

29. Whose Kingdom Is It Anyway?

Perhaps the most accurate, over-arching view of the intricate workings of the kingdom of God ever given to men was that given to Ezekiel. When he was first chosen by God to be a prophet, he was shown a vision of four living creatures who were each attended by “a wheel in the middle of a wheel.” (Ezek. 1:16, 19-20) How do we know the creatures and wheels represent the kingdom? The beauty of the description is that we *don't* know that it is a picture of the kingdom – we cannot know, apart from God revealing something to us, what or all that this picture signifies! There is no interpretation of this vision ever given. There is no “proof text” that carnal men can latch onto and say, “See! *Here* is the kingdom of God! This is how we build it!” Only those whose spiritual eyes can see will recognize the similarity between the four living creatures with the accompanying wheels and the living Word of God embodied in the body of Christ, going wherever He wishes and simply being the people willing to obey Him (the King and His kingdom) and remaining completely undeterred from His own internal purpose by any outside interference or resistance. (Ezek. 1:12) That many, even those among the people who claim to follow Christ, won't be able to see this is simply evidence that very few have been taught to see with their spiritual eyes. Thus this picture of the kingdom of God, given from God's perspective as it were, is not really all that useful (or usable!) to men who are rooted in time and are most often unable to see through the spiritual fog and dust clouds that surround their lives. Yet this picture serves as an excellent starting point for trying to describe God's kingdom because, as we grow more familiar with God's ways, we find that the mystery of His will does indeed resemble a wheel within a wheel.

Further, it really does absolutely no good whatsoever to even try to gain any kind of independent, objective, outside view of the kingdom. When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, He replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you (or, in your midst).” (Lk. 17:20-21) In effect, Jesus was saying, “While you're so busy looking for an outward, visible ‘kingdom,’ you're missing the fact that the kingdom of God is here, now and right among you. You're judging according to appearances and not seeing with righteous discernment.”

John, who more so than the other gospel writers avoids the use of the title “King” (perhaps in an effort to shift focus away from any possible misuse of “King Jesus” to overthrow Caesar and Rome or, more likely, because “Father,” especially in a patriarchal society like Israel's, encompassed and even in some ways surpassed “King” as a useful picture of what Christ and God is to His people), still felt it important to record Jesus' words to Nicodemus: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ...unless one is born of water [physically] and the Spirit [reborn spiritually from above], he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn. 3:3, 5) Without this transformation into a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), no one can see, enter or even truly begin to understand the kingdom of God.

It is precisely here that we must observe all the conflicting “theologies” and doctrinal “distinctives” of the various “Christian” sects and divisions and set them all aside. It is not that there is no truth whatsoever to be found within the convoluted mass of collective “Christian” thought. Rather, because so much of what is believed to be true was compiled by “theologians” who either never entered the kingdom themselves or else have never waited on the Spirit of truth to be “led into all truth” (Jn. 16:13), the mixture of truth and error is simply overwhelming. One

simply must, in this day of deception, contradiction, dissension, divisiveness and lawlessness (especially on the internet!), seek the Spirit of truth and wait upon Him to be led into all truth. Those who refuse to love the truth – whatever and however costly that might be – are those whom God will consign to “strong delusion,” enabling them to believe that the lie they prefer is really the one true God. (2 Ths. 2:10-12)

Thus we could easily get caught up in trying to understand the kingdom and thereby fail to enter in. Or we could recognize and rest in the simplicity with which the gospel is structured. Though the kingdom of God is infinitely vast, His judgments are unsearchable and His ways are beyond our ability to figure out (Rom. 11:33), the “front door” is clearly marked. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me... I am the true vine...” (Jn. 10:7, 14:6, 15:1) There is no formula, no “sinner’s prayer,” no religious rite or penance or “church” attendance that magically transports us into Christ’s kingdom of light – there is only direct, personal, spiritual encounter with the living God. God has so structured His offer of reconciliation and redemption “that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [we] may have life in His name.” (Jn. 20:31) If we have had no such encounter, we have great reason to believe we do not have His life – and man-made religious rituals are not *and never will be* (especially on judgment day!) a replacement of the implanted Word which alone is able to save our soul. (Jas. 1:21)

The Mystery of the Kingdom

Jesus said to His disciples, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables.” (Mk. 4:11) Elsewhere He said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn. 8:31-32) Jesus promised that the prison gates of death and darkness (Hades) would not be able to overcome His ekklesia, His people. (Mt. 16:18) Thus the only viable strategy open to the devil (who is not able or permitted to forcibly snatch anyone from the hand of Christ and God – Jn. 10:28-29) is to deceive people into believing themselves to have entered the kingdom, to have become true ekklesia, when in reality they have either never entered the gate or have failed to progress along the road that leads to life. (Mt. 7:13-14) This is why we can now observe that Jesus proclaimed an invisible kingdom but it was a very visible perversion of ekklesia (a hierarchically structured, worldly organization which men now most often call “the church”) that has held the preeminence. And this condition has so drastically devolved that any genuine ekklesia is most often confused as to its purpose for existing and the “church” can only be rightly called apostasy and abomination!

The mystery of the kingdom of God is not something we can rationally deduce or scientifically evaluate, test and prove or disprove. For this reason alone, many people refuse to acknowledge God. “Mystery” in the New Testament refers to a “hidden truth” that can only be known and understood when God reveals or discloses that truth. Even the devil and the demonic cannot “crack the code” where God’s mysteries are concerned. Though we can now look at the Old Testament prophecies, for example, and readily see the many, many places where the death and even crucifixion of the Messiah was foretold, “none of the rulers of this age knew [the hidden wisdom of God]; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor. 2:8)

If we have properly entered and know then at least something of the nature of the kingdom in which we have become citizens, it is important that we recognize what kind of

people we really are, especially deep inside where God knows the hidden and darkened and deceptive depths of our hearts. (Jer. 17:9-10) Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” (Mt. 5:3) Paul wrote, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” (1 Cor. 1:26) It is a common mistake to look to the eloquence, intelligence or charisma of a man and assume him to be “the man of God for the hour.” Moses was skilled in all the arts of Egypt (Acts 7:22) but did not know the first thing about how God’s kingdom worked and required an additional *forty years* of wilderness training. (Acts 7:29-30) Today’s “pastors” and televised talking heads are skilled in all the arts of Greek sophistry (“wisdom”) and rhetoric (public speaking) but have failed to allow Christ to be the true Head over the people because they stand in His place!

Flesh or Spirit

When the seventy disciples returned rejoicing about the power of the kingdom of God they had wielded over the demonic, Jesus reprovved their exuberance but then went on to say, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Lk. 10:21-22) Here, if we have eyes to see it, the kingdom begins to take shape as a wheel within a wheel.

Paul clearly wrote that God has “made known to us the mystery [hidden truth known only by divine revelation] of His will...that in the dispensation [administrative outworking] of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him...” (Eph. 1:9-10) Clearly Paul has in view the kingdom of God where Christ has “all things under His feet” and He is “Head over all things to the ekklesia.” (Eph. 1:22)

Yet Paul had just written, “In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence...” (Eph. 1:7-8) Paul is saying here that it is by “wisdom and prudence” that we may know the mystery of God’s will (kingdom – a king’s realm is where the king’s will is obeyed! Also see again Mt. 6:10 for the close connection of God’s will and kingdom) – yet Jesus had said that the kingdom realities were hidden from “the wise and prudent.” (Lk. 10:21) How do we reconcile this seeming contradiction?

By recognizing that Jesus is referring to the “wise and prudent” according to the flesh and that Paul is referring to those who receive wisdom and prudence as part of God’s divinely imparted grace (power – also see 1 Cor. 1:30) This is no small difference. “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are *contrary* to one another...” (Gal. 5:17) “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal [fleshly] mind is *enmity* against God...” (Rom. 8:5-7) And “he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption [death], but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Gal. 6:8) Here is the whole plan of redemption laid out in the simple choice between flesh or Spirit, self or Christ.

Jesus said that unless we repent and allow ourselves to be changed and come to Him as little children – trusting, humble, loving, forgiving are applicable descriptive here – we can never enter the kingdom of God. (Mt. 18:3) So long as we are “rich in spirit” (that is, full of our own

flesh's ability to achieve and do), we are in the wrong kingdom – and we will likely have a long list of “church” credentials to prove it! Until we recognize that we *are* the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind who have been graciously granted place where “better men” (in their own eyes, at least) disdained the invitation of the king (Lk. 14:21), we will not discover the kingdom of God even though we may look for it, even though we may speak of it with our associates, neighbors and “Christian” brothers or even though we may teach “kingdom truths” to all those who belong to our particular version of what we call “the kingdom of God.”

Which Kingdom

How will we know whether a teacher (“apostle,” “prophet,” etc.) is speaking of God’s kingdom or his own? Jesus said, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the teaching, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” (Jn. 7:17) And “My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me.” (Jn. 10:27) The one who has truly encountered and knows the Savior and desires above all else to do His will is not much of a candidate for being deceived by the traveling hucksters, frauds and charlatans who come in the name of Christ claiming to have that “special anointing” which gives them the right to lord over others and to tell them how to live and be. (Mt. 24:5)

Jesus said, “Seek [first and foremost] the kingdom of God, and all these things [Your Father knows you need] shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Lk. 12:30-32) Jesus also said to His disciples who had continued with Him in His trials, “I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me...” (Lk. 22:28-29) The kingdom of God does not belong to the intelligentsia, the eloquent talking heads who, with great show of “humility” promote themselves and their books and their broadcasts. The kingdom of God belongs to every man who has heeded the warnings and obeyed the wisdom of God so that he may be presented perfect in Christ Jesus. (Col. 1:28) The kingdom does not belong to the lawless and wicked, especially those who use some purported “office” or “ministry” as a cloak to disguise and parade their flesh as the “right way” to follow God.

Paul wrote, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.” (Eph. 5:5-7) It is no coincidence that Paul has to tell the carnal Corinthians, “We speak wisdom among those who are mature [meaning, not *you!*]... We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory...” (1 Cor. 2:6-7) But he could not speak to them as to spiritually mature people but as to immature babies and even carnal pseudo-“Christians.” (1 Cor. 3:1) Paul could tell the Corinthians about his stewardship (management, caretaking) of the mysteries (1 Cor. 4:1-2) and he could instruct them that genuine love far outweighed understanding mysteries (1 Cor. 13:2), but in all of his two rather lengthy letters he shares with them only *one* mystery, the mystery that not all those in Christ shall die but some shall be instantaneously changed. (1 Cor. 15:51-52) That’s it.

But to the Ephesians, to whom he writes but one much shorter letter (less than half the length of one of his letters to the Corinthians), he is able to discuss the mystery of God’s will (Eph. 1:9), the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4), the mystery of Christ and the ekklesia (Eph. 5:32) and the mystery of the gospel. (Eph. 6:19) And Paul speaks of these things as being already at least familiar to them! It is no wonder then that Paul is able to instruct the Ephesians to imitate

(more modern renditions of this word made available by advances in technology would be “duplicate, photo-copy, replicate”) the invisible God (Eph. 5:1) but Paul was forced to tell the carnal, immature Corinthians to imitate (duplicate, copy, replicate) Paul, whom they could see, as Paul imitated (duplicated, copied, replicated) Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1) This too is no small difference!

The four living creatures and the wheels that accompanied them were covered with eyes. (Ezek. 10:12) Might these eyes be the eyes that belong to the people, the many members of the body of Christ, and be that great cloud of witnesses that surround us all? (Heb. 12:1) Yet it matters not how well we perceive the whole of the kingdom. What truly matters is that we recognize our responsibility to obey the King (Heb. 5:9) and thus fulfill our place, however great or small that may be, in His kingdom. It is not our place to decide whom we think should belong in the kingdom and then “fellowship” or “serve” only them. If Christ has received someone into His kingdom, that one is my brother or sister in Christ. Period. As such it is my duty to share with them the love, truth and life of Christ that is in me, no matter what that might entail or cost. That this simple kingdom truth is all but lost only demonstrates that lawlessness prevails and the love, the chiefest of divine attributes (1 Cor. 13:13), of the many has all but died. (Mt. 24:12)

The kingdom of God can be discussed and explored for the remainder of our days in this world. And through many tribulations we will even experience the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22) But we must always take care that we do not stand before the door to the kingdom, neither going in ourselves nor allowing others to enter (Mt. 23:13), taking care that our teachings and practices do not actually take away the key to truly knowing Christ and inheriting His kingdom. (Lk. 11:52) And let us be ever ready to proclaim the simple message of the gospel of the kingdom of God:

“Repent, for the kingdom of God is here, now.” (Mt. 4:17, Mk. 1:15, etc.)

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 28: Provision, Power and Presumption
<http://paidionbooks.org/girard/tgotk/28ppap.pdf>

Chapter 30: Pressing Into the Kingdom
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