

# Waking the Sleeping Giant - 25

## *Kingdom Living*

As I conclude this series in the book of Acts, I want us to look at the last two verses of this instruction manual for the Church.

**Acts 28:30-31** *“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ - with all boldness and without hindrance!”*

Here we see two emphases in the preaching of Paul. At the close of the book of Acts, we find that the apostle Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul preached both the Kingdom and the King. I want to talk about Kingdom living in this final chapter.

We are living today in a time that some have described as a post-Christian age. By that they do not mean that Christianity has ceased to exist, but that our culture no longer thinks that Christianity is relevant as a way of viewing the world. How we view the world is called our worldview, and we are no longer living in an age that has a Christian worldview. What scares me, however, is that I am starting to wonder whether we have lost a Christian worldview in the church as well. It is so easy for the world to infiltrate the church. All that is required is for Christians to become complacent in their commitment to significant time in prayer, serious study of the Scriptures, generous giving of their resources, and consistent giving of themselves in the fulfilment of the mission of Christ.

When our attention to those basic disciplines of the Christian faith is lost, we will end up with a *sleeping giant*. We end up with a church that, although it's the most significant human organisation on earth, its power is quenched, its glory is lost and its effectiveness is minimal. We can forget the truth that we are citizens of another Kingdom. When our highest devotion and deepest commitment is given to the priorities of this earthly kingdom, we end up with a watered-down Christianity in which people know neither the Scriptures nor the Lord Jesus and they are therefore unaware that there is another view of how they should live their lives which is diametrically opposed to the worldview which surrounds us.

The early Christians with whom we have connected in our study of the book of Acts were, without question, counter-cultural in their mindset and their actions. They had come to understand the reality of the rule of the King. There is indeed a King whom we as Christians are called to follow. Our King is Jesus Christ, and His Kingship implies a Kingdom. We call it the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven – both terms in the bible mean the same thing.

Now, you may not have spent very much time this past week thinking about the Kingdom of God but let me assure you that the Kingdom of God is worth thinking about. Because not only does the Kingdom of God have something to do with how we live in our contemporary culture, it has everything to do with the practical affairs of daily life. It has everything to do with how you deal with your employer; how you provide for your family; how you raise your children; how you treat your spouse; how you spend your money; how you act in the community .. and the list goes on. For Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God was a priority. The Bible teaches us that Jesus' message was primarily about that Kingdom.

Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." (Matthew 4:23)

The message Jesus preached was the message of the Kingdom of God: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*" (Matthew 4:17) After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers "*over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 1:3). In fact, over eighty times in the Gospels alone, Jesus refers to the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is certainly a priority for Christ. Therefore, it cannot be overlooked by us.

It seems to me that not much attention has been given to the Kingdom of God in many of our churches. Perhaps this is due to an incomplete understanding of the mission of Christ and the comprehensive plan of God. Perhaps the absence of this emphasis is also due to our current emphasis on the practical, organisational aspects of church life. We highlight our structure and programs, sometimes without the counter-emphasis of strategy and purpose. But we not only need to understand *how* to do it, we also need to understand *why* we do it. The why is found in our understanding of the Kingdom of God.

So in this sermon I would like for us to look at the message of the Kingdom and its King so we might gain a genuine "*kingdom consciousness.*" It is my prayer that, as a result of this sermon, and I trust this whole teaching series in Acts, you will not only come to an understanding of what it means to be a part of the Kingdom of God, but that you will also begin to see that being a part of that Kingdom is supposed to impact and define every area of your daily life.

We need to understand what the implications of the Kingdom of God are for our life. In order to do that, we must first define what the Kingdom of God is. Most simply stated: *The Kingdom of God is the dominion or reign of the King.* The Kingdom of God is not limited to a place, or a people, or even a time. The Kingdom of God is defined by the King and His reign. Wherever you find the reign of Jesus Christ, the King, there you will find the Kingdom.

The first thing we need to see is that the Kingdom of God is the cosmic plan of God from the beginning. The Kingdom is what God had in mind before we ever showed up. It is His plan for the entire universe. We only see things in a very limited way. We see the here and now. We see everything from an earthly point of view. We see the physical world as it current exists. But God sees everything from an eternal dimension. He sees not only the physical, but the spiritual. He sees the past, the present and the future. God sees the comprehensive cosmic plan that He has been working out from eternity past. This plan brings together all things in Christ. The Kingdom rule and reign of Jesus Christ will be the only reality one day. Only His Kingdom is eternal. The kingdom of this world has a use by date! The Kingdom of God is always God's 'Plan A' and there never was or will be a 'Plan B.'

We have already seen that the message of Jesus was the message of the Kingdom of God. He preached "*Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.*" But when it came to establishing an earthly expression of that Kingdom, He established the Church. Is the Church the Kingdom of God? No, the church is not the Kingdom of God. But the church is an expression of the Kingdom. The church is a manifestation of the Kingdom on earth. The church is the catalyst God uses to establish His Kingdom on earth. So, to understand Kingdom living for today, you must understand what God had in mind for the church.

The church is the community of God's people, and it is God's desire to manifest His Kingdom through that community. While the manifestation of the Kingdom can be seen wherever you see the rule of Christ, it is God's design and desire that the church be that body of people to which He can point and identify as the community of the King. Jesus called the Church into existence for this purpose. It is the church gathered and the church at work through which we see the Kingdom of God expressed in our world each and every day. Or at least, that's how it is supposed to be.

Are you a part of the church gathered? Are you a believer in Jesus Christ, who has identified with a local church where you live? Are you committed to that church and actively involved in its life and ministry? Are you involved in the local community of God's people, known as the local church? I hope you are catching a sense that I am speaking about more than organisational affiliation here.

When I ask you whether you are a part of the church, I'm not asking whether you have your name in some church directory. What I am asking is whether you are a true believer in Jesus Christ who has not only identified with a local church but also has become involved in the life of that community through your active participation in it and personal commitment to that community of faith. If you are a member of the local church in that sense, then you are also involved in the Kingdom of God, because the church is the place where the rule of the King should be manifested more than anywhere on earth. He who is the King of kings and Lord of lords is also the Head of the church, which is His Body.

It is through the church that the visible manifestation of the rule of God can be seen. It is through the church that we should hear God speak clearly. It is through the church that we can be organised to do His work. It is through the church that we can be nurtured, disciplined and held accountable. It is through the church that we can learn how to minister in Jesus' name. We are the community of God's people. We are part of the Kingdom of God.

If I was asked "*What on earth is the Kingdom of God?*" I would have to say that at the very centre of that Kingdom you will find the church Jesus birthed and promised to build. That church is the hub of Kingdom activity. From this hub, many other ministries can go forth. But primarily, it is the church on earth which is the most visible expression of the Kingdom of God.

I said before that the church is not only a manifestation of the Kingdom of God, it is also the agent to bring about the Kingdom of God. It is only when we see clearly our mission to spread the gospel of the Kingdom, and engage in committed action to that end, that we are truly engaged in Kingdom work.

God has called us, as the church, to impact the world for Jesus Christ. We are to spread the news that the King has come and is coming again; that He rules by divine rite; and that humanity needs to choose to come under His dominion. We must proclaim this in all that we do. We must infiltrate our society at every level and become involved with people in a multitude of ways in order to get this message across. We must act as agents of the Kingdom of God. We are on a divine mission for God and we must never lose sight of our real purpose.

While we are not secret service agents, in one sense we are still 'under cover.' You must come to understand that your true identity is as an agent of the Kingdom of God. Your occupation may be one thing, but you are really something else. You may be a lawyer, but you are really an agent of the Kingdom. You may be a doctor, but you are really an agent of the Kingdom. You may be an engineer, but really you are an agent of the Kingdom. People may see you as a corporate executive, but in truth, you are an agent of the Kingdom. To some, you may be a nurse, a housewife, a mother - but to God you are an agent of His Kingdom. When we get to heaven as our final destination, we are not going to be doctors and lawyers and teachers and accountants and nurses and engineers and housewives or even pastors. But we will still be followers of the King.

We therefore need to see that we are involved in Kingdom ministry through the local church. We do not act alone but are part of a community of redeemed people seeking not only to be changed by the impact of the reign of Christ in our lives, but also to make a difference in the world by the proclamation of the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. In order to see the implications of the Kingdom of God, we must understand the importance of Christ being the central focus of that Kingdom.

In the Scriptures, Christ is revealed to us as the Head of the Church. God has centred all things around His Son, Jesus Christ. He is revealed to us in Scripture as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ is the centre of all of God's purposes, and all things are to be summed up in Him. The reign of God is exercised through Jesus Christ. He is central to the Kingdom and the church. We need to see the priority of Christ as King. The Bible teaches us that *"in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."* He is *"the head of the body, the church."* Christ is revealed to us as the divine, sovereign God. It is His rule to which we must submit.

Jesus Christ is our top priority. This church is His church, not ours. While we have the privilege to participate in giving financially to support the church and its ministries, to build buildings and establish ministry programs and function in the many ways which we do, we must never lose sight of the undeniable reality that Jesus Christ is the head of the church.

Too many church fellowships lose sight of this reality and begin to function as if they were simply a democracy. But a democracy is the rule of the people. The Kingdom of God, however, is a theocracy. This theocratic rule is expressed through people, through anointed, called and gifted people, but however this is organised, whatever leadership structure we adopt, what we should always be seeking is the will of God. We must always seek and submit to His rule and reign as the King!

Now, not only is Christ the priority for our lives, but in a very practical way, we must live out His rule on a daily basis. This is where it really counts. This is where the Kingdom is expressed in the lives of God's people, and that all comes down to the depth of our relationship with Him and our submission to His leadership and Lordship. Our service for Christ can never be any greater than the depth of our relationship with Him. The church serves Christ best when we are all thoroughly revived, renewed and submitted to Him. If we need to pray for anything in our day, it is for a thorough revival to sweep across the church; for a great awakening such as occurred under John Wesley and George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney.

On a practical level, as we begin to see ourselves as agents of the Kingdom and begin to put Christ first in every aspect of our lives, then we will also begin to grapple daily with what it means to live under the rule of Christ. As we do, we will find that we start to live from that perspective. Our actions will reflect Christ's rule and this will mean some real changes in our priorities and how we spend our time.

When Jesus gave us that model prayer, that we refer to as the Lord's Prayer, He showed us a very important priority for our whole lives, not just our prayers. The prayer starts with worship: *"Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed by your Name."* Our lives should have worship as the highest priority. Our love relationship with our God – our time with Him in prayer and worship and intimacy should be at the top of our list. And after worship, what do we have? We have the most powerful prayer ever to leave our lips and the highest calling ever to grip our hearts, *"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

That's what it means when we ask for the Kingdom of God to come. When Jesus came to earth, He ushered in the Kingdom of God. In one sense He left heaven to come to earth, but in a very real sense He brought heaven with Him. You see in heaven we have the rule and reign of Christ manifested totally and completely. The fullness and totality of the Kingdom of God exists in heaven. So, when we pray *"Your Kingdom come,"* we are asking God to release the reality of heaven on earth. We are asking that what is true in heaven will become true on earth. We are calling upon God to release the fullness of His kingdom reign as it is in heaven – right here. *"Back up the truck, Lord . . . dump a load of heaven right here in my church community; right here in my family; right here in my workplace; right across this city and this nation, Lord. Let what is real in heaven be real here!"*

Is that what you want? Do you really think that is possible? Do you know what Jesus was saying when He said we could pray such a prayer? This is kingdom living - when the rule and reign of Jesus Christ overflows from the Kingdom of heaven and saturates this hell hole we call earth! That's what happened when Jesus came. That was one mighty overflow of kingdom power. Satan and his demons went wild. There was warfare everywhere as the manifest rule and reign of Christ set millions of people free. The blind could see; the deaf could hear; the lame could walk; the lost were found; the sick were healed; the lonely were comforted; the outcast were made priests in the new order; heaven came to earth!

Do you understand that this is God's plan and purpose? Do you understand that when Jesus came to earth, the kingdom of God came with Him and since that day the kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing against the kingdom of darkness and will one day totally eclipse this evil kingdom so that there is only one Kingdom in this universe – and that is the Kingdom of light and life and love and peace! Do you realise that when you utter those words, *"Your Kingdom Come,"* that this is what it really means?

Will there be any sick people in heaven?

Will there be any lost people in heaven?

Will there be any lonely people in heaven?

Will there be any hurting and bereaved people in heaven?

Will there any miscarried or aborted or deformed babies in heaven?

Will there be any pain or doubt or fear in heaven?

Will we experience loss or betrayal or grief of any kind in heaven?

No, of course not! Everything is perfect in heaven and as heaven invades earth, everything will start to change here! Everything that sin and rebellion brought into our lives will start to disappear. That's the best news of all. We don't need to wait till we get to heaven to enjoy the glory and the wonder of God's Kingdom. Heaven is coming to us! Jesus brought heaven with Him. Jesus ushered in the rule and the reign of the King on earth, as it is in heaven. Then He left us with the mission to continue bringing the reality of heaven to earth.

When we connect with the plan and purpose of God and realise what is happening here, it should change our whole life! *"Your kingdom come, Lord . . . Your will be done here, now, on earth, in my life and church and relationships, as it is in heaven!"* That prayer should be on our hearts and our lips every waking moment. We should be consumed by a passion to see more and more of heaven and less and less of the hell Satan has unleashed in this world.

I have nothing to offer you. I have nothing for the pain and agony that surrounds us in this world. When I sit with hurting and grieving and lonely and confused and sick people, I can only do one thing, I can only lift my eyes to heaven and say, *"More, Lord! More, Lord. May Your kingdom come Lord . . . here . . . now . . . for this hurting brother or sister. Come, Lord Jesus, and manifest your rule and reign in their life and their circumstances."*

O how we need God in these last days. O how we need Him to wake us up, to wake the Church up right across this nation and around the world! The world needs to see the beauty and majesty and glory and power of the Bride of Christ. We really need the reality, the riches and the power of heaven to explode across the face of every relationship and every ministry and every church fellowship and every government. It's time! It's way over time! So, whose side are you on? Are you content to sleep away your life in the Kingdom until you get to heaven and get the biggest shock of your life? There are going to be so many of us that cannot believe our eyes or ears when we get to heaven. The difference from this life to the next will be so huge - we will be in a state of shock, I'm sure.

But is it not meant to be that way! Jesus brought heaven here over 2,000 years ago through His life, death and resurrection. That abundant, eternal wonderful life was for now, not just for later. What nonsense would it be to lock away the power and the glory and life-changing wonder of heaven in the afterlife while His whole creation slips into darkness!

Look around you in this world. There's pain and sickness and doubt and fear and evil abounding and it doesn't have to be that way. The church of Jesus Christ needs to wake up to the truth that we are agents of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and we already possess the keys to heaven! We no longer need to listen to Satan when he tries to convince us that this is just the way the world is, this is as good as it gets! When we start praying for the kingdom of God to come more and more; when we start living like the Kingdom of God is already here; when we confess the ugly, horrible sin of unbelief and start taking God at His word ... then hang on to your hats people! The *sleeping giant* is awake and the church will finally stand up again and be heard and seen. The King will truly reign. Our world will start to see what Paul's world saw as the rule and reign of Jesus Christ is re-established over His creation.

I don't want to wait until I leave this earth to taste the glory and power of heaven. Why would we ever think we had to wait? Read the Gospels! Listen to the words of Jesus. Look again and what He preached and how He lived and what He released on earth. Look at the birth and explosive growth of the church in the book of Acts. Then cry out to God every day and night and ask Him to wake the sleeping giant and release His Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven!

How then shall you live in light of what you have encountered in this teaching series?

I believe all of heaven is on the edge of their seats, waiting to hear your answer! And the Holy Spirit is poised and ready to empower the choices you make from this day forward.