

Scripture Reading:

Ephesians 1: "1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. 15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

"Living in the Kingdom"

This is the final part of three messages from Luke chapter 21 where the disciples come to Jesus with questions about the destruction of the temple and He provides them with answers. We have considered the questions that were asked, the answers that were given and how they gave important insights into God's redemptive plan. God's redemptive plan that is being presented by Luke to his friend Theophilus and all the world...

- **Where God the Father sends His son Jesus to save His people from their sins**
- **Where these people become the Bride of Christ, the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit**
- **Where through this Church, the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Jesus grows to fill the whole earth as we saw in Daniel chapter 2!**

I used the first chapter of Ephesians as our reading this morning so we can again see how this runs through all of the New Testament!

We have considered deceptions taught by those who do not simply accept what is presented by Jesus, especially in the America church for the past 160 years: They tell us that the church age is NOT the Kingdom and the reign of Jesus only begins after the church is raptured in the future before it is overwhelmed.

- The Biblical & historic view of Jesus establishing His Kingdom and it filling the earth has been replaced with new modern ideas complete with charts and graphs

The Bible tells of a victorious God who despite ALL the failing of His covenant people in the Old Testament brings His Son to Jerusalem at the appointed time to save His people from their sins.

A victorious God who raises Jesus in power, sits Him at His right hand and promises to pour out His Spirit upon the Church, His Son's Bride

A victorious God who again despite ALL the failings of this Bride, will see that she is able to fill the earth with the Kingdom of His Son . This is how God fulfills all of the promises given in the Old Testament and all the grand pictures that the Prophets had presented:

- First & foremost is the deliverance from Egypt and the conquest of the promised land [explain to the children]
- Like those dry bones that would be brought back to life
- Like the new covenant that would be written on hearts of flesh which had replaced hearts of stone
- Like Ezekiel's New Temple that was without measure taking the waters of life to the whole world!

So as Saints today, we have a choice to make about what we believe:

- Do we believe that the Kingdom of God was established in the first century with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?
- Or do we believe, with today's dispensationalists, that the Kingdom of Jesus will come sometime in the future after the rapture of the church and a period of great tribulation?

What we want to focus on this week is the fact that which of these you believe does MAKE a BIG difference. We cannot say that Christians are free to believe whichever makes the most sense to them and think they will still serve Jesus the same way.

- There are certainly Christians who believe each of these, BUT it does make a difference, consciously or unconsciously in how they serve the risen and reigning Savior.
- This is where we come to the all important applications!
- I would argue that understanding what the Bible really teaches about the Kingdom of Christ impacts all areas of our walk with Jesus, but I will focus on just some of the more obvious...

First and foremost it affects how we view evangelism and missions... Iain Murray makes this point powerfully in his book *The Puritan Hope* which I would commend to your reading if you have not already done so: Iain shows the power of the missionary movement that followed the reformation where faith in the success of Christ's Kingdom was revived and missionaries were sent forth to "disciple the nations" with great success.

- As the view of having Christ's Kingdom in the future took hold it radically changed this attitude with a resulting loss of hope.

With the coming of this deceptive doctrine they suddenly had no hope, or even need, of discipling the nations, but rather missionaries now went out to try and just save a few brands from the fire that raged across the world.

- What the reformation had revived, and we have largely lost, was the faith and passion of the early church which believed that Jesus meant what He said in the Great Commission!

The long series on Church history by Pastor Wilkins shows the advance of the Kingdom over the first thousand years which came at a great cost but accomplished much. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, Rome fell a few hundred years later and the Christians went on to convert the then known world:

- Turning the rank pagan nations of Europe, Africa and Asia into what is now disparagingly called Christendom.

The pagans who later fought to bring back the glories of Greece and Rome, where you had slavery, cruelty, debauchery and no concept of God-given rights to life, liberty or property, decided that we should call this age of Christian advancement the ‘dark ages.’

Their man-centered enlightenment ‘hope’ brought us the 20th century with such ‘advances’ as the Soviet Union, two world wars, the German holocaust and Pol Pot’s killing fields.

- As our covenant children and grandchildren restore a proper Biblical view of history, I trust they will more rightly label the 20th century as the dark ages!

BUT this will not happen if the Western Church continues to be deceived about the nature and advance of Christ’s Kingdom! Today’s cry from many Christian quarters is “look how bad things are, Jesus must be coming back soon.”

- We must rather cry with the early disciples, “Look at all the work Jesus has left for us to do, we need to roll up our sleeves and believe that God will bless the work of our hands!”

IF you believe the “Church age” is ultimately overwhelmed by the forces of Satan and World so that Jesus must come and rapture His church, then you will despair in the short term and only see the future coming of Christ as the beginning of His Kingdom & victory.

IF you believe that the Kingdom of Jesus has already been established and will fill the earth as the Father puts ALL things under His Son’s feet, then you will roll up your sleeves and get to work and see His second coming as the completion of His victory after ALL the authorities on earth have been placed under His feet, and when the final enemy, death, will be defeated!

- That is quite a difference!
- AND it makes quite a difference in how we approach missions and almost every area of our lives

As another example, I would argue that this contrast carries over into our covenant families.

- God has always advanced His Kingdom through His people.
- He adds to His people by converting those outside the Church and by blessing our covenant children in the Church.

This is why Peter could proclaim that the promise is to you...
speaking to covenant Jews who had been properly convicted of their sin...

The promise is to you, AND to your children, AND to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call!

- **Again if we think the church is doomed to fail then we will begin to treat our children more like other little pagans who need to be converted, except that we get more contact with them and can take them to church & Sunday school!**

IF on the other hand, you believe in the advancement of the Kingdom, you will agree with Peter's very point that brought these Jews under conviction: He quoted Psalm 110 where the Father says to the Son, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool. Jehovah shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies."

- **Peter's point is that this WAS fulfilled at Pentecost!**
- **Jesus is ruling NOW and not just some time in the future!**

Thus we believe that God will grow and strengthen His Son's Bride the Church, which is called in the New Testament the Body of Christ:

- **He will NOT do so by populating it with pagans, but with faithful covenant children!**

Our primary job as covenant parents, and their helpers, is to disciple these gifts and not merely to evangelize them! Again, we see a BIG difference

- **Closely related to this is how we view our vocations, our callings and our marriages.**

We often talk about the problem of Christians having an improper view of separating spiritual things from secular things.

- **IF we believe the church fails here on earth and that our real victory is in heaven, you can see how easily that happens.**

It is the 'spiritual' things that are important, so faithful Christians attend church and seminars, they pray and study the Bible, they give to mission work, but over time the practical commands about work and marriage become less important.

- **We often see such fruit today**
- **We have all heard the tragic stories where two Christian couples get divorced so that they can marry one another because it feels like the right thing to do!**
- **Sadly our 'Christian' businesses have a bad reputation because so many Saints have not valued honest work that is done well...**
- **Again they may not purpose to do so, but if they REALLY don't believe that what happens down here makes much difference it changes how they act over time.**

Those who believe that God's Kingdom will advance and succeed in putting everything under the feet of Jesus come to understand that their everyday actions are important. Having the right marriage relationship is how the Apostle Paul says we demonstrate Christ's love for His Church. We can't say to our neighbor, don't mind how rotten my marriage is, I want you to read this Gospel tract so you too can go to heaven... Sad but too often true!

Being honest and working hard are not only what God commands and expects as His Kingdom advances AND it is also how we earn a proper hearing from those God puts in our path. Again an auto mechanic who does sloppy work on someone's car cannot not claim to be doing the work of the Lord because he included a Bible verse about salvation on the invoice!

- We will once again understand the importance of the older women teaching the younger women about the critical role they play in the advancement of God's Kingdom as homemakers!

We will no longer fear to bring covenant children into the world because it is so evil or over-populated: We will rather desire and pray that God gives us more covenant children who can labor in the fields ripe unto harvest! Wives will train their children with a perspective that reaches far into the future full of great hope, and husbands will work hard not only to provide the home for her to work in but to build a solid inheritance so his children can carry on the work of the Kingdom.

- We will once again take seriously the process of prayer, training and courtship that assists our covenant young people in finding the right husband or wife who will help them advance the Kingdom.
- And finally, whether we believe that the Kingdom has been established and is advancing today, will impact how we view the Church.

-- Is church just a nice place to come where people can meet our needs and help evangelize our children? -- A place that we have no real attachment to, where we can come and go as we please or even change if the folks down the street have better coffee or programs?

I don't have time this morning to fully explore the tension between individualism and the Biblical concept of the Body of Christ... But we must remember that Luke, and all the New Testament, is driving home the point that the Kingdom of Jesus is going to fill the earth

- God is doing this through His Church and not with a bunch of individuals looking to have their needs met, within or without the church!
- So I hope you can see in just this very brief survey of some applications why what we believe about the Kingdom of Jesus is SO important.

IF we believe that the real Kingdom of Jesus is off somewhere in the future after the Saints are raptured from the earth, then we have very little of the Bible that impacts us today and that certainly shows with much of what we see.

- IF, on the other hand, we believe Jesus and Peter and Paul really meant what they said about the Kingdom being established in the first century then ALL of the Bible becomes richly alive and very relevant to our lives.

We will no longer be navel gazers who are always asking 'what must I do to make sure I am saved.'

- Instead we will be the redeemed people of God who are always asking, what does the Lord require of ME!

In conclusion, I want us to think again of that small band of followers who loved Jesus while He ministered here on earth

- After His death and even after His resurrection they mostly huddled in upper rooms fearing for their lives...

They were challenged by the Great Commission and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are told that some doubted, we will see in the Book of Acts that at times they were fearful, and they faced over-whelming persecutions:

- They saw Stephen martyred by the religious leaders of their days and James beheaded by King Herod
- The Roman occupation continued in full force... With Caesars who made Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot look like amateurs

These early disciples could easily have thought that all was lost... Just as many Christians do today. BUT God had promised to give His Son ALL the Kingdoms of the earth and they believed Him even though they could not be sure, or even imagine, how the story was going to be played out... Knowing the conclusion but none of the details of what would happen. So in those early days, they could not have imagined that the man who held the coats of those who stoned Stephan, who was himself a citizen of Rome as well as a Pharisee with great power and influence, would soon be converted and go on to author much of the New Testament. Saul of Tarsus was slain on the road to Damascus and Paul was resurrected to be the Apostle to the gentiles believing what he told the church of Corinth, "For [Jesus] must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." We will learn much about Paul's journey and influence as we study the Book of Acts, but I want to close this morning with the final passage in Luke's orderly account so WE will also be encouraged to be about our work of building the Kingdom... Even when things do not seem to be going our way!

With Paul under house arrest in Rome we read this in Acts 28:23 "So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom [Paul] explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." ' 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

- Paul said the Gentiles would hear, and preached with all confidence because he believed God would do what He promised.
- He believed God's Kingdom would fill the entire earth as the fullness of the Gentiles was brought in!

Charles Spurgeon preaching against the unbelief and pessimism of his day in 1890 said this: "Our want of faith has done more mischief to us than all the devils in hell, and all the heretics on earth. Some cry out against the Pope, and others against agnostics; but it is our own unbelief which is our worst enemy."

- May it not be so with us!

Let us be those people with the great faith of the Roman Centurion.

Let us really mean "Thy Kingdom come on EARTH as it is in Heaven" when we pray it each week

Let us hardily sing the songs of the great hymn writers like Isaac Watts who believed that God's Kingdom was advancing, which we will have an opportunity to do in just a moment.

Let us remember those words of Paul to the church of Ephesus where he reminds them of the mystery that God has revealed in Jesus: "according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. ."