

What We Believe, Part 8: The Kingdom

We believe that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated by Jesus Christ and that his reign on earth is not reserved for a future date, but is available now for the transformation of individuals and societies until the consummation of all things at the return of Christ.

- I. We are still looking at the core beliefs of NRLC. After examining the Scripture, God, regeneration, and the Gospel, we now look at the doctrine of Kingdom of God.
 - A. In the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, had a dream that perplexed him greatly. So he orders all of the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom to first tell him what his dream was (to prove their authenticity), and also to interpret it's meaning for him.
 1. They are appalled at the King's request, but he is determined that the "wise men" of his kingdom shouldn't be allowed to just take the details of his dream, and make something up out of thin air as their interpretation.
 2. None of them were able to do what was asked of them. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar, flying into a rage, orders that all of the wise men in all of Babylon be executed as a result, having discovered that they are all frauds.
 - B. Daniel knew nothing of this, so when the captain who was sent to kill him made it known to him, he asked the King for an opportunity to give the interpretation of the king's dream. He prayed earnestly for answers before he went before the King. God answered his prayer, so he boldly approached Nebuchadnezzar.
 1. He told the King that he had dreamed of a massive, frightening statue. It's head was of gold, it's arms and chest were silver, it's middle and thighs were bronze, it's legs were iron, and it's feet were made of iron and clay.
 2. Lastly, the King had seen a Rock "cut out by no human hand", strike the image, smashing it into dust that was carried away by the wind, never to be seen again. The Rock grew, becoming a mountain that filled the whole earth.

Daniel 2:37 ESV (Pg. 430) You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, **38** and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. **39** Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. **40** And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. **41** And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. **42** And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. **43** As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. **44** And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, **45** just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

- I. Daniel saw a vision of the future that proved to be so accurate that skeptics have gone out of their way to try and disprove, or at least re-interpret, this story for centuries. But there is no credible way to deny the predictive quality of his vision.
 - A. The first empire he saw, the head of gold, was Nebuchadnezzar's own; Babylon. The second empire, the chest and arms of silver, was the Medo-Persian empire. The midsection of bronze was the Greek empire. The legs of iron, along with the feet of iron mixed with clay, was the mighty Roman empire.
 1. The accuracy of the chronology of this dream, as well as the described characteristics of each successive empire, is astounding in its accuracy!
 2. But the real amazing thing is when the King sees the Rock appear that will demolish the statue, with all of the kingdoms, ideologies, pride, and might represented by it. "This will happen in the days of the kings" of Rome.
 - B. At the height of Rome's power, Caesar Augustus decreed that all the world should be taxed, causing a young, pregnant Jewish girl named Mary to travel with her husband to their ancestral home in Bethlehem to be registered
 1. While there, she gives birth to a Son. This child, like a nondescript stone in a vast sea of other stones, does not stand out at all to the mere casual observer. **Isaiah 53:2b ESV** "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."
 2. But make no mistake, this "Rock cut out without human hands" (indicating his divine origin), was hurtling toward the kingdoms of this world, and none of them would escape the impact! They would be destroyed beyond recovery.
 - a) Notice that the damage done by the Rock in Nebuchadnezzar's dream not only smashes the kingdom of its **own** time, but demolishes the memory, legacy, and influence of all past kingdoms as well.
 - b) More than that, the Rock changes the course of the future. Unlike the others that vanished, it will be the **final** kingdom; one that will last forever. Daniel says it shall never be destroyed, shall never be left to another people, and shall stand forever, a mountain filling the whole earth.
- II. It is this idea that is laid before us in the concept of Kingdom of heaven (or God). It is the rule of God, affecting individuals and cultures, and overriding all other powers to the glory of God. **Habakkuk 2:14 ESV** For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. The idea of Kingdom is vastly superior to the idea of religion, or a vague and homogenous spirituality.
 - A. The message of the kingdom is not just another message, but is **the** message of Jesus! The Bible calls his message "the good news of the kingdom (Matt 4:23)". Many of his parables were preceded by the words "the kingdom of heaven (or God) is like...". The book of Acts even tells us that Christ spent his days on earth after the resurrection speaking to his disciples about the kingdom.
 1. He instructed people on how to inherit the kingdom, on how to see the kingdom, and on how to enter the kingdom.
 2. He told how his mighty acts were evidence that the kingdom had arrived. **Matthew 12:28 ESV** "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God **has come upon you.**"

- B. When he said “the kingdom has come upon you”, Christ was saying the kingdom was not just a future reality, but rather one to be experienced and enjoyed immediately; a reality irrevocably inaugurated by the advent of his ministry.
1. **Matthew 3:2 ESV** “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” To be “at hand” means that it is imminent; the idea of joining one thing with another.
 2. In preaching the gospel of the kingdom, Christ was proclaiming that heaven was imminently destined to be inseparably and irreversibly fused with earth.
- C. The imminent coming of the kingdom is often misunderstood. Some think it’s arrival will only happen at the end of time. Others believe the Bible teaches that the kingdom has all already arrived, and God is ruling even now.
1. But when we look around and see violence, perversion, greed and blasphemy ruining lives and corrupting the the planet, it would seems hard to believe the kingdom is here! Why all of this depravity if it’s arrived?
 2. So which is right? Is the kingdom something that **has** arrived, or that **will** arrive someday? The answer is...Yes! We can see in the scriptures that the kingdom (as Jesus said) is “at hand” and has, in fact, “come upon you”; but that is also approaching, and we scan the horizon for it’s day with great hope.
- D. Theologian Gerhardus Vos, in the early 20th century, called this dual tension, the “already” and the “not yet”. George Eldon Ladd developed that concept more thoroughly in the 50’s; teaching that in scripture, the kingdom indicates God’s supreme authority and right to rule the cosmos, as well as something that we both have presently entered into, and yet will enter more fully in the future¹.
1. Christ saying “the kingdom of God has come” does not nullify his use of the future tense as well. **Matthew 25:31 ESV** “**When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.**”
 2. We are concerning ourselves with the “now” aspect today. In two weeks, I will speak about the end of all things and we will focus more on the “not yet” aspect of the kingdom that we don’t see with clarity and fullness just yet.
- E. But the reason I mention it today, is because, as Christians, we must always consider that our present state is not all that there will be.
1. All of our struggles be over and our victories won in the sweet hereafter, when we shall see Jesus face to face.
 2. But even now, we can rejoice because we’re not stuck in a miserable life until we get to heaven. The kingdom established by Jesus is advancing toward it’s fulfillment, and nothing can stand in it’s way. **Matthew 16:18b ESV** “**...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**”
- III. But, as I said earlier, the kingdom is advancing **progressively**. The single Rock is becoming a global Mountain. You and I are in the middle of history. The nature of the kingdom’s advance was the underlying message of many of Jesus’ parables.
- A. **Matthew 13:33 ESV** He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” This parable is efficiently packaged in just one little sentence, but what a marvelous sentence!

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_theology

1. I once heard Dudley Hall preach on this passage, pointing out two qualities of the kingdom that are signified by the way the leaven (or yeast) works its way through a lump of dough.
 - a) First, the yeast affects the dough **Undetected**. Once you infect the lump, the yeast begins to do its work without any noise. It just does what it is chemically structured to do, and it takes a while to see the results of the process in the rising of the bread.
 - (1) When Jesus infiltrated the world and began proclaiming the kingdom, and demonstrating its reality through signs and wonders, no one, except a few unimportant people, noticed.
 - (2) But after his death, resurrection and ascension, the Spirit was poured out on that handful of people, and a change began to be seen. First, it was limited to a single city in the middle east (Jerusalem), then it things began to happen in other parts of Judea.
 - (3) Next thing you knew, Samaria had been reached. Before long the gospel of the Kingdom had spread to Ephesus, Corinth, all the major metropolitan areas of Asia Minor, until it reached the capital of the Empire, Rome, in the heart of Europe. And all this happened in a single generation; in a time devoid of modern communication.
 - b) But the Kingdom also spread **Undeterred**. After the the first miracle done by the hands of the Apostles, the authorities came down hard! Next thing you know they were being arrested, and even beaten. Soon after that, they began to be martyred for preaching the message of the Kingdom.
 - (1) When the state requires you to prove your loyalty by proclaiming Caesar is Lord, but you insist that Jesus is Lord, you're going to butt heads at some point!
 - (2) But no matter how intense the persecution became, the message kept advancing. One by one all of the Apostles except John were murdered (he only survived because God miraculously kept him alive when they tried to boil him in oil!). When one fell, 3 more took that one's place.
 2. Since that time, rogue governments have tried to kill the messengers, outlaw the message, and destroy the scriptures that preserve it. And every one has miserably failed!
 - B. His truth still marches on! The Rock has become a Mountain. It is filling the earth, undetected and undeterred, as Daniel foresaw.
- IV. Which brings me to my next point: the Kingdom of Heaven is an invisible Kingdom. **Luke 17:20 ESV** Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, **21** nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."
- A. He's not saying the evidence of the kingdom can't be discerned. We see it every time God answers our prayers, or heals the sick. Mostly we see it when the gospel is preached and someone trusts Christ, submitting to the kingdom's king.
 - B. Rather, it means several things that don't apply to the kingdoms of this world.
 1. First, this is not a localized kingdom. It is not headquartered in Jerusalem, or Rome or Salt Lake City. You cannot point to its capital city. The subjects of

this kingdom will be drawn from every people group on the face of the earth; regardless of age, gender, political affiliation, race, or socio-economic status.

2. Next, it is invisible because it is not organized in normal ways. Its been called a kingdom upside-down. In it, the servants rule, sufferers are blessed, the rich have a difficult time entering. In it, the humble are exalted, and the exalted are humbled; the first are last, and the last are first.
 3. It is invisible because it can't be managed by the world's economics. Here, it is better to give than to receive, and those who abandon everything are promised that they will be rewarded a hundredfold.
 - a) We don't enter it through our influence or even our worthiness. Those things are meaningless as passports into this kingdom. Jesus said to see it or enter it you must be born again. Also the determination to press into this kingdom carries a continual and high price.
 - b) Paul told the church **Acts 14:22 ESV** "that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
- V. But despite the promise of "many tribulations", Kingdom is a place of great reward to those press into it. **Matthew 19:27 ESV** Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" **28** Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **29** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, **will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.** **30** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.
- A. In the movie "Men in Black", Tommy Lee Jones' character, "K" is recruiting Will Smith's character "J" for the secret agency he's a part of. After telling J that he will have to sever every human tie, erasing every shred of evidence that he ever existed, J asks a clarifying question. "Is it worth it?" To which K replies, "Oh yeah it's worth it...if you're strong enough."
1. The kingdom of God is worth it. To know the almighty God intimately...to know that you're sins are completely forgiven... to know that you will spend the rest of forever in perfect peace, joy, satisfaction and rest, is worth it.
 2. But the problem is, we're not strong enough! So someone had to be strong enough to earn it for us...the benefits of this kingdom could only be received as a gift, and never as a wage.
- B. In a lust-fueled frenzy, King Herod made a promise to the daughter of his brother's wife, who he had sinfully taken for himself, "Ask me for whatever you want, and I will give it; up to half my kingdom". By comparison, Christ says to us, as an expression of pure and perfect love, "Ask me, and I will give you my entire kingdom, holding nothing back. I will pay the full price...my very own life; and it will be yours, with all of it's attendant love, power and blessing."
1. **Luke 12:32 ESV** "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure **to give you the kingdom.** **33** Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that **do not grow old**, with a treasure in the heavens **that does not fail**, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. **34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

2. Aren't you tired of chasing another buck, another scheme, another relationship, another empty worldly promise? Don't you want something more sure? More lasting? You'll only find it as a subject of the Kingdom of God.
 - a) You might wonder how you could live if you truly pursued Christ with everything; if he were your only priority. There is a promise for you!
 - b) **Matthew 6:33 ESV** But **seek first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, **and all these things will be added to you.** The things it is referring to are the things you need for life and happiness. Real happiness - not as you and I define it, but as our perfect God defines it.
- C. I hope that your heart longs for God's rule more and more today and every day! Nothing can stop the advance of the kingdom! The mountain will crush all other powers and fill the earth, Will you be a part of it? Will you enjoy it's benefits? Will you be satisfied to stay in the rat race and scramble for your piece of cheese?
 1. It takes faith and an obedient movement of the will to participate in this kingdom. Peter, James and John left their fishing businesses. Matthew left his cushy government job, Paul left his religion, Thomas left his doubt. The man at the region of the Gadarenes left his chains, Mary Magdalene left her sin, Lazarus left his grave, the Apostles left their comfort. Stephen left his life.
 - a) Everyone who enters the kingdom must leave something behind. None of the people I mentioned ever regretted it. Jesus told a young man to sell everything, follow him, and have treasure in heaven...he wouldn't do it!
 - b) Will you walk in the faith of the apostles, or the unbelief of the rich young ruler? How will you enter the kingdom today?
 2. **Matthew 6:10 ESV** Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 - a) That is the heart's cry of the one who truly wants the best that God is willing to give, and not just the best they are able to come up with.
 - b) Are you willing to pray that prayer this morning, leaving nothing on the table?