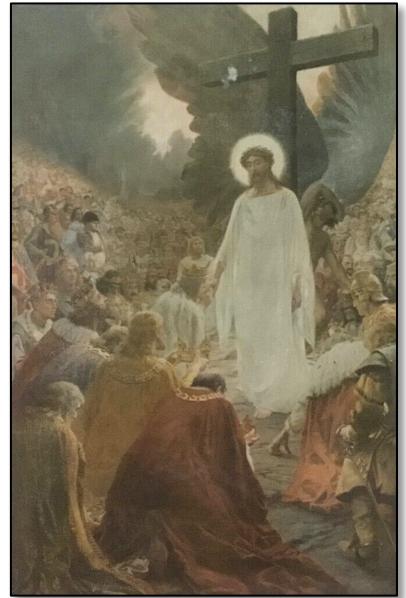


Your Kingdom Come

PART 11: 'THE PRESENCE OF THE FUTURE'

I wonder if you have seen this picture. It's titled *The King of Kings* and it was painted by an artist called Charles E. Butler back in 1916 and first shown in the Royal Academy in London. Unfortunately the original was destroyed in a bombing raid in the second world war but there are a number of prints and photos circulating. There is some amazing detail in the painting but you really need to look at it very closely because in the picture are portraits of over one hundred and thirty earthly kings and rulers – many of whom have been identified by eagle-eyed historians.

The key figure in the centre is the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Behind Him, is Satan, the king of this world. Every one of the faces shows the attitude of that king or queen towards the King of Kings. It's quite a unique painting and they've never been able to repeat the luminosity of the robes of the King of Kings. It truly is an amazing picture which portrays life as it really is.



This sermon follows on from the last one and so I encourage you to read or listen to that sermon first if you missed it last week. Today I want us to explore how God is restoring or re-establishing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. God is in the process of putting things right which have been terribly wrong for a very long time because of our sin and rebellion. This is the most important part of the gospel of the kingdom. In fact, the whole Bible is about God's remedy and His re-establishment of His kingdom rule and reign in our world and it all began a very long time ago with a dear old man named Abraham.

As I am sure you know, when we are introduced to Abraham in the Bible, he is far too old to be of much use by human standards and certainly too old to be a father again. But we soon learn that where mankind finishes - God starts. What is impossible for us, is always possible for God. I am really looking forward to meeting this dear old man, because without Abraham, none of us would be here. Abraham was a great man and in spite of his advanced age, he left a brick built home and lived in a tent for the rest of his life. Not many 90 year old men would be willing to do that. I don't think I would. But Abraham consented to live in a tent for the rest of his days when he left all that was familiar and journeyed into the unknown in response to the call of God.

That's when God began to re-establish His kingdom on earth and from that man came a whole nation; a nation that began in slavery; a nation that had no time of its own; no money of its own; nothing of its own. When you are slaves, you belong entirely to someone else. So that dear old man's descendants became a nation.

God said, "*I'm going to show you my power first and then my authority later.*" Now I want you to get hold of that. God showed the power of His kingdom first, and then spoke about the lifestyle of His kingdom. That's the order in which we are called to preach the kingdom of God. The gospel of the kingdom is first demonstrated and then it is declared. It is experienced first and explained next.

The power of the kingdom must first be displayed on earth. Otherwise why should people accept the kingdom? Once the power of the kingdom is demonstrated, you then declare the kingdom itself and the authority of the King. The power first and the authority second - that's how God dealt with the nation of Israel. He showed His power first by overcoming Pharaoh – by sending all those plagues on Pharaoh's kingdom, to set His people free from slavery. Only then, having gotten them away from Pharaoh; having given them their freedom, did God tell them how He wanted them to live.

Now that order is so important: let the people see first, then let them hear. Demonstrate the kingdom, then describe it. That's how God Himself deals with people on earth to re-establish His kingdom. He even gave Moses anti-magical powers with his staff, so when Pharaoh's magicians tried their best to stop it happening, Moses' magic was better than theirs and this demonstration through the plagues was a very important part in setting the people free from slavery by the power of the King of Kings. This was the first step and then having gotten them to Sinai, God gave them laws, and revealed His will for the way they were to live as His people. We have God's instructions in the book of Exodus, and later, in the book of Deuteronomy, *Deuteronomy* means 'second law.' So twice, God gave His instructions as to how they were to live in His kingdom on earth. So this nation was called to demonstrate the kingdom of God on earth so that all the other nations could see what living on earth as it is in heaven really looks like.

That was the story of the Old Testament - but I'm afraid it's a sad story. It's a story of how Israel wanted God to be sovereign over all their enemies and over all their troubles but they didn't want to be His subjects. As we saw last week, in a true kingdom the king reigns *and* rules. But Israel did not want to be ruled - and so they paid a high price. They lost even the land that God had given them and they broke so many of His laws and paid heavily for it. Now before we look at the New Testament, I want to underline this point. God first delivered His people from slavery with a demonstration of His power - then He gave them His laws. He demonstrated His power first, then His authority as King and that is how Jesus taught the disciples. So let's come now to Jesus, the King of kings and see what He did to re-establish the kingdom of God on earth.

Most of Jesus' teaching is about the kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven – those terms are used interchangeably. Over and over again we read, "*The kingdom of God is like this, and like that.*" Often He said it's like a man or a woman. It's made up of individuals. We also note that the very first preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus - was identical. "*Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.*" Now what does 'at hand' mean? Well, I have a large desk at home and there is a lot of stuff on my desk and around my desk and I know my way around it all. Everything is at hand. It means it's within reach. I can pick up a stapler, a calculator, a pen, a file; I have two computers on my large desk and wheels on my chair so I can slide along and use either one. Everything is 'at hand,' it's near and accessible; I don't have to search for it; it's not hidden or under lock and key. Everything I need is 'at hand.' John the Baptist and Jesus both said the kingdom of God is 'at hand' - it's within reach; it is near; it is accessible; it is not beyond our grasp or hidden. Of course the reason this was so is because the King had come and wherever the King is, so is His kingdom.

Now Jesus began His ministry by demonstrating the power of this kingdom. He healed the sick; He raised the dead; He cast out demons; He read people's thoughts; He controlled the wind and the waves; He defied gravity and walked on water. He demonstrated the power of His kingdom over and against the kingdom of Satan before He went on to teach the people how to live in the kingdom of God. Now the implications for evangelism today are very clear: demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God before you preach it and teach it. As we looked at recently in Matthew 10, Jesus told His disciples to go into a town and demonstrate the power of the Kingdom by cleansing the lepers, raising the dead and casting out demons and to tell the people that the kingdom of heaven has now come among you ... the kingdom of heaven is near.

So you see the same divine order as when God delivered His people from slavery and then taught them how to live under His rule and reign: show them first, tell them second. Jesus did the same. Now the Church has pretty much ignored that order ever since but it's an obvious way to do it. I thank God that there are still Christians out today who are praying for healing and demonstrating the power of the kingdom first and telling people that the kingdom of God has come among them.

Then they tell them the rest of the story: "*If you want to embrace the reality of God's kingdom you can do that right now. But it involves a complete re-think of your life, your purpose and where your identity comes from.*" To embrace the fullness of the Kingdom of God, we need to step down as the king or the queen of our own kingdom and become a subject of the one true King – Jesus Christ.

Now when you look through all of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven you will notice there's a present kingdom and a future kingdom. George Eldon Ladd described it perfectly years ago in his first book on the Kingdom of God when he referred to it as '*the presence of the future.*' This means the kingdom is 'now' and 'not yet.' It has been inaugurated now but it will be consummated in the future. For the discerning, they can enter the kingdom now, they can see other people in the kingdom now, but they are looking forward to the kingdom being fully established on earth. That will come when the King gets back. It's as simple as that. At the moment, the King of Kings is invisible – He is present through His Holy Spirit. When the King returns to fully establish His Kingdom, every eye shall see Him and the 'not yet' of the Kingdom will be completely replaced by the 'now.'

Here we must learn something from Israel. Israel had a King from the very beginning - the King of heaven and He told them how to live. The trouble was, He was invisible to the world but every other nation had a visible King and they could show him off and in battle he could ride out ahead of the troops. So this lack of a visible king in Israel became a crisis and you can read about it in 1 Samuel chapter 8. Israel wanted to be like other nations - they wanted a visible king. They already had a King – the King of heaven was their king. They were already in His Kingdom or could be. But they said, "*No, we want a visible King.*" God finally said, "*All right, I'll give you a king – but this will be your downfall. You will find out what an earthly king is like.*" So He gave them Saul - a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was head and shoulders above everybody else and chosen for his size. They were so glad to have a big king who could look down on everybody. That's the kind of King they wanted.

Well, you know the story, just as their true King, God, had warned them, things went seriously wrong, very quickly. So much so that God Himself chose someone else to be King. Even while Saul was still king, God chose a young shepherd boy, David who was the youngest of his family and nothing like the kind of King Israel has envisaged. But later, under King David, the empire of Israel expanded to the limits that God had set for them and even to this day, the Jews look back on the reign of King David as their greatest time in history.

But even the best earthly kings die and I'm afraid that King David also blundered badly before he died. In just one afternoon, he broke all ten commandments. That's quite an achievement! As a result, his kingdom began to decline and his son Solomon was so ambitious for his own wealth, and for his own reputation that under King Solomon, all the seeds were sown for Israel's demise. As soon as he died, civil war broke out and ten tribes broke away from the two in the south called Judah and Benjamin and Israel's story went downhill from there.

So Israel only had three Kings who ruled all the people. The first of those was no good and finished up consulting a Spiritist medium and the third was no good because of his ambitions for himself and as soon as he died, the nation fractured. When you read the Book of Kings, you'll find most of them were bad kings. In fact, the Northern ten tribes never had a good king. The southern two tribes did have some good ones, but most of them were bad too. When you've got a bad King making all the rules and the people follow, it's no surprise when the nation falls apart - and that's what happened.

But God gave His people a promise, "*I will give you a king like David, a son of David, descended from David, from your royal family, but he will be more than any king before him. He will indeed be king of Israel forever.*" (See 2 Samuel 7). This was the promise of the Messiah, and that word means 'anointed king.' So in Greek, the word *Messiah* becomes the word *Christ*, which is from the word *Chrism*. You may be interested to know that when Queen Elizabeth was crowned on 2nd June 1953 in Westminster Abbey, she was anointed with oil which was called the *Chrism* and she herself said that this was the most moving moment in the whole ceremony for her. So when you call Jesus 'Christ' that's not His surname. When you say Jesus Christ you are saying, 'Jesus, my anointed king.' Some days I wish we would actually use the word king instead of Christ, because that's what we really mean. Jesus is God's anointed Christ. He has the *Chrism* of the Holy Spirit - the anointing oil of the Holy Spirit, which He has to a greater degree than any other king who ever existed.

So that's how the kingdom of heaven came to earth, in Jesus, and that's how it's going to be re-established on earth. This kingdom of Christ is expanding today more quickly than it has ever expanded in more than 2000 years. Every minute that I speak to you, there are more than 50 new voices proclaiming Jesus as Christ somewhere in the world – sadly not here and not in most western nations – but in Africa, South America and even among Muslims in the Middle east, thousands of people a day are coming to Jesus, the Christ. Never has the Church grown so quickly.

But the Church is not the kingdom of God, it's a colony of the kingdom. Don't ever get the idea that building the Church is building the kingdom. When that mistake is made you end up with pastors and elders who begin to think they are little kings and queens and they start ruling. We don't want that. But every time a person is brought to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God is expanding and what began as a tiny seed, like the mustard seed, becomes a great tree, in which the birds of heaven can nest and this is happening today on a larger scale than ever before.

Jesus said, "*I will build my Church.*" He didn't tell us to build the Church and Jesus is succeeding in building His Church. But it's still not very visible to the world because it's still not demonstrating the power of the kingdom. The power of the kingdom is demonstrated with miracles, with healing, with people being set free from oppression – it's the real action of the kingdom like we see in the book of Acts when the Church began on earth. When people today get to see what the people saw in the book of Acts, they will be drawn to this phenomena and they will listen to the gospel of the kingdom. But not until they see something are they willing to hear anything.

Now let's go back to the fact that Jesus talked about the kingdom on the one hand as a present, steady growth but also there are those parables that talk about a future reality. For example, as we saw in a recent sermon, one parable talks about the kingdom of heaven being like a man sowing seed in his field and I would encourage you to read that sermon if you have not already for a full explanation of that important parable. That parable speaks about the growth of the kingdom through the Word of God now – right before our eyes, like seed sown in good soil. We can see it germinate and grow and bear fruit and the kingdom of heaven is growing every day and we need to know this for our encouragement because we may not see that around us in our part of the world yet, but the kingdom is growing.

Then there is the future aspect of the kingdom. One day the king will come back and then He will establish His Kingdom fully. Now, every Christian believes Jesus is coming back but hardly anyone ever asks why. Why is the King coming back? What is He coming back to do? How long will He stay this next time? The answer is He's going to stay a long time next time, and long enough to rule our world. Then, and only then, will the words of Revelation 11:15 be true, "*The nations of the world have become the kingdom of our God and His Christ.*"

That's the end game friends! That's what we are praying for when we cry out to God, "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*" We are praying for the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God to be consummated and established in this world visibly. We are praying for the day to come when the King of King sits on His throne and is finally embraced as the king of the whole universe. Then, and only then, will that incredible painting by Charles E. Butler from 105 years ago become a reality when the king of this world, Satan, loses his throne and all the earthly kings, queens and rulers fall on their knees before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

On that glorious day, all the great stories of the Bible will merge into one and find their fullest meaning in the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Moses, Abraham, Noah, David, Ruth, Jeremiah, Mary, Joseph, Jesus, Peter, Paul . . . every journey and every story of God's people over the centuries will finally make sense when the Christ, the Messiah, the King of Heaven, reigns and rules over *all* His Kingdom. That glorious day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation. Oh what a glorious day that will be!

What needs to happen for that day to come? I shall answer that question next week, but I warn you to brace yourself. The implications of what I will share in the next and final sermon in this teaching series will be incredibly confronting, yet absolutely essential if we truly want to see God's kingdom come and God's will done on earth, as it is in heaven.