

Ephesians 2.6

Enthroned with Christ

In Acts 19-20 we read of the opposition that the Church in Ephesus faced at its founding. Paul was rejected by the Jewish synagogue. Then he was the center of a protest by the metal workers guild. The gospel was seen as a threat to their trade and to the cult of Diana or Artemis. Paul warned the elders of the Church that wolves would arise from among them to devour the flock. They faced dangers from political powers as well as spiritual forces within and without the Church. Paul wrote to encourage them that the poor and meek of Ephesus reign with Christ, just as Jesus had promised “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Paul says that as the heirs of the kingdom, you are seated with God in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This raises several questions. What is the Kingdom of Christ? When is the Kingdom? Where is the Kingdom? What is your place in the Kingdom?

The Kingdom is the reign of the God-Man, Christ Jesus. When we hear the word “kingdom” we usually envision a realm or territory that falls under a particular administration. While “place” may be implied in the concept of “kingdom,” the emphasis of the New Testament is not on “place” but on the activity of the Sovereign, His rule. If we were to ask where God’s realm extends, the Bible is clear that He rules, through acts of providence, every square inch of the universe. Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’” In fact, Nebuchadnezzar testified that it was not until he made this confession that “my reason returned to me.” Truly, all who do not live in light of the reality of God’s sovereignty are not only unreasonable, but insane, like brute beasts. So, God’s reign is universal, but it finds particular expression in and through His chosen people. We see this in the Theocracy of Israel. You will recall that in 1 Samuel, when Israel asked for a king to rule them like all the other nations, God told Samuel, “they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them.” Now, God did not cease to be Israel’s king, but He was pointing out the idolatry in their desire for a king like all the nations. But God’s rule, His kingdom, came to expression through His visible and tangible leadership and provision for Israel—leading them through the wilderness in a pillar of fire and a cloud of smoke; taking them across the sea on dry land, while drowning their enemies in the same sea; feeding them manna in the wilderness, and giving them water from the rocks of the desert; opening the earth so that the rebels of Israel were swallowed up alive by the grave; leading the people in the conquest of the Promised Land against fortified cities and giant warriors. Through many acts of judgment and salvation God reigned over Israel in plain view of the nations.

Now, while Israel’s idolatrous request for a king like all the other nations displeased God, we know from Genesis 49.10, Numbers 24.17, Deuteronomy 17.15, and other passages, that God’s plan always included a human king to embody His government among His people—a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13.14). God chose King David, calling him from his father’s sheepfold, to be the shepherd of Israel.

David represented the reign of God well in many ways. His valiant battles to deliver Israel from her oppressors are just some of the many features of his reign that manifested God's Kingdom on earth. Yet, even David proved to be a disappointment for those who longed for the promised King, who would perfectly embody the Kingdom of heaven. Their hope would be renewed in the covenant that God made with David, in which God promised to raise up just such a king. "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but My steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7.12-16). Solomon, who succeeded his father David, would only partially fulfill this promise, further whetting the appetite of those who awaited THE son of David. It is no wonder that the New Testament opens with these words, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David." In Luke's Gospel, the angel Gabriel announces the birth of Christ with these words, echoing the Davidic covenant, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (1.32-33). Jesus is clearly the eternal Davidic King—the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

In Genesis 49.9 this king was promised as the Lion of Judah. In Revelation 5.5 one of the elders describes Jesus as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" who has conquered. Jesus is the "greater than Solomon," the son of David who reigns forever. And we know that His eternal reign began at His ascension. Revelation 1:5 calls Jesus "the ruler of kings on earth." Jesus is not waiting for some event in the future to begin reigning over the earth. He *is* the ruler of kings on earth. He *is* the King of kings and Lord of lords.

His kingdom is called the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Christ for two reasons. Jesus reigns under the authority of the heavenly Father, so it can be called the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev 11.15), referring to the activity of the Father and the Son. But it can also be called the Kingdom of God because Jesus is the God-Man. When the Father entrusts the Son with rule and judgment, He has not given the kingdom into the hands of a mere man. He has given the kingdom to One who is God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. Now, God the Son sits on David's throne, not only as *God*, but as the *God-Man*, the Word who was with God and who was God, who became *flesh*. In the incarnation two natures, the Divine and the Human, were united in one Person, Jesus Christ. These did not mix to make a third thing, but united so that Jesus is fully God and fully human. In the words of the Symbol of Chalcedon, *Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-*

begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

The enthronement of this incarnate God, the Son of David and Son of God, is celebrated in Ephesians 1.20-22: “[God] seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things for the church.” Clinton Arnold has demonstrated that Paul’s usage of the terms for power is consistent with the power structures in the magical traditions in Ephesus and the surrounding Roman province of Asia. The people were enslaved to the fear of these powers. They relied on “magicians” and magical trinkets to manipulate these powers by using them against each other. The knowledge of names and incantations was seen as a power-authority that could protect people from these “powers,” what we would call demons, and even control these powers, but at great risk to one’s own life. So, Paul is assuring the Christians that they need not live in fear of these “powers,” and certainly must not rely on these “powers” for protection or prosperity, because Jesus, their Lord, is enthroned on high above all powers—above every name that is named both in this age and in the age to come. In Colossians 2.15 Paul says, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in the cross.”

The ascension of Christ was His enthronement, at the Father’s right hand, on David’s throne, to rule over all created powers, human and angelic. His reign is expressed in the ordinary acts of providence, as well as in extraordinary acts of judgment and salvation. Once we understand that the King of the universe is the incarnate Word of God we can read Psalm 29 with fresh insight, and marvel at the supreme authority *and* tender care of the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It reads: “*The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, “Glory!” The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!*” (Psalm 29:3-11) Our King Jesus governs all things great and small. He sees to the birth of fawns and strips the forests bare. He rules over kings and presidents and parliaments. He governs the spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenly places. This is the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Now let’s briefly consider two more questions and then consider the implications of this for our lives. When is the Kingdom? And, where is the Kingdom? I have presupposed the answers to these questions in my previous remarks. I will only briefly demonstrate this perspective.

The Kingdom is both now and then. For the past one hundred years or so, Dispensationalism has been the controlling paradigm for questions about the kingdom. According to Dispensationalism, the kingdom is a future reality, but not a present reality. Jesus is not sitting on David's throne yet. He will do this in a future millennial kingdom after His second coming. There has been an opposite current of thought, though it did not gain traction in mainstream evangelicalism like Dispensationalism. According to more existentialist theologians there is no future kingdom in distinction to the present. Their view is often called "realized eschatology." All of the promises related to the kingdom are realized in the present. Attention to the New Testament exposes the error in both of these views. They both embrace one truth of the New Testament view of the kingdom, but ignore or reject other truth. According to the New Testament the Kingdom is present and future—now and then. It is really present. In that sense we can agree with "realized eschatology" and say that the promises are realized now through the ascension of Christ. As John says in Revelation, Jesus is "ruler of kings on earth." Peter's first sermon pointed to the present session of Christ, "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Let the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2.34-36). And in Romans 14.17, Paul can urge the ethics of the kingdom on the church because it has already arrived with the enthronement of Christ.

Yet this is not all that the New Testament says about the Kingdom. In Acts 14.22 Paul encouraged the saints saying, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God," implying that there is yet a future experience of the kingdom for those who are already in the kingdom. So the New Testament teaches inaugurated eschatology. The promised and prophesied Kingdom of the future has been inaugurated with the enthronement of Christ, but it is not yet consummated. It is already, but not yet. This is well illustrated in 1 Corinthians 15.25-28 "For [Jesus] must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. . . . When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all." When Iraq successfully held elections and put a new government in place, this did not immediately eliminate all competitors. The Iraqis and American forces have continued to contend with insurgents hoping to disrupt the government and possibly gain control. Similarly, there are still insurgents who rage against the Kingdom of Christ. Psalm two reminds us that the nations and kings of the earth rage against the Lord, desiring to overthrow His rule. As well, spiritual forces of wickedness continue to fight against the people of God, the people of the kingdom. But one day, Jesus will vanquish all His enemies and deliver the Kingdom over to His Father. In Revelation 19 we read of the Rider on a white horse, Faithful and True, who, in righteousness judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems . . . clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is 'the Word of God.' And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Then the Kingdom will be consummated in a New Heavens and a New Earth. There will be no more insurgencies. "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21.27).

Where is the Kingdom? **The Kingdom is both here and there.** Jesus' rule is over Kings on earth. His reign is expressed most explicitly on earth through the visible Church. But His throne is in heaven. And we are still to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Right now, there is still a distinction between heaven and earth in terms of the realization of the kingdom. But the day is coming when the city of God will descend from heaven to the earth, and God's dwelling will be with man. Then there will be no distinction between here and there. There will be no temple in that city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (Rev 21.22).

What is your place in the Kingdom? **The Kingdom is yours to possess and govern with Christ.** Paul says in our text that we are "seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." We are seated with God because of our union with Christ!! What does this entail? First, we must not overlook that word "with." We are *with* God. Colossians 3.3 says "your life is hidden with Christ in God." Whatever your circumstances and whoever your company is on earth, you are with God. All of the kingdoms in the world would be useless to possess if we did not have this one promise. But with God our life is hidden and content. The present experience of the kingdom does not come with the guarantee of perfect health, a stable economy, or popularity. Nevertheless we can know contentment because God is with us. John Bunyan wrote this lyric while in prison for preaching the gospel in England 1665:

The prison very sweet to me
Hath been since I came here,
And so would also hanging be,
If God would there appear.

Second, since we are enthroned with Christ, we are above all rule and authority and power and dominion. Now, remember, our experience of the Kingdom is real, but not complete. Spiritual wickedness is still a danger, but it is not lord and master. In chapter six Paul can call us to "stand against the schemes of the devil." We do this strengthened by God's might, "strong in the Lord." Our adversary does roam about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, but our David grabs the lion by the beard and smites him and delivers us from his teeth. We realize our reign with Christ today by saying "no!" to the powers that once dominated us: the devil, the world, and sin/flesh (see Eph 2.1-3).

Third, since we are enthroned with *Christ*, we are servant-kings. Some people get the idea that reigning with Christ means that the world and all its people exist to serve them. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Don't you like that?! Jesus is ready to serve them! And they said to Him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to Him, "We are able." Imagine what cup they had in mind. Why, they probably envisioned a jeweled chalice with sweet wine served to them on a platter by Andrew or Matthew or, perhaps, by Mary and Martha. But it was a bitter cup that Jesus would drink, the cup of the wrath of God poured out on our sins. But Jesus knew they would one day learn the true meaning of discipleship, so He said, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at My right

hand or at My left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” Now, get this! When the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to Him and said to them—now this is for you, so listen up—“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.35-45). Listen to the shocking promise of Jesus in Luke 12.35 “Blessed are those servants whom the mast finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.” The Master serves His servants! The Master serves His servants!! Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. The one who serves is most like our Lord. So, when you say, “I’m a child of the king!” “I’m a son of the king!” “I’m a daughter of the king!” “I’m seated with Christ in heavenly places!” remember that this is the privileged place of service.

New Testament theologian, Frank Thielman, reminds us of the original dominion mandate given to Adam. He was to rule the earth under God. In his rebellion against God he allowed the serpent to invade the Garden sanctuary and lifted up his heel against his Creator when he took of the forbidden fruit. In light of the ascension of Christ, Thielman says, “the hegemony that God intended for humanity to have over all creation is in the process of coming to pass through the Messiah’s kingly rule over ‘all things’” (*Commentary on the NT Use of the OT: Ephesians*, p. 816). We are experiencing something of that process as we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. The poor and meek of Fayetteville, NC, heirs of the kingdom, are enthroned with Christ.