

The Kingdom Consciousness of a True Disciple

By Jay Wegter

I. The Kingdom Consciousness of a True Disciple

A. The Kingdom of God was the heart of Jesus' teaching (Luke 4:42-44).

What God has done, and will do, through Christ in the inauguration the Kingdom of God is the pervasive mindset of a true disciple—we are calling this mindset, “kingdom consciousness.”

Christ's announcement of the Kingdom of God marked the end of the old era of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus stated that the ‘Good News’ of the Kingdom of God was being preached starting with John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God was very closely associated with the Gospel message itself. “And [Jesus was] saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel’” (Mark 1:15).

The term, “Kingdom of God,” in its general sense in both O.T. and N.T. means God's reign—His divine kingly authority, especially over those who belong to Him (see Ps 103:19; 145:13; Is 52:7; Dan 2:44; 7:14, 27). The passages in Daniel indicate that God's reign—His rule as King of creation, will at the end of the age *invade* human history and establish everlasting dominion on earth. The glorious message of the Kingdom is that God will establish His kingdom on earth through His Son, Jesus Christ. God's divine reign is given by the Father to the Son (Luke 22:29-30; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Rev 11:15).

Christ is appointed by God to take back the title deed to the earth and to reclaim God's authority in every sphere by overthrowing and judging all hostile authority. The angelic victory cry announced during the future Tribulation period is, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15).

This same angelic victory cry encompasses the divine conquest of both the satanic and the human enemies who oppose God's reign and glory. “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:10).

God is “the great King over all the earth” (Ps 47:2). “His kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103:19). His kingdom is everlasting, enduring through all generations (Ps 145:13). What is particularly revolutionary about the message of the Kingdom of God is that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, invisible God of the universe will manifest Himself as King on earth. We are reminded of the stanza from the hymn, “How dread are thine eternal years,” for it reminds us that we are created for God and will have an eternal existence—bearing forever the relation we had with Him while mortals on earth (*My God, how wonderful Thou art*, Author: Frederick W. Faber, 1848).

What is the message of the coming Kingdom of God: the sovereign King of creation will manifest Himself as King of the nations. The Apostle Paul captures the gravity of this event, “. . . that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen” (1 Tim 6:14-16).

The saint's great hope is that he is joined to Christ, his covenant Head. For in Christ, we have peace, safety, adoption, and refuge. It was the humiliation and condescension of Christ in His cross-work that purchased our security in the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 8:9). This great climatic future event of God manifesting Himself as King will be realized through the ministry of Messiah (see Isaiah chapters 11 and 49). "The Sovereign Lord comes with power and His arm rules for Him" (Is 40:10) (R. B. Gaffin Jr., "The Kingdom of God," *New Dictionary of Theology*, IVP, 1988, p. 367).

B. The gospel call to faith and repentance is not timeless, the message was preached with urgency, "the time has come." For the gospel call is joined to the reality of what is still impending: the Kingdom of God. History is hurtling toward its predetermined end—history is linear, not cyclical as paganism suggests. Therefore, the repenting sinner looks to the new and final order at the end of history—these Kingdom promises which fill the O.T. have arrived with Jesus. This helps us understand why Christ and the Apostles announced the Kingdom in their gospel preaching. For the proclamation of the Kingdom was made against the backdrop of the O.T. Kingdom promises to Israel.

Christ's imminent glorious return will mark the coming of the Kingdom in its physical form. The Kingdom will be ushered in with judgment. Christ as Judge will execute 'perfect discrimination' between the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-34, 41). The references to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" are found in the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13:39-42, 49-50). What an awesome and sobering thought that our meek and lowly Savior returns as Judge (Jn 5:22-29; Acts 17:31).

The Kingdom belongs to Christ, it is given to Christ (Heb 1:8; 2 Tim 4:18; 2 Pet 1:11; Lu 22:29). It is the Kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph 5:5; Rev 11:15; 1 Cor 15:24). Those in the 'Lamb-Lord' program will inherit the eternal Kingdom—they will be triumphant in the Lion program. In the N.T. the Kingdom of God is the divine authority and rule given by the Father to the Son (Lu 22:29). Christ will exercise this rule until He has subdued all that is hostile to God. Then, He will return the Kingdom—His messianic authority—to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28).

The end of the age will see a great apostasy, or falling away from the faith just prior to Christ's glorious return (2 Thess 2:3). The world is presently filled with scoffers who are willfully ignorant of this hostile takeover in which Christ shall crush all opposition to God in the coming Day of the Lord (Rev 11:15; 2 Pet 3:3-13).

C. The death and resurrection of Jesus was the decisive point in the coming of the kingdom (Mt 16:21; Mk 9:31; Luke 18:31-34; 24:7). According to Colossians 2:13-15, Christ's redemptive work *disarmed the rulers and authorities* (making the rescue of the elect possible). In other words, Christ's sacrifice in the place of His people not only brought redemption to the elect; it also stripped Satan of his weapons (2:15). The kingdom is now manifest in heaven's spiritual rule over the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21); and one day will be established in a literal earthly kingdom (Rev 20:4-6). In one sense the kingdom is a present reality, but in its fullest sense it awaits a yet-future fulfillment (MacArthur Study Bible, p. 1396).

FOR DISCUSSION: Why are the thoughts of a true disciple of Christ dominated by thoughts of the Kingdom of God? Why is 'kingdom consciousness' practical for everyday life instead of merely theoretical and ideal?

II. The subject of the Kingdom of God contains elements which can be confusing to those who have not studied its phases, or stages of installment.

A. Perhaps the easiest way to understand these phases or installments of the Kingdom is to recognize how they are tied to the work of Christ. *First*, the Kingdom is present in Christ's earthly work and ministry—for His 'in-breaking' into human history was "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8), and "give His life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45) (the church Christ is building *manifests* the Kingdom; but is not *equivalent* to the Kingdom). *Second*, the Kingdom has been inaugurated spiritually in that Christ completed the work His Father gave Him to do, and has been exalted to the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:34; 5:31; Phil 2:9). In referring to His exalted state Christ could say, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). *Third*, at His glorious return, the Kingdom of God invades human history in power and glory and judgment, signaling the beginning of the Messianic age (Mt 8:11-12; 2 Thess 2:6-10) (Gaffin, p. 368).

The wisdom of God in the cross is spiritually discerned—requiring the regenerating work of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-16). The power of God and the wisdom of God are brought together in one person, our Lord Jesus Christ. To the extent that we promote God's wisdom, we exalt God's power in Christ. Unless Christ is preeminent and central, God's wisdom is not exalted. God has made foolish the wisdom of the world "through the foolishness of the message preached" (1 Cor 1:21). God intends to shame the wise—this is His divine purpose.

God destroys the world's wisdom, and He does so with cosmic ramifications (2 Pet 3:10-13; Mt 24:27-31; Rev 6:12-14). Like an immense steel wedge, God, in sending Christ, presses in upon the folly of the world's wisdom with the divine wisdom of the cross. The men of the world regard the cross as weakness and folly. But, Christ is the only source of total, final, absolute wisdom that there is. Christ and Him crucified embraces both the mystery of Christ's person and the wonder of His redemptive work. The whole fulcrum, the whole balance point, the arrow point, the focus of God's wisdom, the very axis of God's wisdom is '*Christ, and Him crucified*' (1 Cor 1:18-25; 2:2).

B. In Christ's first coming, His redemptive rule and supernatural power have now invaded the realm of Satan, delivering the elect from the power of evil (Col 2:8-15; Mt 12:28). Though the evil one was defeated at the cross, the final destruction of Satan awaits the coming of the Son of man in glory (Mt 25:41; Rev 20:10). Though this event is future, Jesus could say that the Kingdom of God was present in the midst of men because the messianic works manifested its power (Mt 11:12; Is 35:5-6; Lu 17:21).

The Lamb-Lord messianic program involves the exertion of supernatural power every single time a sinner is saved (Eph 1:19-23; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3). This same supernatural power has invaded the realm of Satan and has defeated death. All of the Lord's people will be raised in bodies which are corruptible in order to inherit the blessings of the Kingdom (1 Cor 15:50ff.).

C. The presence of the Kingdom now in history (in the 'Lamb-Lord' program) is a mystery (Mk 4:11). This mystery is a divine purpose which has been hidden for long ages but finally has been revealed (Rom 16:25-26). The mystery of the Kingdom is this: before its dramatic consummation, before the destruction of Satan, before the age to come, the Kingdom of God has entered this age in spiritual power, invading the realm of darkness in order to bring men in advance the blessings of

forgiveness (Mk 2:5) *life* (Jn 3:3); and *righteousness* (Mt 5:20; Rom 14:16) which belong to the age to come. That is the great mystery, the righteousness of the Kingdom in its present form is an inner, absolute, imputed righteousness (Mt 5:22; 2 Cor 5:21). Christ is ruling His own people by His love *now*, He is enthroned in their hearts *now* (2 Cor 5:14-15)—all before He returns in might and glorious conquering power.

D. The Kingdom parables of Matthew 13 embody this new revelation which is a mystery. The Kingdom has come among men, but not with political power which compels every knee to bow before the glory of its King. Rather, it is like a seed cast on ground which may be fruitful or unfruitful, depending on its reception (Mt 13:3-8). The Lamb-Lord form of the Kingdom has indeed come to men, and in quickening power of sovereign grace, the hearts of the elect are made willing to enter. But, the present order in the world is not disrupted—the sons of the Kingdom and the sons of the evil one grow up together in the world until the harvest (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43). Like the proverbial mustard seed, the present form of the Kingdom, though insignificant and despised in the world will one day be a great tree (Mt 13:31-32). This same Kingdom, like a bit of leaven hidden in a bowl of dough, will yet fill the earth (Mt 13:33) (G. E. Ladd, “The Kingdom of God,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, Ed., Baker, 1984, p. 609).

Blessed are you that you have been granted *eyes to see and ears to hear*—that you might perceive the infinite wealth and beauty of the King and His Kingdom (Mt 13:16). Blessed are you to have been given the gift of repentance to depart from your idols and your attraction to the works of the devil, the imposter king. For, the Kingdom is coming in glory—on that day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Christ is Lord and rightful King (Phil 2:9-11).

The mystery of the Kingdom of God coming in humility instead of glory was an utterly new and amazing revelation. Yet, Jesus warns that men should not be deceived. Though the Bearer of the Kingdom was put to death and condemned as a criminal—it is nevertheless the Kingdom of God. Like buried treasure, or a priceless pearl, the acquisition of the Kingdom merits any cost or sacrifice (Mt 13:44-46). The humility of the Kingdom in its Lamb form ought not lead to a misunderstanding of its true nature—for it one day will divide the good from the evil in eschatological salvation and judgment (Mt 13:47-50). To see the value of the Kingdom in its present form requires a work of divine grace—this perception is a function of faith.

E. In this age the ‘sons of the Kingdom’ are called to heroism; they will experience sufferings (2 Thess 1:5), and tribulation (Acts 14:22). But God will rescue them from every evil and save them for His heavenly Kingdom (2 Tim 4:18; 2 Pet 1:11; 1 Cor 6:9-10). The Lion program will be a radical new world order. We will share in perfect fellowship with Christ and will share His authority (Mt 26:29-30; Lu 20:34-36; Rev 2:26-28). Again, to our ears tuned to the ‘bounciness’ feel good alien values of modern Evangelicalism, the Kingdom proclamation can sound too other worldly—too fantastic, too fictional. But, in the face of those inner objections we ask, “Do you know who Christ really is?” “Are you aware of the seriousness of His call to be an overcomer?” (Rev 2-3; 21:7).

The present realm of the Kingdom in the world shows that the dynamic power of God’s reign has invaded this evil age. The Kingdom has been ‘spiritually inaugurated’ in that the saints have been

delivered from the power of darkness and the tyranny of sin (Col 1:13; Rom 6:21-23), and they now enjoy the spiritual blessings of God's reign. Jesus said that since John the Baptist the Kingdom of God has been preached and men enter it with violent determination (Lu 6:16) (Ibid, p. 610). That is what believers do—the violent determination needed to enter the Kingdom depends upon your estimation of the King and His Kingdom! And, that is a function of genuine saving faith.

The Kingdom is not the church. It is impossible to substitute the church for the Kingdom in such passages as: Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:23. Yet, there is there is an inseparable relationship between the two. The church is a fellowship of believers who have accepted His Kingdom offer, submitted to His rule, and entered into its blessings. Thus we may say that the Kingdom of God creates the church. The redemptive rule of God in Christ brings into being a new people who receive the blessings of the divine reign. The Kingdom also works through the church. The disciples preached the Kingdom of God and performed signs of the Kingdom (Mt 10:7-8; Lu 10:9, 17). See also that the church is entrusted with the 'keys of the Kingdom'—Matthew 16:18-19; Luke 11:52 (Ibid., p. 611).

Because of the mystery of the Kingdom in its present form, and because of the humiliation of Christ in the 'scandal' of the cross, the natural man is offended by the gospel. Therefore, the Kingdom must be received with childlike faith. The Judas' of the world have esteemed Christ and His Kingdom to be on the loser side of the tally. What a shock it will be when Christ returns in wrath and conquest—with the doors of mercy finally closed—all the tribes of the earth will mourn (Rev 1:7-8).

III. The Kingdom is soteriological—the object of divine rule is the redemption of men and their deliverance from the powers of darkness.

A. Christ's reign means the destruction of all hostile powers (1 Cor 15:23-28). The N.T. sees the Kingdom of God standing over against the kingdom of the world which opposes divine rule (Rev 11:15, 18). The kingdoms of the world are under satanic control and must be conquered (Mt 4:8; Lu 4:5; 1 Jn 5:19). The world opposes the working of God's Kingdom. The 'god of this age' exercises his rule by holding men in darkness (2 Cor 4:4; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Heb 2:14-15). Nevertheless, God remains King of the ages, and in the coming of the Kingdom a mighty, apocalyptic in-breaking will finally put an end to all rebellion (1 Tim 1:17; Rev 15:3). This momentous culmination of history will see the merging of the Lamb program with the Lion program.

Thus, the Kingdom of God entails the redemptive rule of Christ as mediatorial King who defeats the powers of darkness and delivers men from the sway of evil. Entrance into the Kingdom (a kingdom 'transfer') means deliverance from the powers of darkness, and entrance into the Kingdom of the Son—this is accomplished by the new birth (Col 1:13; Jn 3:3-5) (Ibid., p. 608).

B. As recipients of the redeeming work of the Lamb program, we experience a 'kingdom transfer' in which we are granted citizenship in Christ's Kingdom (Phil 3:20-21). The significance of Christ as Mediatorial King is profound. No other King in history has loved righteousness perfectly (Heb 1:8-9), has come as a humble servant without ego (Jn 5:30ff.), has given His own blood to make friends of His enemies (Rev 1:5-6). Those who reject the Son's rightful rule will be revealed as avowed enemies of His Heavenly Father.

The Kingdom comes at the end of the age—Jesus taught the prayer known as ‘the Lord’s prayer. “Thy Kingdom come” (Mt 6:10) is a violent prayer; for in order for God’s will to be done on earth universally by men, there must be condemnation by fire and a throne of judgment. The wicked will suffer judgment by fire, and the righteous will inherit the Kingdom (Mt 25:31-46; 13:36-43).

IV. In Christ and His work, the future has already come (2 Cor 5:17). The age to come (though not in its global fulfillment) is penetrating this present age.

A. The sin, death, and meaninglessness of the present age have been transformed by righteousness, life, and meaning of the age to come. Hope in Christ connects us to the *age to come*. “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19).

The conquest of sin, death, and the devil at the cross established the rule of God over the church. We are in a period between the comings of Christ. The future, or eschatological dimension, penetrates the present. The truth is, with the coming of Christ, the present age died (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10). This is a fundamental division recognized by Scripture (David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, pp. 205-210). “Last Days” refers to the present period established at the cross (Heb 1:1-5; Heb 9:26; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; 1 Cor 10:11).

The *end of the ages* has come upon us. The victory won at the cross of Christ has established this era as “*the last days*.” We live in a unique time period between the victory won at the cross; and the consummation of this victory at the *Day of the Lord*. (See Peter’s Pentecost sermon beginning with the declaration of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel.)

FOR DISCUSSION: In what sense does the first coming of Christ mark the fact that the *end of the age* is imminent? How should this affect our gospel proclamation?

B. We live between the cross and the resurrection—these two decisive events are to control our entire perspective. Eternal life is a present reality—in essence it has begun in the believer already (Jn 3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54; 11:23-27). For the believer, the present age of this world has passed. The so-called wisdom of the present world has been judged and exposed by Christ as folly and shameful.

The “wisdom” of this world is foolishness. It cannot lead men to a saving knowledge of God. The Lord is systematically *shaming* the wisdom of the world through the ‘*foolishness of the cross*’—He is doing so through a message regarded as foolish by the world (1 Cor 1:20; 2:6-8; 3:18; Titus 2:12).

Think of how tragic it is for the unbeliever living blithely and apathetically in his spiritual darkness. For him, the present age still belongs to Satan—for Scripture states that *the whole world lies in the power of the evil one* (1 Jn 5:19). By contrast, the believer has been *delivered from the domain of darkness and has been transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son* (Col 1:13). For us as believers, God’s grace has brought eternity into time. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20-21).

God has decisively reclaimed us and saved us for Himself. Yet there is a final phase of this reclamation that is still to come. Scripture says that *we are eagerly waiting for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body* (Rom 8:23b).

The fact that believers are eagerly awaiting their glorification does not diminish the truth that God has now, in the present, ‘broken into our lives’—transforming them by the reality of His truth,

power, and love. C. K. Barrett writes, “*The common pattern of N.T. eschatology is in [the book of] Hebrews made uncommonly clear. God has begun to fulfill His ancient promises; the dawn of the new age has broken, though the full day has yet to come. The “age to come” is already being tasted and experienced (Heb 6:4-5) because “the world to come” has already been subjected to Christ’s rule (Heb 2:5) (Quoted in Wells, p. 212).*

This rule of Christ is the target of opposition from enemies of the knowledge and glory of God (Heb 2:8-9; 10:13-14); but the outcome is sure (Heb 9:26). Thus the author of Hebrews speaks of a salvation being experienced in the present, a redemption, an inheritance, and a covenant each of which is also “eternal” (Heb 5:9; 9:12, 15; 13:20).

We must not miss the significance of this. The truth of the kingdom of God that we believe and preach is all about God’s mighty in-breaking into human history. God’s *in-breaking* involved both saving and vanquishing. God has done for us what we had no hope of doing for ourselves—He has conquered our darkness and our love of darkness. And He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and placed us as subjects in the kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13-14). Christ our Redeemer-King makes His redemptive work (of atonement, propitiation, and penal guilt transfer) the basis for our kingdom transfer. We have been transferred to the kingdom of light—an entirely different domain.

C. God’s rule has begun in the hearts of believers; and will someday soon fill the earth. As disciples and subjects of King Jesus; we receive this Kingdom—we receive the kingdom because by His sovereign grace, God had made us subjects of Jesus Christ; the King of Kings—citizens of His kingdom. In Christ, the eternal God—eternal life—eternal truth walked on this dusty planet 2000 years ago. It was through Christ that God was breaking into our age in sovereign mercy. In Christ, God took decisive action against sin, death, and the devil—the forces which held His people in subjugation and bondage.

During His earthly ministry, the context of “The Kingdom of God,” was the means by which Jesus defined Himself, and His work. The message of the kingdom of God is what Jesus used to set forth and reveal the purposes of God in sending His Son (Matt 12:28; 16:28).

FOR DISCUSSION: Name and describe some of the ways the believer’s life is to be controlled by the two events of the cross and the resurrection. How are these two events to shape and deepen our commitment to ‘kingdom consciousness’?

D. Living between the cross and the resurrection means the believer’s life is defined by both events. To live between the cross and the resurrection is to live between the two events in a way that is dynamically connected to both. Romans 5:1-11 contains this “*already, not yet*” tension. The believer does **not yet** actually reign with Christ over the earth, but does **already** belong to that new age and rule of life in Him (Rom 5:17, 21).

The outworking of the “reign of grace through righteousness to eternal life” is through “Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:21). This is why the role of *ongoing faith in the Gospel* is so vital. For, the Gospel is our constant reminder of the reality of the present reign of grace and life. We really do participate in the reign of grace and life (v. 17). It is ongoing faith in the Gospel that produces a life-transforming awareness of the reign of grace.

Ongoing faith in the Gospel deepens our assurance, hope, and joy in the unshakable fact that the reign of grace cannot be frustrated, no matter what tribulations we face (Rom 5:1-5). Salvation transferred and discharged us from the old era of sin's reign (2 Cor 11:3; Jn17:3). Believers have been radically identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. The Christian life is defined more by allegiance to a Person (the Lord Jesus Christ to whom all authority has been given) than it is by allegiance to a moral code.

Our part in the process of renewal is to keep the eyes of our minds fixed upon things that are unseen. The phrase “things that are unseen” refers especially to ***the age to come*** (2 Cor 4:18; Phil 3:8-17). This same *fixing of the mind on things above* refers also to the “treasure principle.” In other words, *where your treasure is, there will your heart (affections) be also* (Matt 6:19-21; Col 3:1-3; Eph 4:22-23).

We are not to be preoccupied with temporal things, we are to fix our minds upon eternal things (2 Cor 4:16-18; Phil 3:18-19). Our responsibility is to fix our eyes on things that are unseen—that is the kingdom age to come in which the resurrection of our body and glory will be ours. Faith and hope in God's promises is the key to *being renewed day by day*.

Mind renewal through the Gospel puts our focus back upon what God is doing in us; and what God is doing in history. God never backs off from His purpose to conform us into the image of His Son. Renewal each day means we are to live as a new person in Christ. We are to reject the sins that are totally out of place in God's people (Col 3:5-9). Our daily task of living to reflect the holy character of God, and living under righteousness (justification) is our preparation to live with God forever in His eternal kingdom.

When the N.T. describes God's grace, with that description of His grace comes an explanation of the believer's ***identity*** in Christ, the believer's ***mandate*** to be conformed to Christ, the believer's ***relation*** to the Body of Christ, and the believer's ***destiny*** in Christ. These grace-based *spiritual realities* are a powerful incentive for Christian living.

Thus the Gospel gives us, and instills in us “kingdom values” that are joined to our hope of resurrection life. Those *kingdom values* are lived out by setting one's mind on things above; considering the members of our body as dead to sin (*immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, lying*); putting on the new self; putting on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; bearing with and forgiving one another; putting on love; letting the peace of Christ rule in your heart; teaching and admonishing one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness; being a submissive wife and a loving husband; avoiding *bitterness*; being obedient children; avoiding *exasperation* of children; doing your work heartily as unto the Lord.

The more our hope is joined to kingdom thinking—the more it is fixed on the resurrection, the more we will seek an energetic compliance with God's purposes in Christ. “If we are definitively sanctified by the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, ‘growth’ in holiness will mean increasing and abounding in practical expressions of that status, calling and commitment which is ***already ours*** by God's grace” (David Peterson, *Possessed by God*, p.136).

FOR DISCUSSION: What is so significant about the “already, not yet” tension? What are some of the effects upon professing believers who are blind to this “already, not yet” dynamic?

E. The cross is at the center of God’s plan of glory, rescue and restoration. In the secularized, relativistic age in which we live, we are ever prone to divide up our complex lives into compartments in order to keep things “manageable.” To our own discredit and shame, we even attempt to compartmentalize the eternal truths of God—often *partitioning them off* from the demands, pleasures, and activities of life.

“Kingdom thinking” brings us back to the reality that this is a moral universe over which heaven rules. It is a moral universe solely because of one reason; the Creator and Ruler of this universe is holy. Moral cause and effect (crime and punishment—obedience and blessing) are not impersonal laws and forces. The inviolate law of moral cause and effect is a reflection of the character of the God of the universe who rules His creation.

This universal truth of God’s moral government must be the backdrop for properly understanding the cross of Christ. In the incarnation and work of Christ, God in the flesh comes to address the outcome of His broken moral law. This fact should shake us—rock us—stagger us—ever be fresh and exhilarating to us. God in Christ takes on the burden of His own wrath. God absorbs His own wrath in the Person of Christ. The holy justice His character demands—He Himself provides in the substitutionary death of Christ.

In Christ, Agape love reaches out of eternity into time. The age to come has broken into time and space. Christ crucified is at the center of our worldview. Time and eternity meet in Christ. His resurrection nails us to eternity. The age to come, which will endure through all eternity, has arrived in the Person of Christ.

This is the point of kingdom thinking—for the people of God, end-time judgment has already come at the cross. The “hell” they should have justly endured was borne by Christ in His passion. Christ entered our alienation and dereliction. He came to earth and radically identified Himself with our cursed existence—He was the *man of sorrows acquainted with grief*. He was the believer’s “High Priest in training” (see Hebrews 4:15-16; 5:7-9). He identified Himself even with the consequences of our sin with its shame, sorrow, suffering, rejection, betrayal, fear, grief, death, and separation from God.

FOR DISCUSSION: Describe the ways in which the cross of Christ defines your life—where you have been, what you were, what you are now, how you are to walk, where your power for holiness comes from, what you will be.

F. The cross marked the decisive turning point in the destiny of all men, fallen angels, and the entire creation itself. The scope of the coming Kingdom is cosmic—extending to the entire creation.

To preach the Kingdom of God is to proclaim the eschatological reality that God will manifest Himself as King—invading human history in a series of climatic events which will set up the final form of world order. The church is not the Kingdom—but the church manifests the Kingdom. For, the church is made up of the citizens of the Kingdom. Christ has called believers into His body, the church. Through faith and repentance, they have submitted to the redemptive lordship of Christ—they have believed the “gospel of the Kingdom” (Mt 24:14).

When Jesus was proclaiming the Kingdom, He was announcing the imminent end of the world and the arrival of a violent, militant, apocalyptic upheaval of the present world order (Heb 12:25-29; Mt

24:29-35). Here is where our weakness in theology and our failure in Scripture meditation are revealed. Our concept of heaven is far too ethereal, like floating spirits without bodily form, wispy clouds and harps. This is far from the truth. For the scope of Christ's eschatological rule will be cosmic. ***The extent of His realm will reach to the entire creation.*** This is where so many in our churches today are blind to the reality of the Kingdom of God and the new heavens and earth (2 Pet 3:10-13). All things in every place will be subject to Christ—the exalted Christ is “head over everything for the church” (Eph 1:22). The church today has done a poor job of keeping the present and the future elements of the Kingdom joined in its devotion to Christ. We need to preach the relevance of the Kingdom (Gaffin, p. 369).

The world was oblivious, and still is, to the scope of the triumph which Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection. Paul proclaims in Colossians, *All the fullness of salvation dwells in Christ. “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him I say, whether things on earth, or things in heaven”* (Col 1:19-20).

The Father was pleased to have all redemptive power dwell in Christ who is the Agent for and goal for reconciliation (Col 1:20). To reconcile (*apokatallacia*)—in its redemptive sense means to exchange hostility for friendship. The prefix conveys the idea of complete reconciliation. God's reconciling of man to Himself is necessary because of the enmity of sinners toward God in their natural mind (Rom 5:8-11; 8:5-7). Man's corruption is an effrontery to God; the fact and existence of corruption requires reconciliation before relations can be restored.

But, in what sense does Christ reconcile all things to Himself? “All things” reconciled by His blood cannot mean universal salvation. The broader (non-salvific) meaning of reconciliation in this verse points to the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the millennium when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father (Phil 2:10; Rom 14:11) (H. Wayne House, “The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (Apr 1992), pp. 185-186).

“Having made peace,”—the participle is inserted to indicate the reconciliation is not a cosmic miracle in which the universe is changed outside of man. BUT that reconciliation is primarily concerned with relationships that are restored. Peace here is not primarily defined in the negative—that is by erasing or canceling out hostilities—but reconciliation points to positive content with positive blessings—spiritual blessings impacting the prosperity of the whole man (Ibid.). (This fact is monumental—the direction of the universe, including those who live in it, is forever changed because of what God does through a man, Christ Jesus.)

At present, heaven and earth are not now united. Kingdoms are in conflict; sin brought the universe into a state of corruption; decay; deterioration. Sin destroyed harmony. Through the blood of His cross the sin principle is conquered—the curse is borne; the law satisfied; peace is made and restored. Through Christ and His cross the universe is brought back to its proper relation to God (see also Eph 1:9-10). As a just reward for His obedience; Christ is exalted to God's right hand—from this position of exaltation, glory, and power—He rules the universe.

What He accomplished at the cross; He will consummate at the Second Advent when He formally and militantly takes back the title deed to the earth. Through Christ; all intelligent beings—

both obedient and disobedient, and both human and angelic will acknowledge the sovereignty of God manifest in the Lordship of Christ who is over all.

The vastness of Christ's Person is seen in His cosmic Kingship (He is Head of the Church; all things are under His feet; He is Lord of all creation). Thus His cross affects not only mankind; but the entire cosmos. Also a distinction needs to be made between reconciliation and salvation.

Reconciliation removes the barrier between God and man and opens the potential for a new type of relationship between the two. But the barrier removed does not mean that reconciliation has been appropriated. The act of reconciliation in Christ's death does not itself immediately effect reconciliation for the individual—people by nature do not desire to take advantage of this situation of their own accord. This does not detract from the reconciling work of the Father—for it had to take place for salvation to be in accord with God's nature.

All the redeemed and unredeemed will acknowledge His sovereignty; AND in that sense there will be reconciliation. But this does NOT mean the unredeemed will be given salvation. (Christ's vicarious death on the cross paid the price necessary to make possible this peace.) As cosmic Lord, when God in reconciling all things prepares to put creation itself under His authority and rule, through the administrative reign of Jesus Christ—then when Christ is inaugurated as the cosmic Potentate at the beginning of the eternal state, the earth will have its day of reckoning and redemption, and will be transformed (2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1).

Present spiritual warfare in this life takes place between the believer and satanic powers (Eph 6:10-18). But Christ at the right hand of the Father possesses authority over the angelic realm, though at the present time that realm has not come under final judgment. In spite of their present limited power; the angelic realm will be subject to God's work of reconciliation. Christ will be exalted and every knee will bow (Phil 2:10). Paul highlights all the aspects of the believer's former alienation in the bulk of Ephesians chapter two. Now the believer's present condition as reconciled (Col 1:22) emphasizes life; and blamelessness free of reproach. The purpose of the reconciliation is to *present each believer before Him holy, blameless, and beyond reproach.*

The intended goal of reconciliation is reached BECAUSE Christ's incarnation allowed Him to die a real death in our place. The prepositions Paul uses to support our being *in Christ*. By identification, believers are positionally holy, blameless, and beyond reproach. And they are to manifest these qualities in the Christian walk.

FOR DISCUSSION: How would it alter and improve our loyalty and devotion to Christ if we saw Him more and more as He truly is—as *Cosmic King, Reconciler of all things, Head of the Church, Judge of all the earth?*

V. The church today tends to neglect the message of the Kingdom. Christ is often depicted merely as friend, a 'mascot' in one's spiritual journey, rather than majestic Lord who inspires reverential fear and awe.

A. If a professing believer has but a 'cultural concept' of Jesus, then he won't 'see' the expansive, all-consuming theme of the Kingdom of God in its fullness. One cannot 'see' the Kingdom unless he really knows Christ as Logos, Lamb-Lord, and Lion. Christ as Lord of the cosmos does not fit a

cultural concept of Jesus. During Christ's earthly ministry, it was clear that His authority was not derived from earthly authority, but from God and His divine purpose (a thing never seen before in history). Therefore, men must receive the Kingdom with childlike simplicity and faith (Mk 10:15; Mt 19:14; Lu 18:17).

During His passion, His enemies imagine that they have gained ultimate authority over Him and have defeated Him. ***This is the 'Lamb plan'—Christ comes meek and lowly (Is 53)—but God has made Him Lord (Acts 2:34-36; Heb 1:3-8).*** During His passion, His enemies imagine that they have gained ultimate authority over Him and have defeated Him. In the present age, the saint is called to suffer with Christ, bearing His reproach and rejection by the world (Heb 13:13; Rom 8:16-18; Jn 15:18-20). Believers are called to radical identification with Christ—they are called to heroism as His disciples.

B. There can be no neutrality in this matter of following Christ versus loving the world (1 Jn 2:3-6, 15-17). Only those who are mortifying sin are “friends of the cross” (Phil 3:17-19). Christians are called to radically identify with Christ, as His servants, slaves, disciples BEFORE Christ is publicly manifested in His global triumph. At the end of the age, the tribulation period and the glorious return will remove all imagined middle ground. All those who are not disciples of Christ will be exposed and condemned—their actual loyalty to Satan, the imposter king will be revealed.

Variations of this theme of the return of the rightful King have been seen in literature: those who follow the evil imposter king (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2) will be judged once the rightful King returns for His Kingdom (Ps 2; Ps 45; Mt 22:1-14). The true Christian follows Christ the rightful King in this present age—while it is not popular—while it is derided by the world.

If these realities leave you cold, yawning—then it is very likely that you are not an heir of heaven. For, Kingdom consciousness is the mark of a true disciple of Christ. Those who have seen the infinite value of the Kingdom willingly take up their cross daily, denying themselves (Lu 9:23; Jn 12:24-26). The true children of the King are always *entering into the Kingdom daily*.

If the message of the Kingdom of God does not move you and stagger you, and grab your desires and imagination, then do not delude yourself by saying that you are a born again believer headed for heaven. You ask, “But, what can be done? I thought I had believed on Christ?” You must plead to God to give you a new heart. You cannot change your nature, only the Lord can. Too much moralistic preaching today leaves people with the deception that you must start loving what you hate (holiness), and hating what you love (sin). That will not save you—you must have a new heart that loves what God loves. Those who are born again are taken up with Christ and His Kingdom. They have an enthralling vision of God's redemptive plan. They have been granted eyes to see the treasure of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

G. Practical applications that flow from kingdom consciousness.

- ***Christ in us is the hope of glory – we ought to stimulate one another to love and good deeds based upon that blessed hope of glory*** (see Hebrews 10:23-25 for the connection between resurrection hope, or ‘kingdom hope’ and Body life in the church).
- ***According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, beholding Christ as our King has transforming power but there is spiritual combat.*** The flesh and the Spirit are locked in battle. The call of Scripture is to

live out the practical implications of our sanctification by pursuing holiness as a lifestyle. We are to do this by ***looking back to the cross and forward to the resurrection***, when by God's grace we will share His character and life completely" (Peterson, pp. 136-137).

- ***Christ is cosmic King. He has authority over all things. No part of creation is finally or fully meaningful until it is understood in relation to Christ who is Creator and Redeemer. This must radically affect how a Christian thinks about life.*** All creation is made by God; belongs to Him; derives its meaning from Him—and must only be used in accordance with God's will. Thus the purpose of God's redemptive work toward us is that we might take our proper place in His created order; and that we might own Christ as our Creator and Redeemer. The glorious news of the gospel of the kingdom is that through Christ, we have been fitted by God to do His will, and to live as Christ's subjects.
- ***All things have been delivered to Christ by His Father (Matt 11:27; Jn 3:35; Eph 1:22; Heb 1:8). Christ is Lord of all (Phil 3:21; Acts 10:36)—but His reign is currently contested by many enemies of the glory of God (Col 2:15).*** God through Christ will make a public object lesson of rebellion and evil. Wickedness will be taken to the scaffold and held up to public ridicule (Rom 9:22-24). God will demonstrate His wrath—the subjugation of all rule, authority, and power will be witnessed by the holy rational universe (1 Cor 15:24-25). Error is headed for the gallows. It will be displayed there in all its horror and repugnancy as God *demonstrates His wrath*. This *demonstration* of God's wrath also is accompanied by the demonstration of God's mercy. As a "vessel of mercy" you are part of God's comprehensive *object lesson*! Therefore your life ought to demonstrate that you believe with all your heart that God has chosen you to *make known the riches of His glory* (Rom 9:23).
- ***The saint animated by kingdom consciousness will excel in 'spiritual seeing'—he will live between the cross and the resurrection.*** He will connect the cost of discipleship (self-denial, taking up his cross daily) as the expression of his loyalty and devotion to Christ. As a result, he understands that as a faithful follower of Christ, the cost of discipleship is a small price to pay for usefulness in the kingdom. For, the dictates of true discipleship (self-denial, and taking up one's cross daily) are part and parcel of being radically identified with Christ. Only those radically identified with Christ are controlled by kingdom consciousness—for the Kingdom is about the King!