

THE COMING KING

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This is the third week of Advent where we reflect on the fact that our King Jesus has come, and our hopeful expectation that he is coming again. What I would like to do today is fill in that word “king” and a related word “Kingdom” a little bit more. Because I think as often as we use those words, as common as they are in Christian vocabulary and prayers, I think they are still a little alien. I know this has been true of me. “God’s kingdom” has been this fuzzy term that seems to mean a lot of different things.

In Matthew, the “gospel” the good news that God saves sinners, is often referred to as “the gospel of the kingdom.” (Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14) Mark tells us that Jesus preached the gospel by declaring “the kingdom of God was at hand.” (Mark 1:14-15)

But at the same time the gospel isn’t just a message, it’s also this force in the world. Right after telling his disciples to proclaim “the kingdom of God is at hand” he tells them to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons.” (Matt 9:7-8)

But then Jesus, at the end of his life, tells his disciples that he will see them again in God’s kingdom. (Luke 22:22-30, Matthew 26:29) Making it seem as if “kingdom” isn’t merely a message, and not just supernatural power that marks God’s people on earth, but a physical place.

To compound our confusion. The term “kingdom of God” or sometimes “Kingdom of heaven” is just used a lot. It appears 36 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 32 times in Luke, and twice in John.

What exactly is the “kingdom of God”? What are we saying when we pray for God’s kingdom to come? What does it mean to wait for our coming king? What does his rule and kingdom look like? What I want to do today is different for Bridgeway. I want to preach *topically*. I want to trace this theme of “kingdom” from Genesis all the way to Revelation. I want to fill in those words “kingdom” and “king” with biblical ideas and history so that when we sing, and when we pray “your Kingdom come.” It means something more than a Christian thing we throw into prayers. Even though this message is topical, I’ve made sure that you know where my thoughts are coming from. I would encourage you to read through my notes and read the Scriptures that I have referenced there.

Ruled and Ruling

But before we understand God as our king, we must first understand that we were made to be ruled. We were made to be ruled, by God. Another way we could say this is that we thrive, we flourish and we are at our best when we are ruled by God. That might strike some of you as frightening, but this accords with our basic human experience, right?

If we want to get better at almost anything you need a “master” to teach us. That’s why classrooms have teachers. Football teams have coaches. Dojo’s have Sensei’s. Cities have mayors and kitchens have chefs. It’s why when you go to learn a musical instrument you have an instructor.

Throughout our life this pattern doesn’t really ever change. Everything we have ever experienced points us to this the fact that we flourish, and we learn best when we are under someone’s authority - when we are ruled. In fact, it’s the first thing we ever learn. We’re born and if we want to survive our parents must take over. They have to make all the decisions about feeding us, and changing our diaper, and what toys we won’t choke on. Most of us, to this day carry evidence that our parents “ruled” over us - our names. We come out of the womb ruled over - and that’s not frightening, that’s good. Without authority we rarely develop, we rarely learn new skills, we rarely get stronger. And without our parents ruling over us in the

beginning our life would be at stake. **That's by design, our common experience points us to eternal truth. That we were made to be ruled by God. We flourish, we thrive, and are at our best when God is our King. We are meant to live in God's Kingdom.**

The Garden Kingdom

Now that might sound abstract but we have a perfect example in Scripture. Even though the word "kingdom" is never used, God's first kingdom was the Garden of Eden. The first line of the Bible is this profound announcement that God rules over, and is king of all things.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (Gen 1:1)

In fact, the first two chapters of Genesis go to great lengths to show God's mastery, and rule over each aspect of life. Night and Day. Stars and Planet. Land and Sea. Fish and Insects. Everything - even humans are under his kingship. And by the end of chapter two we get a look at what God's kingdom should look like. Graeme Goldsworthy puts it this way:

God's people (Adam and Eve) in God's Place (this beautiful garden) under God's rule. This I think is the best way to understand God's Kingdom. "God's People in God's Place under God's Rule."

And what we see in Eden is how perfect it is.

Adam and Eve had almost no limits to their freedoms. They were supposed to explore and enjoy God's world, and each other forever. They were ruled, but that was not a bad thing. They had perfection all around, and then also this perfect job...

"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion... [and] You may surely eat of every tree of the garden..." (Genesis 1:28, 2:16)

Humans were ruled, but we were also co-kings with God. Reigning and exercising authority to spread God's goodness and love and kingdom further and further. God tells us: "The whole world is yours, rule it with me, eat it's fruits, and enjoy your spouse!"

To this day, that's all of our dream jobs right? To have authority over a small empire in our particular field, to have the foods we want to eat at our table, and time alone to enjoy our spouse and kids. We were meant to live in God's kingdom.

There was only one rule in this kingdom:

"...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17)

This rule reminded us that no matter how much multiplying, and subduing we did. God was still the true king, and we were still in his kingdom.

The Garden Rebellion

But this did not sit well with Adam and Eve. Eventually, they reject God as king by rejecting his one rule - they eat the fruit. They decide they would rather be their own kings.

And it's easy to underestimate what happened in that moment.

But consider, God had given them everything! Even their minds that decided they didn't need him we're given to them by God. I have a 18 month old son. In almost every important way I have given him everything. Can you imagine him turning to me and saying: "Dad, I know you have taught me every word I know. Given me every meal I've eaten. I know your leadership has only been kind. But I hate you, I don't need you to feed me, or change me, or provide for me. Leave me alone. You are not my Father anymore."

It's not a perfect analogy but it's similar in seriousness to the choice Adam and Eve made. To mutiny against the one who gave them everything. It would be impossible for me to call myself a Dad if I responded to my son's rebellion with - "Well boys will be boys." And it would be impossible for God to call himself God and tolerate his own dethronement without making the punishment fit the crime. Adam rebelled against the King of his life so God said: "on the day that you eat of it, you shall die." God's kingdom was broken.

God's people are no longer his people. They are no longer in God's place, and they hated God's rule. The Apostle Paul, when he wants to unpack the implications of the gospel will echo this "kingdom" language when he says

*Let not sin therefore **reign** in your mortal body... For sin will have no **dominion** over you (Romans 6:12,14)*

Notice how he pictures what happened after the Fall. (Sin reigns, Sin has dominion) He doesn't just say we left God's kingdom, occupying some neutral zone. No we joined another one, a kingdom of death, a kingdom of sin. He will say a few verses later that we were slaves to sin. **Instead of being God's people in God's place, under God's rule. We are this rebelliously-lonely people, we have no place to call home, and we are ruled by - enslaved by - sin.**

And we've all felt this - that slavery.

You feel that slavery when you just can't do the right thing, even though you know it's the right thing. You feel it when you can't stop your anger at your kid's disobedience. Our emotions seem to "run away from us." We feel that our emotions control us. When we can't stop certain feelings. Feelings aren't necessarily sinful but when we can't stop feeling depressed, or when we can't stop feeling anxious, or when we can't stop harming ourselves, or we can't stop those thoughts that say "you're worthless" and "you don't matter" and they spring up in your mind almost like reflexes. That's the slavery of sin. That's the Kingdom of the Snake.

Many of us are enslaved by sickness, cancer, arthritis. Other of us are victims of the sins done against us, whose effects we can't break free from.

Everyone in this room knows what it feels like to be enslaved in sin's kingdom. We know what it feels like to feel like a worthless *person*, we know what it feels like to feel as if we have no place, no home, and to be lonely, and we know what it feels like to be ruled by powers (whether sickness, or societal) that are beyond our control. And at the end of Genesis 3, that's where we are left. **That's where the whole world is left. No people, no home, and enslaved.**

How will We Return? How will we be Rescued?

But this is just chapter three, of book one, of sixty-six books that make up the one story of Scripture. We know this can't be the end right?

We've all seen those moves that in their first 3 minutes open up with some intense action scene, where

bullets are flying, and cars and whirring. And just when you think the hero will escape he's trapped, or his car splashes into a lake and then... the screen cuts to black. Don't you start asking questions? Like well is he really dead? What's the rest of the movie about? How will the story end? How will the world be saved?

When you read Genesis 3 that's how you should feel. Those are the questions you should be asking. And when we do we see something we don't expect.

In Genesis 3:16. Right in the middle of God lining out the consequences for Adam and Eve's rebellion. God stops and promises that the Kingdom of the Snake, the Kingdom of Sin will not last forever.

"I will put enmity [hostility] between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:16)

The snake's kingdom, it's promised, would be crushed. This verse is God's promise to re-establish his kingdom. To bring his people back, to give them a new place, and offer them a new rule - one that cannot be broken by serpentine lies, one that is stronger than the slavery of sin.

But how? How does God intend to undo all of what Adam caused? How will he create a new people? How will he bring them to a new place? How will He break sin's rule and reign and replace it with his own? **How will his kingdom come?"**

Little Kings, and Little Kingdoms

And the answer is that over the next 4000 years God would start to give us glimpses of his coming kingdom by electing different people throughout history to act as new "Adams," new "Kings." Who will try to re-establish the kingdom God had in the garden. People like Noah, and Abraham, and Moses and David. Each one of them unique in their own historical context, but also representatives for humanity and God's kingdom building work. Each in turn would be given the responsibility to lead God's people into God's place, and keep God's rule.

Noah, is the first of such "Adams." His family is supposed to be this new chosen people, on a new earth, under a new rule ratified and secured by the rainbow. But just like Adam his family breaks God's rule. Instead of being these partners spreading God's glory throughout the earth. Noah's descendants disobey God's rule, and amass they're own glory at the tower of Babel. God strikes down the tower, and God's kingdom isn't built through Noah. (Genesis 8:20-9:29, 11:1-9)

Then we meet Abraham and his family who act as a second type of "Adam." They are supposed to be God's chosen people, their place is supposed to be the land of Canaan, and they live under this great promise that through Abraham all the world would be blessed if they would obey. But just like Noah, and just like Adam. Abraham's descendants break God's rule. And in poetic fury the only land that Abraham owns is his grave. A dark reminder that ultimately God's people, God's place and God's rule must be established by another - someone whose grave isn't the end. (Genesis 15:1-21, 17:1-14, 25:1-11)

But, by God's grace, Abraham's family does continue to grow into this huge nation of people that Moses (a new type of Adam) leads out of Egyptian slavery. So as studious readers we think we see God's kingdom right? God's people are large enough to be a real "kingdom" now, and God promises them a new place - the promised land overflowing with milk and honey, if they would obey God's rule, his laws, the 10 commandments. But just like Adam, just like Abraham, and just like Noah. Israel would rather rule themselves, than allow God to rule them and so God's kingdom can't be built through Moses. (Exodus 19:5, 20:1-21, Deuteronomy 28:1-68)

The final little “King” we see is David. By God’s grace, despite repeated rebellion God’s people are now actually part of a kingdom. David is actually a king. Israel is actually a kingdom. It has cities, and armies and a temple. And God promises David that his kingdom would last forever... if his people would submit to God’s rule. But they don’t. David’s family does not build God’s kingdom. (2 Samuel 7:1-17, Ps 89:28-32, Judges 21:25) And at the end of 2 Chronicles Israel is flattened by an evil empire (Babylon) it forces the survivors into a brutal slavery. (2 Chronicles 36:1-22)

It’s the same story as the garden, just on a much larger scale. God’s people (the whole nation of Israel), have no place (they are exiled to Babylon) and they are enslaved by an evil king. You might wonder why God would enslave his people. But it helps to remember that they were already enslaved. Sin “reigns” over them.

When they are taken over by Babylon - it’s a physical / national picture of the cosmic war for their souls. The reverberating drumbeat of the OT is: “Sin reigns. Sin rules. Sin is on the throne, and slavery is the default.” No one is good enough to bring God’s kingdom back since no one submits to his rule. Judges 21:25 sums it up best.

“In those days there was no King in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” (Judges 21:25)

Since they have all rejected God’s rule, none deserve to be God’s people, so no one could live in God’s place.

So in a world filled with people totally unable to save themselves how exactly will God keep his promise to crush the dominion of sin, and the kingdom of the snake? The height of Israel’s power and purity was king David! He ruled the most advanced, and progressive society of that time. But that Israel dissolved. David’s throne, destroyed. His people, exiled and Jerusalem burns. **How will God’s Kingdom Come?**

We’re going to watch a video that picks up the story, in the book of Isaiah, and begins to answer that question...

God’s People in God’s Place under God’s Rule.

How will God’s Kingdom come?

Not through kings, not with armies or political powers, but through the crucifixion of the last Adam.

Israel’s history teaches us that ultimately human power cannot establish God’s Kingdom. The only thing that can conquer the Kingdom of Sin is the upside-down power of the King who comes. God himself would need to save us. But not just God himself, God incarnate. God born. He needed to be our new “Adam” our new Moses, Abraham and David. And to do that he need to walk among us. So he came to a manger. To stand in for humanity and do what we have never been able to do - to submit to God’s rule. This is the glory of the first Advent, Christ has come to us in our misery, and he has made us his people, given us a home, and conquered sin’s rule by his substitution on the cross for us.

If you are not a Christian here please consider what Scripture is saying. Without Christ you are like David, and Moses, and Adam. You see the brokenness in the world around you, in your own relationships, and in yourself and you have tried and worked, and organized, and cried, and pushed to fix it. Only for it to fail. Many of you are at the point that you’ve worked hard enough and long enough to know that “what’s wrong” will never be repaired... no matter how many second tries you get. (There’s a system keeping you down.) Some of you have might have given up hope, resigned yourself to the fact that this is the way the world is. But that is the logic of a slave!

Relent of your works, let go of your pride and bow **before the king who has come, and is coming again.**

But there is another group of people here who are not so much tired, as ashamed. One of the tensions running through the Old Testament is that Israel disobeys, yet God continues to advance his kingdom. Even though Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Israel all rebelled God still pushes his kingdom on, growing it, providing for it. While at the same time promising destruction for disobedience. So by the time we get to David thousands of years rebellion and mutiny have gone unpunished. So when Jerusalem falls in 2 Chronicles every Israelite asked... is this it? Have we finally gone too far? Are we finally getting what we deserve?

Have you ever felt that way? That you feel too dirty for God? Too broken to be fixed? Too nasty to be loved? Too sinful to be of any use? Have you ever felt so guilty that you didn't think you were allowed to come and worship God? Israel's history was all proof that they could never be good enough to earn God's promises and you might feel as if all your history points the same way. **But there is good news, carried by the beautiful nail-skewered feet of King Jesus. The destruction you deserve has been destroyed, the death that you were owed died, and the sin that separated you from God was erased by our King's first edict: "It is finished."**

But this good news is not just for non-believers. It's good news for those of us who God has saved! Because even though we know Jesus is ruling it doesn't always feel that way. It feels as if, in God's kingdom nothing is really all that different than it was before. It feels as if nothing is changing, and you are just stuck. It feels like our battle with sin is doomed to fail. And more than that it feels like your relationships are doomed to fail. That reconciliation with the people around you whether that's your marriage, or something as simple as Christmas dinner with your family, or as complex as the deep racial divides in our country are all hopeless. We feel these things can never be fixed, that they are intractable problems.

But the first Advent speaks to us as well. When you bowed to Jesus as your King, something happened fundamentally, at the bottom of you. "You are a new creation." Yes, while sin is still **present** in your life it has **no power**. Sin no longer reigns over you, it does not have dominion. Sin and strife, and division are all toothless for Christians. They cannot control people who are under God's control. Sin and separation cannot rule, where Jesus rules and his Spirit lives. Your family and marriage are not determined by past mistakes, and tensions. They are determined by the power of Christ!

You are now in God's kingdom. Sin does not reign here! You are his daughter, his son, his people, his place is inside us, and his rule cannot be thwarted. Know that. Jesus resurrection rule is more powerful than even your most sinful desires, and it, not sin, controls you.

For the love of Christ controls us... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:14,17 ESV)

We can boldly fight our sin, work to repair our marriages, fight to end division, integrate a segregated America. Not only because Christ has come and his power lives inside us but also because he is coming again and he has promised that each of those things will come true finally, fully in his Kingdom - and we are his partners to do so!

We have a double guarantee. His cross guarantees the power to do it, and his Kingdom guarantees his plans to do so. Since we have a King who has already come, who has already sacrificed, who has already orchestrated 4000 years of Biblical history to provide his people, with his own place, under his own rule. How will he not come again, and bring every blessing along with him?

We are guaranteed that God's people will remain God's people since it's grounded on resurrection power. Our heavenly home is guaranteed by the blood paid to purchase it. God's rule will be perfectly exercised and freedom freely given since sin's slavery was itself enslaved.

Because our King has come, we know he will come again.

And we can also know that every trial, and pain, and hurt, and frustration and episode of segregation and isolation and loneliness tell us what will no longer be.

And we can know that every blessing, healing, and experience of forgiveness and pardon, and joy, and hope. Every time we see people from different tribes and tongues and nations here on earth worshipping together. We can know that all of them are glimmers and crumbs of brighter things, and greater feasts.

Our King has come, and is coming again! Hallelujah!