King. What happens when His Kingdom becomes a reality in our lives, and it begins to pervade every area of our life and all the facets of our lives are now under his Kingdom, and we see his reign in our lives as home, and our lives at work and our lives at play and our lives at school? Everything we do is letting the Kingdom of God, His reign, His Lordship invade every facet of our lives. Not this compartmentalized Christianity that we are so many times guilty of that is relegated to over here in our lives. He is the King of it all, and He transforms it all to bring glory to Himself. This is the beauty of the Kingdom. Now, your life at work, in your work place or your life at school or your life at home or in your neighborhood where you live is now intended to be lived for the Kingdom, and God is intended to be glorified as King in the way you work as a lawyer, or the way you work as a teacher, or the way you work at home. All these things, He is King in.

So, how does that transformation take place? Well, we embrace the King's teachings. We embrace the King's teachings. I have the Sermon on the Mount listed there, but also John 8:31-36. He is talking about the freedom that comes in the Kingdom. How does it come? *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* You will know the truth, know my teachings. We are students of the King. Why do we gather tonight? This is motivation for the rest of this evening and any time we have opportunity to study the Word because we are listening to the King. We are His students. We are His apprentices. We listen to His Word. We embrace the King's teaching.

Not only embrace His teachings, but we embody the King's character. John 14:15-21. Go look at those verses. It starts off, and He says, *"If you love me, you will obey my command."* That is where it ends too, and in the middle, what he does is he talks about how the Father is in me, and I am in you, and you are in me. You embody the King's character. The purpose of the King's teachings is to transform our character. That is why we have to know the Word, and that is why the Word must be the center of the Church because it is only through the Word that we are going to be conformed to the image of Christ and the character of Christ. This is the avenue through which that happens. Therefore, it is not such stories we need to hear or entertainment we need to get, it is the Word we need over and over and over again in our lives because it alone has the power to transform our character to be like the King's. We embody the King's character.

Third, we experience the King's power. Luke 10. Go with me to Luke 10. I want you to look with me at verse 9. Luke 10:9. This is Jesus sending out 72 people on a mission, and I want you to hear what He says to them in Luke 10:9. Well, we will start in verse 8 just to get context. *"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'"* Now, this is Jesus sending other people out. He has done the healing deal, but now he is telling them to go out and heal and tell them that the Kingdom of God is near them. So, that is what they do, and they come back. Listen to the verse, *"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'"* They are kind of excited! *"He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.'"* He has transferred his authority. *"However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

The whole point of the miracles was to do what? To point to the reign of God over us, personally, in our lives. The King has come, and when He transfers his authority, and they see all these demons submitting to them, they are seeing the effects of this thing and are getting a little excited. Jesus says, "That is great. I have transferred you my authority, but don't forget why. I transferred you my authority so that you would be in the Kingdom and

others would be drawn into the Kingdom." Then, you get to John 14:12, and Jesus says these words. He says, "All the things you have seen me doing there, you are going to do even greater things than these. What do you think about that?" Jesus, who did all of these things, comes to the end and He says, "You will do it even greater." How can we do it even greater? The Church has the authority to go out and proclaim the Kingdom, and men and women, boys and girls in all nations, the Bible promises, will come into the Kingdom. That is great authority, and it is a great privilege to be a part of the Kingdom that does even greater than what we see if Jesus' life, because He is doing that through every single one of us in this room who trust in Him!

We experience the King's power. Finally, we enlist in the King's mission. We enlist in the King's mission. What I have listed there is, basically, the Great Commission, so to speak, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and it leads us to the next facet of the Kingdom of God.

THE MISSION OF THE KINGDOM

We have seen the Gospel of the Kingdom. The King has come, the King has conquered, and the question is "Have you accepted the Kingdom?" Is the Kingdom a reality in your life, your submission to Christ? Is it there? If not, I urge you to see your life as a picture of this Kingdom. That is what Jesus is teaching us. Have you accepted, have you received the Kingdom? Is He showing his reign in every facet of your life? We go from Christ to the Church when we get to Acts. The mission of the Kingdom. I want you to go with me to Acts 1. Acts 1, the very beginning, and I want you to look at how it starts. Acts 1. Jesus is, obviously, by this time, has died on a cross, He has risen from the grave, and then Acts 1:6. Listen to this. "*So when they met together...*" This is the disciples and Jesus. Obviously, Judas excluded at this point. "*They asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the...'*" What? The "*kingdom to Israel?*" Is this it? Now you have risen from the grave. All right. How is it going to happen?

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Do you see what is happening here? These guys are still holding out that the Kingdom is going to, you know, show itself in the way that they had thought. Maybe now that He has risen from the grave, is it time now that you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel? Jesus says, "No. It is not for you to know the times and the dates." He basically says, "We have work to do. Here is what I am going to do. I am going to give you my Spirit, and you are going to all nations, and you are going to make my Kingdom known. You are going to be witnesses to the Kingdom in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." That inaugurates the picture of the Church in the Kingdom. He says, "We have a job to do and the Spirit is going to enable you to do it." So, I want us to think about the King. After this point, He ascends into heaven, and the guys are stunned. What do we do now? There they are in Jerusalem. So, the King is there, even on the story line the map in your notes, you see the arrow going up but that doesn't mean the King is out of the picture. The King has come. The King has conquered.

The next truth, and it is the first truth under the mission of the Kingdom.

The King is in control.

The King is in control. Now, this is where it gets really good. Here is Jesus who has ascended into heaven, but I want you to see some things about Jesus even while He is in heaven. First of all, He has a plan. He has a plan, and I want you to think about His plan in a few different ways.

First of all, His plan never fails. He has a plan, and that plan never fails. Let me show you this. You have some Scriptures listed there. In Luke, all those different Scriptures, the word that is used, it is the same word in the Greek, but it is a couple of different words that you will see in the English. It talks about how this must happen or that must happen or it is necessary for this to happen or it is necessary for that to happen. Why is it necessary? Why must it happen? Well, because these are not just random, haphazard things going on here. You get to Acts 1, and the theme is picked up in different verses. Look at verse 16. Acts Chapter 1. *"In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago."* Then, you get down to verse 21, *"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us..."* You get to Acts 2:23, *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge..."* It was purposed that this should happen. You get to Acts 3:12, *"When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? We didn't do this. It had to happen. God is doing this."* Look at Acts 4:21. *"After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened."* What we are seeing over and over and over again in the book of Acts is that things are happening for a reason. They are happening for a reason. The plan that God has is never going to fail.

Now I want us to think about it in some specific ways. He planned, Jesus planned to go to the cross. Jesus planned to go to the cross. We can't get the idea when we come to the New Testament that the cross was an accident. "Oh no. I sent my Son and this is what happened." No, this was the plan from the very beginning. You look at Acts 2:23, which we just read, and it is really interesting. You know, it is a hot topic today in our church culture, predestination and election. Look at Acts 2:23. Look at what it says. *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge..."* God purposed to send Jesus to the cross. *"...and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."* So, God purposed it, and, at the same time, they chose to put him on the cross. So, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility for what happened somehow go together, and we are going to try in our day to do everything that we can to try to debate that back and forth, but the truth, is that they are both there in Scripture. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are right there together. You see it again in Acts 4 when they are praying after they are experiencing persecution. Verse 27 says, *"Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed."* They conspired. Then look at verse 28, *"They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."* God's sovereignty, His plan, man's responsibility, they go together. Ask me how, I don't know, but they go together. They are not against each other. Somehow, they fit together in Scripture. God has a plan. Jesus planned to go to the cross.

All these verses you see in Luke talk about how Jesus set himself toward Jerusalem to go to the cross. Luke 9:51 is a major shift over to the book of Luke, and it says, *"Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."* John 10:18 says, *"No one takes my life from me, I give it up myself."* He planned to go to the cross. It is part of the whole design of Christ.

Not only that, but He planned to rise from the grave. I am glad that was a part of His plan. Acts 2:24, *"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."* Then, when you get to Acts 13, it says the same thing. He planned to go to the cross. He planned to rise from the grave.

Next, He planned to send His Spirit. He planned to send His Spirit. When you get to Acts 2, and the Holy Spirit comes down in verses 1 through 4 especially, you see the plan of God completely coming together here. It says, *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting."* You go back, and you might make a, well, I have got it written there. Ezekiel 37:9-14 talks about the Spirit of God in Ezekiel coming to be upon His people and that is the picture we are seeing culminating here in Acts 2.

Then, it says, *"They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."* You go back to Exodus 19 and Exodus 31, and you see a similar picture of the Word of God in Exodus 19 that you see right here. Then, 3,000 people are struck down in one day in Exodus 31. It just so happens on the day that the Spirit comes, 3,000 people come to faith in Christ. It is a complete reversal of that picture in Exodus 31. Then, you see what happens. *"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."*

We have a picture way back in Genesis 11 of God's judgment that causes people to be scattered to the nations and confused and divided from each other. When God's Spirit comes down, what you see is unity among the nations because there is one gospel being preached in all these different languages. All of that in the Old Testament sets this picture up in Acts 2. God planned to send his Spirit in this way at this time. It was all part of his divine plan.

He planned to go to the cross, arise from the grave and to send His Spirit, and He planned to bring the nations to Himself. He planned to bring the nations to Himself. You have verses there. Matthew 10:5-6 and Matthew 15:24 both talk about how Jesus came expressly for the house of Israel, for the people of Israel. He came for the lost sheep of Israel, but then you get to the end, Matthew 28:18-20, and we know that He said, *"Go and make disciples of all nations."* The whole picture was Jesus came to minister to the lost sheep of Israel and raise up an army that would go to the nations. It is the ultimate fulfillment of Genesis 12:1-3. He planned to Bring the nations to Himself. All of that, all of that showing that God has a plan. So, when Jesus has ascended to heaven, He is still in control. There are still things working out here according to His plan.

Not only does he have a plan, but He has the power to accomplish this plan. He has the power to accomplish it. His authority cannot be stopped. Daniel 7:13-14 talks about the Son of Man who would have sovereign dominion and rule over every nation and tribe and language. That is the prophecy of the Son of Man in Daniel 7. When Jesus rises from the grave, and He comes to the Great Commission in Matthew 28, He starts by saying, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* In other words, all dominion is mine. It is the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14, but what is really interesting, is when you get to, look at it with me, Acts 7. Acts 7:54-55. This is the stoning of Stephen. The stoning of Stephen says, *"Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and..."* He doesn't say Jesus is standing at the right hand of God. He says, *"the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* It is a direct reference to Daniel 7:13-14. Hardly

anybody outside Jesus Himself referred to Him as the "Son of Man," but Stephen does it this time to show that He has authority over everything in this situation. He is about to be stoned for his faith, but Jesus has authority over the whole picture. So, he gets stoned and what happens? The gospel advances. In Acts 8, the gospel goes to Judea and Samaria. Then, you get to Acts 11:19, and it says the whole church in Antioch was there as a result of the persecution associated with Stephen.

The authority of Jesus cannot be stopped. He is going to show his authority over Satan. This is a great picture. You do realize that, in Acts 7 and 8, Satan's attempts to stop the Church actually serve to advance the Church. Does that give you confidence in the mission that God has entrusted to us? That any efforts of the adversary to stop us, God would turn around to advance us. He has authority, and it can't be stopped.

Not only does He have authority, but His Word cannot be stopped. All these verses that are listed there, I wish we had time just for the sake of seeing it repeated over and over again, to see how His Word is emphasized because going forward nothing can stop His Word. That is why, when they prayed when they were persecuted, this is what we pray I think. Acts 4, at the end of Acts 4, is a great guide for us on how to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters. Acts 4:23-31. Basically, what they prayed was *"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."* That is what they prayed for. "Just let your Word continue to go forward. Do whatever it takes. May your Word go forward." His Word cannot be stopped. The bottom line is, nothing can or will keep His plan from being accomplished. When you get to the very end, Acts 28:30-31, you might turn there and make a little note because this is a great thing about the book of Acts. You get to the very end, and it says, *"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God ..."* There it is. *"...He preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."* The interesting thing is, and you might underline or circle it, but when it says "without hindrance" right there in Acts 28:31, "without hindrance" he preached it, that word is actually at the very end of this verse in the original language of the New Testament. In the Greek, "without hindrance," is the last word that Acts gives. The gospel going forward without hindrance. Nothing is going to stop this Word, and that is a promise that we can and must cling to today. In the New Testament, no unbelieving Jews who persecuted the Church, no secular kings, nothing can stop it from going forward. So, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that is going to keep this mission from being accomplished.

The only question is, "Will the Church align with our King's plan?" What is interesting is there are points in the book of Acts where you see the Church resisting the plan of God. Acts 11 is one example. The Gentiles are starting to come to faith in Christ, and they ask, "Are they allowed to? Should we let them? Let's get together and have a conference and see if that is an okay thing." It leads to Acts 15, and here is where we have to see, we have to learn from the history of the people of God. God's design throughout the Old Testament, we saw this when we studied the Old Testament, is His design for His people is to bless them greatly so that His glory would be made known through them in all nations. That was His whole plan, but they resisted it. Year after year, generation after generation, they resisted it, and they missed it. So, you get to the New Testament. The King comes to His people and what do they do? They resist it. The gospel, and really the whole book of Acts is a story of God active and God resisted over and over and over again. You see Him resisted in Jerusalem, rejected by the Jewish people, that is the statement of Acts 6 and 7. Then, even the Church, you see the mission, God and His people resisted. It is not intentional. It is not necessarily, "In your face, God. We don't want to do what you are saying." However, it is preoccupation with everything except for the mission, which we have been created for. Is there a word there for us? God help us not to get so preoccupied just as Israel did

throughout the Old Testament with our national pride and what we do in this or that, so that we turn a deaf ear to the nations who He desires to see come to faith and repentance. That is why Luke said at the very end of his Gospel, "Jesus died so that repentance and forgiveness of sins could be preached in all nations." So, we don't say today when Jesus died on the cross, He died just for me. We say, "When Jesus died on the cross, He didn't die just for me. He died so that repentance and forgiveness of sin would be preached among all the peoples of the earth, and I am not going to resist that mission. I am going to give myself to that mission." As a church, we must give ourselves to that mission because, if we don't, then we will miss it, and we will reject Him and we will miss the whole point of why we are here. That is why the mission must be central in the Kingdom in the Church. You can't just put it to the side. Will the Church align with our King's plan? I think the New Testament gives us hope, but when it happens, what can happen? I pray that we will learn from that. The King is in control. Second Part of the Mission of the Kingdom: The King Has A New Community.

The King has a new community.

What we see in the New Testament is Jesus enlarging the Kingdom through the church. Up until this point, the people of God were the people of Israel. They had some outsiders, but mainly the people of Israel. You get to the Church picture in Acts, and especially the letters that help inform the book of Acts, and it is a completely different picture. It is open to all people. The Kingdom is available to all nations, all peoples, Jew, Gentile, slave, free, all open to. I want to see the picture that we see.

First of all, this community, this church is called by the mercy of Christ. Called by the mercy of Christ. Look with me at 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2. Remember, this is that book that was written in the middle of Nero's persecution when believers were being, basically, burned alive to light up his gardens. The suffering picture. 1 Peter 2:4. Listen to what he says to the church. He says

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Is this a Jewish picture or what? However, it is written to Gentile believers as well as Jewish believers. Then he goes on, and he quotes from the Old Testament, and he gets down to verse 9,

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We are here because God has called our names, and He has initiated a relationship with us. He said to us, "*You are my people; now declare my praises everywhere you go. You are my people.*" That is what He said throughout the Old Testament to the people of Israel. Now, He is saying it to the Church. It is loaded Old Testament imagery. He called us by His mercy.

Second, we are joined by faith in Christ. We are joined by faith in Christ. Galatians 3:6 and 8 and 26-29 are just a very clear picture of that. Then, you get over the Hebrews 11, and it is a great picture. I put, especially, 11:26 because it says Moses regarded disgrace for the

sake of Christ as something worthy to pursue. Moses? For the sake of Christ? Yes. We are united even with believers of the Old Testament by faith. Their faith was in the promise to come; ours in the promise we have seen come in Christ. Joined by faith in Christ.

Third, filled with the Spirit of Christ. Filled with the Spirit of Christ. Ephesians 1:13-14. We won't have time to go there, but that is, man, that is a great picture of the unity of Jews and Gentiles. The whole book of Ephesians was written to really hit on some of that Jewish/Gentile relationship.

He expresses the Kingdom in the Church. Okay? So He calls us out. He calls us by His mercy, enlarges the Kingdom through the church, and then, He expresses His Kingdom in the church.

The church comprises the Body of Christ. Ephesians 2, all those verses from Ephesians talk about how we are the Body of Christ. The Body is mentioned over and over and over again. So, we comprise the Body of Christ. Second, the church possesses the authority of Christ. Remember, back in Luke 10:9, when the disciples were given power to heal, authority to heal? We looked at that, and how they were excited when they came back and demons submitted in the name of Christ. When you get to Acts 3, Peter goes up to the Temple with John, and there is a lame man sitting by the gate called Beautiful, and Peter says, "Rise and walk," and the guy does. He gets up and walks. What we see from the very beginning of the Church is that the authority of Christ now belongs to the Church. He has given, entrusted the authority that He had to the Church, most clearly in giving us His Spirit. We can grow so casual with this, but don't miss the gravity of this statement: "God has invested His Spirit in you." He has given you His Spirit. That is a mammoth truth, a mammoth responsibility. If we are not overwhelmed by that, then we have missed it. He has given us His Spirit, the Spirit of the living God, and all the authority that comes with that has been given to us. We can't live a defeated Christian life with the Spirit in us.

We are the Body of Christ, we possess the authority of Christ, and third, the church embodies the love of Christ. Church embodies the love of Christ. All over Ephesians, that book on the Church, you see the love. The distinguishing mark of the Church is love. 1 John 3:16-18. We show our love for each other by laying down our lives for each other. You realize that the Church is intended, we are intended to be a picture of the love of Christ in the world, and when the world looks at us, if they do not see a community of love, then we are missing out on what it means to be a part of His Kingdom. They need to see a community that loves and embodies His love for each other and embodies His love and His care, His concern for the people in the world. Love must be the distinguishing mark for the Church. We cannot compromise on love in the Church.

The church embodies the love of Christ. The church completes the sufferings of Christ. We had mentioned in Philippians 1, we have talked about suffering, obviously, a good bit. Colossians 1:24-27 says exactly that. It says, "I fill up," Paul's says, "*what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.*" What does that mean? That His afflictions on the cross were not enough to save me from my sins? No, but don't miss it. Some of you, some of us, are sitting here thinking, a little perplexed with the suffering, persecution emphasis, "How does this work? Why is suffering, how can persecution even be a good thing?" Well, think about it. How did God show His love to the world most clearly? He did it through a suffering servant, through the sacrifice of His Son. That is how He showed us His love most clearly. So, assuming that His strategy has not changed, how is He going to show His love most clearly in the world today? How can we show, embody the character of Christ, if everything always goes right for us? It is actually when things don't go right for us, and when it is the hardest and when the suffering is deepest, and I don't want to say this in any way trivially

because I know that there are people all across this room who are experiencing, maybe not persecution, but some pretty intense suffering in their lives right now, and God desires to show His glory most clearly in those times. That is when a victory is most clear in suffering. So, that is where it all comes together. We complete the sufferings of Christ. How are we going to show Christ to the world if everything always goes right for us? It is when things don't go right for us when we most clearly show Christ. The church completes the sufferings of Christ.

Finally, the church displays the glory of Christ. Man, this is a great picture of Ephesians, I think you are there. Ephesians 2:19-22. He says, "...you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but..." you are

fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

We saw that picture earlier with Jesus being the Temple. Now the Church, us being filled with the Holy Spirit, and our bodies being the Temple, we rise together as a picture of the glory of the Lord. All those verses talk about the glory of Christ being most clearly displayed in the Church. So, he expresses the Kingdom in us. We do realize, in this room, that we are the living representation of the Kingdom of God on the earth today. Do you realize that? This is why we have to study the New Testament because we have to know about the Kingdom of God, and we have to know how that looks in our lives because this is a huge responsibility. It is more important than anything else. That is why we need to do it, because He expresses the Kingdom through us in the Church.

Finally, He entrusts the Kingdom to the church. He entrusts the Kingdom to the Church. He has given us this privilege, and it means two main things. First of all, the Church must guard the Gospel. In our day, just as in every day, all the way since Colossians, there are philosophies, world views that would go against the gospel, would jeopardize the gospel, and that would even infiltrate the Church and cause many in the Church to begin to doubt if Jesus is the only way to heaven. If this Word is really true, or if it is just some suggestions, we would begin to take the teachings of Jesus and twist them. It is alive and present today, and we must stand guard with the gospel. We must guard against any false gospel that would try to infiltrate the Church. The Church must always guard the gospel. Guard the deposit that has been entrusted to us, it says in the New Testament.

The Church must not only guard it, but it must proclaim it. This is kind of a dichotomy. Sometimes we guard it, almost like keep it hidden, but no, guard it, and don't miss it, we guard it through proclaiming it. We proclaim it. We get it clearly out there over and over again. It is open to misinterpretation when the Church is silent about the gospel. We guard the gospel by proclaiming the gospel. I love this. You have to see this. 2 Corinthians 4. Let me encourage you to turn there. 2 Corinthians 4 is talking about this. Verses 4-6. Listen to this.

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

Skip down with me to verse 6.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

So, what you have in verse 4 is the god of this world blinding the minds of unbelievers. In verse 6, you have the true God who is shining a light in their hearts, and in the middle, how does He do this, in the very middle, sandwiched in between, *"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."* We preach Christ in the very middle of that. The god of this world is waging battle with the true God of the universe who is shining light in our hearts, and we are right in the middle, in the thick of this battle. We are proclaiming the gospel. We must be active in proclaiming the gospel.

One of my favorite things that Johnny said, one of my favorite things that I heard Johnny say today, "We don't have Billy Graham in China. We just show the gospel as individuals in our lives and in our families. That is how we share the gospel." He said, "You can't have Billy Graham in China, you know." God help us to see that sharing the gospel as individuals would be a better plan ultimately for advancing the gospel to the ends of the earth. We must proclaim the gospel.

The question that I want to challenge you with is...

Are you advancing the Kingdom?

That is the question. Are you advancing the Kingdom? I want you to think with me about the New Testament Church and mission.

First of all, the Church was born in the context of mission. You realize, obviously, these writings about Christ did not happen necessarily while He was on the earth. All of them had to be written after He ascended to heaven in order to include that picture. So, every book that is written in the New Testament came after the life of Christ, the beginning of the Church. The Church was born in the context of mission. From the very beginning in the book of Acts, all of this is aimed for the mission of the Church. That means every single one of these documents is a missionary document. It was born in the context of mission. The whole point is to show how the Church was shaping itself for mission and advancing the Kingdom.

Second, the Church exists for the completion of mission. Exists for the completion of mission. Romans 10:12-14. *"How will they hear if nobody comes and shares with them?"* God's Plan A is to take you to the unreached peoples of the world, and if we don't do it, there is no Plan B. We are the Plan A, so we have to see that in the New Testament. The Church exists for the completion of this mission.

Third, the Church dies for the cause of mission. The Church dies for the cause of mission. We realize that most of the books that are written in the New Testament were written by people who died for the cause of mission. Matthew, John exiled of course, Peter, Paul, main characters, authors. If we miss the persecution that is all over this book, then we will miss what fueled the fire of this book. The Church dies for the cause of this mission. It embraces death for the advancement of the Word. That is a Christianity that we need to discover, recover. Think about the contemporary Church in mission.

Here are the implications that have just gripped me studying this. We will miss the entire point of the New Testament if we read it and study it apart from the context of mission in the church. If in our local churches, if in this Church, if we are not on mission then we will

never understand the New Testament. You do realize that. If we are not surrendered completely to mission, we won't even be able to understand the Word of God. That is why Philemon 6 says, *"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."* How do you have a full understanding of every thing we have? By being active and sharing your faith. If we hole up in our church buildings and study the New Testament, then we won't even begin to grasp its meaning, and if we are out giving our lives to proclaiming the gospel in all nations, now it starts to make sense why Paul would say this or that. Now it starts to make sense why Jesus would say this or that. It all makes sense only the context of mission.

Second, the New Testament Church advanced the Kingdom of God. Which kingdom are we advancing? Which kingdom or kingdoms are we advancing? Notice, please notice, that the goal and the verses that are listed here Acts 8, 19, 20, 28. They are not talking about the church preached the church. They are talking about how the Church preached the Kingdom, the gospel. We are not advancing our own kingdoms. We are advancing His Kingdom, and our kingdoms have been sacrificed to His. They have been abandoned for His. The Church advances His Kingdom.

Third, the Kingdom does not exist for us; we exist for the sake of the Kingdom. You look at Galatians 1:15-16, and you see that Paul describes the very motive of Christ and His salvation. He says, *"God... was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles..."* There was an end. Christ gave His gospel to Paul for a reason, and it didn't stop with Paul, that wasn't the ultimate reason. The ultimate reason was so that all nations, Gentiles would worship God. It is full circle. We can't stop salvation right here centered around ourselves and miss out on the fact that we exist for the sake of the Kingdom. We are saved for one reason, ladies and gentlemen, to advance the Kingdom. If we are not advancing the Kingdom, we are not fulfilling the purpose of our salvation.

We exist for advancing the sake of the Kingdom, and if we really desire to live out New Testament Christianity, we must risk our lives for the cause of mission. We must risk our lives for the cause of mission. I want you to turn with me to Revelation 6, and I want to show you a verse. Actually, all the Apostles except for John, excluding Judas, lost their lives for mission. Peter, Paul, the two main characters in the book of Acts, Stephen stoned, James beheaded, it is all over the book of Acts. 2 Timothy 3:12, *...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..."* Look at Revelation 6:9.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

This is martyrs praying at the throne. *"Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until..."* When? *"...Until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."* Did you catch the weight of that verse? Feel the weight of that verse. The picture of martyred saints at the throne of heaven calling out for God to rise up and show His truth and His justice, and God says there are still more who will give their lives for the sake of the Kingdom. May God raise us up to be a people who will say, "We embrace whatever you desire in your plan, oh God, and we will trust in you." I won't even pretend to know what it is like to be in the shoes of Johnny or any other brothers and sisters who are suffering and persecuted around the world. I won't even pretend to go there. However, at the same time, what if we prayed that, if God would see fit to count us worthy to be among that number, that we would embrace that? I am not saying that is an easy prayer to pray. Some people in the Church would think

that is too radical of a prayer to pray, but God will think it is a biblical prayer to pray. "God, if you would count me worthy to be joining in that number, then I embrace that." Okay. On that note.

THE HOPE OF THE KINGDOM

The Gospel of the Kingdom, and the mission of the Kingdom. You get to the end of Revelation, and you have the hope of the Kingdom. I told you hope was coming. It is 11:57, and hope is here. Hope is here. All right? We are going to fly through this. Okay? Revelation. Hope is here. So, get ready. All right. You know. All right, here we go.

The King is coming back.

The work of Christ in the Kingdom. The Gospels. The King, the King has come, the King has conquered, the King is in control, the King has a new community. Ladies and Gentlemen, the King is coming back. That is where Revelation starts us. In Revelation 1, the King is coming back.

The work of Christ in the Kingdom. The Gospels show the completion of Christ's work for us. There is nothing else that needs to be done for our salvation. His work is complete. Hebrews 9 teaches us.

Acts and the Letters show the continuation of Christ's work in us. We have seen that over and over again. Colossians 1:27, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Revelation, though, shows the consummation of Christ's work with us. We will reign with Him, the Bible says. We are co-heirs with Him in glory. It is not just for us or in us; we are with Him.

Man, this is where it gets good. The King who's coming! He came as the Lamb, Revelation 5:6. You have it there probably close to you in front. *"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders."* He came as a Lamb. He came in weakness. He came in poverty. He came in humiliation. That is how He came.

He will come next time as the Lion. Verse 5, *"Then one of the elders said to me "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."* Now, you think, "Well, I thought it was the Lion and the Lamb in the New Testament." It is. Here is the beauty of it. The triumph of the Lion is seen even in the Lamb. Look in verse 6. *"I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain."* A slain Lamb, but what is the Lamb doing? The Lamb is not seated, the Lamb is not lying down, hurt as if it has been slain. The Lamb is standing as if it had been slain. Lambs don't stand when they look like they have been slain unless they have the triumph of a Lion. A Lion and the Lamb.

He came in weakness. He will come in power. He came in poverty. He will come with the wealth of heaven. He came in humiliation, He will come in glory. Jesus, this is a picture of him all over the book of Revelation. He is the faithful witness and the ruler over the kings of the earth. Remember, the whole point of this book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." He is the Living One, Revelation 1:18, He is the Son of God. He is Holy and True, Revelation 3:7 says, in the letters to the churches. He is the Amen. Can I get an amen? He is the Amen, the faithful

and the true witness, the Beginning of the creation of God. You see the greatness of that word here, because all that was prophesied, all that was pictured now is "Amen" in Christ. All the promises of God that are "Yes" in Christ, the New Testament teaches. So, we come to the end of this scene, the book of Revelation, and we have one big "Amen" fest, because He is the "Amen."

Faithful and True, He is the Word of God. Revelation 19. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the Root and the Offspring of David. All the way back to Matthew, now to Revelation. The King is coming back. He is the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, not only is He coming, all that picture, but here is what He will bring. He will bring, first of all, final redemption for those who have accepted the Kingdom. Final redemption. Redemption is brought back, final restoration. That is Revelation 19:1-10. The Bride prepared for her Groom.

Revelation 19:11-16, though, shows that the King will bring final judgment for those who have rejected the Kingdom. He will bring final redemption and final judgment. The King is coming back. It is a reality.

The King will host an eternal celebration.

Not only is the King coming back, but the King will host an eternal celebration. You are probably going to have a hard time fitting eternal celebration into that blank on your yellow sheet, but you might use two lines. The King will host an eternal celebration. Here is a picture of the Kingdom. When you get to Revelation 21. Revelation 21.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Here is the picture of the Kingdom in Revelation 1. First, indescribable beauty. Indescribable beauty in heaven in the Kingdom. A new creation. Revelation 21:1 says. We saw the fall at the very beginning, now everything is new, the old is gone.

Second, a new Jerusalem. Revelation 21:2. You may not know it, but I used to be in a praise band that was called "New Jerusalem." How do you like that? Okay? We will make a come back one day at Secret Church. Okay.

A new creation. A new Jerusalem. A new Temple. Third, a new Temple. A new place where we will be with our God, and He will be with us. A new order. Everything is new. Indescribable beauty.

Second, inexpressible joy. Verse 6 says it is done. "*He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.'*" Is there anybody in this room who has gone to the things of this world time and time again and come up empty? I am looking forward to the day when we will experience eternal satisfaction, and we will never, ever be

thirsty again. Inexpressible joy. Here is the beauty of it. It is full and free. Without cost. "I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."

Indescribable beauty, inexpressible joy and irreversible justice. Revelation 21:7-8 gives us a picture. "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." Eternal sonship. Eternal sonship, but it also talks about those who will be cast into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Eternal sonship and everlasting separation. "The lake of fire is the second death," Revelation 20:14 says. "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." So, I urge you, if there is any doubt in your mind as to your status in Christ in the Kingdom, I urge you to see that there is coming a day of irreversible justice when there will be no more second chances. So, I urge you not to play the game and not to take your chances. I urge you to submit to the King.

A picture of the Kingdom. A promise of the Kingdom. Here is where, go to Revelation 22:7. This is the claim of Christ, and He repeats it three different times in the last chapter of the Bible. Hear his words. Verse 7, "Behold, I am coming soon!" Then, you get down to verse 12, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me." Verse 20, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'" That is the claim of Christ.

What is the cry of the church? The cry of the church is "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." Amen. So be it. So be it. Amen. Come Lord Jesus. I am coming soon. Amen.

Are you anticipating the Kingdom?

So, here is the question that I want to ask you as we close out this whole picture of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament. The question that I want to ask you is this: Are you anticipating the Kingdom? Are you anticipating the Kingdom? We have asked ourselves, "Have you accepted the Kingdom," "Are you advancing the Kingdom?" Now, the closeout: Are you anticipating the Kingdom? Here is what the New Testament tells us to do. In the book of Revelation, as well as other places. Number one: We look for His appearing. We look for it. See the temporary nature of this world. Take heart, the New Testament says to those who are reading it. Take heart. Soon there will be no more sin. Soon there will be no sin. You will not have struggles with sin any more, not at all. Soon there will be no sorrow, no pain, no agony over lost loved ones, no pain over cancer and over sickness that just doesn't seem to go away. There is no more sorrow, no more sadness. Soon there will be no more sickness. Cancer in all forms will be gone. AIDS that ravages so many lives...gone. There will be no more sickness, and soon there will be no more separation. See the temporary nature of this world, and whenever we face things that threaten to destroy us, see the temporary nature of those things.

See the eternal importance of our work until He comes. Don't quit your jobs. Don't sit around like fanatics. Work like Jesus is coming back next week, and all the peoples of the earth need to hear that He is good and need to hear that He died on the cross. We work like that. That means we work much harder than we would work if He wasn't coming back. That is why the Second Coming must be a recovered doctrine in the Church because it is motivation for the mission. See the eternal importance of our work until He comes. Keep your jobs.

We look for His appearing. Next, we live for His appearing. We live for it. We must pursue holiness in all areas of our lives. Colossians 3:1-5 says that in light of His appearing, pursue God, be holy. We don't want the King to come back, and us to be asleep in our sin. That is not the picture the New Testament gives. The New Testament says pursue holiness. Be holy because the holy King is coming back for you, so be the Bride beautifully dressed in white linen, which is the righteous act He has given you to wear, that you have the power across

this room to say, "No" to sin and live in righteousness. So, live in righteousness, live in holiness, because He is coming back, and we want to be ready when He comes.

We want to be alert, the New Testament teaches, and we must proclaim the Gospel to all peoples of the world. You don't have to turn there. I am going to read to you from Matthew 24:14. Here is what he says. He says, in verse 13, "*he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*" Then, listen to Matthew 24:14, "*And this gospel of the kingdom...*" which we started out talking about, "*the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*" Do you see that? Jesus ties His coming back with the gospel going to the nations, which means, if we anticipate His Kingdom, then we advance His Kingdom with great zeal. We run to the nations. Why? Because we want to see Jesus. It is tied together. The whole picture is tied together. The hope of the Kingdom, the mission of the Kingdom, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, it all comes together. Make the Kingdom known. We must proclaim the gospel to all people of the world, all peoples without distinction.

We look to His appearing, we live for His appearing, and third, we long for His appearing. We long for His appearing. We long for the day when He will save us fully. The work of Christ on the cross was enough to save us and justify us before God, no question. We stand confident of our eternity with Him. There is coming a day when our salvation will be complete. "*For those God called, he also justified, and those he justified, he also glorified.*" There is a day when our salvation will be complete, and not only do we long for the day when He will save us fully, but we long for the day when we will see His face. I want you to underline Revelation 22:4. If this verse is not underlined in your Bible, you need to underline it and put a box around it or stars everywhere around it. It needs to be very noticeable when you turn to this page in the New Testament. Revelation 22:4. We will start in verse 3 because it is going all the way back to Genesis. Let me make sure you get there because you have to be able to underline this. "*No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face.*"

Five words that creation has longed for ever since Adam and Eve were separated from the Garden and cast out of His presence. No one in the history of redemption has been able to look at the face of God. The most righteous that we could put forward, cannot look in the face of God apart from Christ of course. However, there is coming a day, ladies and gentlemen, when we will experience the goal of our redemption and we will see His face. Is there any grander vision to motivate us in life? We are going to see Him in all His beauty and all His glory and all His creation and all His majesty, and we are going to enjoy it forever. We live, long for the day when we see His face. The last paragraph of the last book of the Chronicles of Narnia series, C. S. Lewis says,

As Aslan spoke, he no longer looked at him like a lion. The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us, this is the end of all the stories and we can most truly say that they lived happily ever after, but for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last, they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read. Which goes on forever in which every Chapter is better than the one before.

"*And there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.'*" This is the Word we have. The Kingdom has been given to us, entrusted to us.

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