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Establishing the Kingdom of God, Part 5

The Message Implied by a Kingdom

During the last week of Christ's life, the people of God were faced with a decision: What kind of kingdom did they want to be apart of?

It was Passover week and according to Roman custom, Pilate offered to release any prisoner the Jews wished. Yet Pilate made the choice rather simple as he unwittingly offered two completely different "ways:"

Matthew 27:16-17, "And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?"

Whether you realize it or not, at the time Jesus and Barabbas represented two very different kingdoms, and so two very different answers to a rather complicated question. The question: What to do with Rome?

Since 586 BC, the people of God were bound by foreign powers: First the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, and now Rome. Throughout this time, the collective thinking of God's people was that such oppression was evil. As a result, every Jew looked to the day of deliverance!

Yet that raised the question of, How? How should this deliverance be affected?

On the one hand you had Barabbas, a zealot and so a patriot who believed the best way to handle Rome was through armed conflict. That most likely is what got him in prison in the first place. In an obvious attempt at overthrowing Roman rule in Jerusalem, Barabbas lead an insurrection against Rome in which Roman soldiers were killed and property either taken, damaged, or destroyed.¹ Leon Morris wrote this:

“Barabbas was evidently a member of what we would call the resistance movement, judging from the reference to insurrection. No doubt the murder² had taken place in connection with this uprising.”³

As such his “kingdom” represented a political and so an armed rebellion against Rome in the attempt of ushering in a Davidic-type age of peace and prosperity. On the other hand there was Christ. Subsequent to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem in which the nation lauded Him as Messiah and King⁴, Christ dismounted His donkey and ascended the stairs which lead to the Temple Mount. Large crowds followed Him; for it was expected that at this time He would approach Antonia’s Fortress which housed the Roman presence in Jerusalem. Here He would issue orders either for the Romans to leave or be forcibly removed. And yet far from attacking the Romans, Christ turned His focus against the religious abuses of Judaism⁵! What an incredible shocker!

Yet that just goes to show that when Christ walked the earth He did NOT come to establish a kingdom whose focus would be the secular nations surrounding Israel RATHER, He came to establish a Kingdom whose focus would be the toppling of the Kingdom of Satan to which all men are bound on account of their unforgiven sin.

And so herein we behold two “saviors,” two “kingdoms,” and so two entirely different messages! In response to Pilate’s question Jesus answered “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

I hope you see from this that not all kingdoms are alike. Housed in any kingdom is an objective and so a corresponding message!

We are looking at “The Message” which accompanied Saul’s kingdom, a kingdom which was but a shadow and foretaste of the kingdom which Christ established and of which you and I are apart. Last time we saw that accompanying Saul’s kingdom (and so the kingdom of Christ) was a message

- Of Deliverance, 1 Samuel 11:9a
- Which Evoked Gladness/Joy on the part of the participant, 1 Samuel 11:9b

A Message of Confidence

Now we will pick it up where we left off last time noting that Saul’s Kingdom also included the establishing of the kingdom of God’s anointed a message which brought confidence.

1 Samuel 11:10, “Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall

¹ Compare Luke 23:18-25; John 18:40

² Compare Acts 3:14

³ Leon Morris, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, The Gospel According to Luke*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (January 2007) ISBN-10: 0830829822, page 353

⁴ Compare Matthew 21:1-11

⁵ Compare Matthew 21:12-13

do with us all that seemeth good unto you.”

This is double-speak since “come out to you” can have the connotation of “coming out in battle.”⁶ Accordingly the Ammonites would have taken this as a promise of surrender, whereas the men of Jabesh by this would have intended the threat of battle. And this is an entirely different message from the one which was sounded just a few days before.

Note again that Jabeshgilead is here a city under siege. Nahash, whose name means “snake,” the Ammonite has humiliated the entire region; all but this city. He was pursuing a band of 7,000 men (presumably along with their families) Nahash chased them to this city. Having posted his army around Jabesh, his plan was to starve them unto submission. Again, listen to the translation as found in the New Revised Standard Version:⁷

“Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead. About a month later, Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead...” (1 Samuel 10:27-11:1a NRSV).

So Jabesh is a city under siege. Now in an act of desperation, on the first day of the siege the elders of the city offered the conquering king their soul in exchange for freedom.

1 Samuel 11:1, “Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead: **and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.**”

With this, the city fathers were endeavoring to enter into a covenant relationship with Nahash, a relationship which would have led the city to

- The paying a yearly of tribute to Nahash- a glorified tax.
- The accepting of Nahash’s gods (if not, at least a sympathy toward them).
- The taking upon themselves key elements of Ammonite culture.
- Vassal obedience!

And yet, the sad part is that this city already enjoyed this kind of relationship with God. All they had to do was call out to Him! He would have protected them. Yet they forgot their God and, in forgetting, they became servants of man. Solomon knew the perilous road on which the Israelites here were traveling.

Proverbs 29:25, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”

So “yesterday” the men of Jabesh were weak, helpless, panicked, and accommodating! They were willing to do almost anything to save their right eye, so frightened were they. Yet the next day, there was an entirely different tone.

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 18:13

⁷ Recall that for the most part the Hebrew Old Testament has remained in-tack and therefore free of errors. We know this on account of a comparison between the Massoretic text and the Dead Sea scrolls. However that is not to say that there are no problem passages, texts which read differently when placed side-by-side with other valid manuscripts. And our text is one of those times. The passage found in the New Revised Standard Version was preserved in the Qumran scrolls (i.e., in the Dead Sea Scrolls) and quoted by Josephus. Note that both the Massoretic Text and the Septuagint omit this section.

1 Samuel 11:10, “Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To morrow we will come out unto you [smile], and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you.”

So what happened? What made the difference? Why is it that the first day they were willing to do anything to save their health, and then the next, they confidently said, “Tomorrow, you shall have us!”?

They had received a message from Saul, a message of complete and total deliverance!

What effect did this have on them?

It emboldened them and so gave them CONFIDENCE! Such was the effect of the message of Saul’s kingdom. And, as the kingdom of Saul was but a shadow of Christ’s, such continues to be the effect of standing in the presence of God and heeding the message which comes from His kingdom.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego

Recall, the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they stood in the presence of another snake, Nebuchadnezzar. He threatened them with death if they didn’t bow down and worship him, the king endeavored to intimidate these mere boys into submission. Yet knowing the kindness of God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could boldly proclaim these words:

Daniel 3:16-18, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

What a demonstration of boldness in the face of acknowledged defeat! Yet such is the disposition which arises from citizenship in the kingdom of God!

Elisha

Recall Elisha in Samaria. Samaria found itself suffering under a siege, with starvation already having set in, Jehoram⁸, king of Israel, vented his frustration by endeavoring to execute the prophet.⁹ Elisha had predicted the siege and so stood culpable in the king’s eyes. So when the soldier came to behead Elisha, the prophet, trusting in God responded quite boldly.

2 Kings 7:1, “Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.”

Again don’t miss the confidence... the boldness... his “strength in the Lord”! Elisha knew at this point that his life was in peril, yet without flinching he proclaimed the glory of God.

⁸ Compare 2 Kings 6:28-30

⁹ Compare 2 Kings 6:32, “Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.”

Habakkuk

Then there's Habakkuk. Everywhere he looked he beheld violence!

- Violence against God.
- Violence amongst God's people.

So with trepidation, he approached the Lord and inquired as to what the Lord was doing. And the Lord said this: You think it is bad now? Just wait. It is going to get much worse. And what was Habakkuk's response?

Habakkuk 3:16-19, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

What boldness! What confidence arises from the knowledge of God! It enabled Habakkuk to face an uncertain future

That is the boldness and confidence we see when the men of Jabeshgilead received the message of Saul.

Now get this, if the words of a sinful, mutable, wicked individual who would do so much harm against the people of God — if the Message of Saul's Kingdom — could arouse so much confidence then how much more ought we to have who NOT ONLY have become subjects of Christ's Kingdom BUT personally know and have tasted the kindness of God!

Indeed the picture of the child of God throughout Scripture is that of a bold, unrelenting confidence and trust. Though

- The world may fall apart.
- The enemy may gain the upper hand.
- Our health may fail.
- The future may look bleak.

We are not shaken or moved!

Now you must see that this confidence is within the grasp of each and every one of us this morning. Yet for it to be so, our hope and trust must be in Christ!

Living By Faith

Hebrews 11 lists the men and women who confidently served the Lord in dire and hopeless situations and yet who overcame on account of God.

Hebrews 11:32-38, "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

What’s to explain?

- Their hope?
- Their seemingly irrational confidence?
- Their unwavering trust in God and His purpose?
- Their good cheer in the face of tragedy?

I mean I get a paper cut and it is as if God is no longer in control of the world! I say, “why, oh God, why the paper cut?”

So how is it that men and women of old continued to trust God even though their world was falling apart?

The obvious answer from this text is, “Their faith!”

Yet personally that answer is not good enough after all

- The Muslim has faith!
- The Existentialist has faith!
- The Atheist has faith!

So how is the faith of the child of God any different?

The faith which evokes the confidence of our text is a faith which is directed in and so resting upon the character of God and so His plan and promises!

Hebrews 11:39-40, “ And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Do you see what made the difference in their lives?

Yes they had faith, but their faith was informed by the word of God such that they knew the purpose and plan of the Lord. Housed NOT in a futile hope, BUT in the surety of God’s character and the fact that what He promised certainly would come to pass. And so knowing the nature, purpose, and end of God’s kingdom, though they were down they never were out!

Yet you say, “I haven’t fared too well under the multiple sieges I have endured in life. The “confidence” of those of Hebrews 11 is a dream, the men of Jabeshgilead eludes me, much less the joy to the Lord. When I compare myself to the non-Christian religious fanatic, I find that they have more faith in their cause than I do in God. In fact, NOT ONLY have I NOT been filled with confidence and joy in the purpose and plan of God BUT I even have found myself at times filled with anger and frustration directed at God! And so

today I stand as one who is unworthy of the deliverance and so the joy and confidence of this text! What hope is there for me?"

Before we look at the next point would you notice a very important piece of trivia concerning the city of Jabeshgilead. About 20 to 40 years prior to our text, the call was sounded forth for all faithful Israelites to gather and address the sin of Benjamin.¹⁰ This call was a call to arms and thus a call to participate in the judgment of God directed against this tribe.

Now the entire nation came out; all but one city, Jabeshgilead.¹¹ As such this city abandoned the cause of Israel and so the cause of Christ. When their countrymen were dying on the battlefield in the name of righteousness, they were merrily going about their own business.

The result?

They abandoned Israel when she was in her hour of greatest need! From this I hope you see that our text contains a complete reversal of the account at the end of Judges. This time it is Jabeshgilead that is in trouble. And if they received the same response that they gave when the rest of Israel was in trouble, no one would come! And if no one came we would have concluded even today, "They got what they deserved!"

But that's the beauty of our text! As undeserving as was Jabeshgilead, deliverance nevertheless came. And thus we see that the message which was sounded forth from Saul was a message given to a people who didn't deserve it!

And such is the nature of the deliverance granted by Christ! Such is the nature of the Kingdom of God! Paul said, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

When was God's saving love set on you? When we had cleaned up our act? ****OR**** When we were hopelessly lost in sin?

It was when we were hopelessly lost in sin!

Luke 18:13-14, "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Behold the one who comes to know the deliverance of Christ. They are ones who are unworthy. They are as the citizens of Jabesh who truly don't deserve it. They are you and me!

Accordingly in the siege under which you are struggling today once for all put away fear, insecurity, and all shrinking back when it comes to trusting in God! The Lord is your Savior and Suzerain who has unconditionally accepted you as a vassal Kingdom- to protect, love, nourish, cherish, deliver, and glorify you! Waste no more time licking your wounds or worrying about His love. And with a confidence foreign to the world, let us serve the Lord! To every "would-be" Nahash boldly proclaim with a smile, "Tomorrow we will come out to you!"

¹⁰ Compare Judges 19:29

¹¹ Compare Judges 21:8

A Message of Triumph

With that we are brought in our study of the establishing of Saul's kingdom to its triumph.

1 Samuel 11:11, "And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together."

All this happened between 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.¹² As such commentators put the attack around 6:00 a.m. in the morning, just before sunrise. In this case, the campaign would have begun with a surprise attack. And the battle continued until they had "struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day" (1 Samuel 11:11b). This tells us that the battle was over by noon. As such the implication is that Saul's three companies were so victorious, so powerful and strong, that they crushed the Ammonites such that by noon the battle was over!

You must see that this is significant. The Ammonites at this time was a nation of warriors. As such the army which besieged Jabesh was NOT a disorganized or inexperienced band of men. They were hardened soldiers who had many battles and victories under their belt. In contrast, Saul's army was composed of farmers and tradesmen who never had fought in a battle- at least not one on this scale. Thus to read that the battle was over by noon is little short of amazing. And yet it doesn't stop here. For the battle was so one-sided that "And it came about that those who survived [amongst the Ammonites] were scattered, so that no two of them were left together" (1 Samuel 11:11c).

In other words, so devastating was the force of Israel that the Ammonite soldiers didn't have time to regroup... anywhere. They were in total disarray... individually fleeing for their lives.

Oh don't miss it brothers and sisters! When God established Saul's kingdom he did it in such a way that there was no question as to its Source, Creator, and Sustainer! As such, Saul's kingdom victoriously and triumphantly arose! Now, this doesn't mean that in time there wouldn't be problems from the surrounding nations for there would be. However, and get this, the problems which Israel would soon face would be addressed on the part of a sovereign and free nation!!

Child of God, do you see that this also is true of us?

When Christ died and rose from the dead, He established an earthly Kingdom. And as citizens of this kingdom, we co-reign with Him. The twenty-four elders in glory praised God because, "thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned" (Revelation 11:17b). Speaking of Christ Paul wrote, "for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25).

Christ is reigning today, of this there can be no doubt.

What implication does this have for us?

In Christ we too are reigning! Paul wrote, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12a). And speaking of the age in which we currently live, John wrote "but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6b).

¹² In the Jewish culture of the Bible, days began at sunset (~6 p.m.) not midnight. As such, the night was broken into three, four hour watches (Watch #1: 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Watch #2: 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.; Watch #3: 2 a.m. to 6 a.m.).

So Christian! Today we co-reign with Christ. Accordingly, insofar as, Christ is victorious, we will be victorious. Christ suffers humiliation, we too will suffer. In the words of our Lord, “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master” (Matthew 10:24-25). So truly, as the Lord goes so also will we!

Well that raises the question, “What is the state of Christ’s Kingdom today? Is it advancing, growing and triumphing? Or is it in decline?”

When we look at Scripture we note that just as in the conquest under Joshua (a conquest which was overwhelming yet incomplete), so also it was when Christ came to this earth in His first advent. Our Lord established a foothold for His Kingdom in the hearts of His people.¹³ Yet, His plan always has been that this would be the first phase in the establishing of a Kingdom which would not be complete until His Second Coming.¹⁴ At this time, He will conquer the power and authority of Satan and so the nations of this world¹⁵ purge the physical world of its corruption through fire¹⁶, renew the world and so make it a paradise once again,¹⁷ and gather all men and angels before His judgment seat where they either will be cast into the Lake of Fire or be brought into what will have become the physical boundaries of His regency- the New Heavens and Earth.¹⁸

Now until then we live on this earth in light of the already/not yet kingdom of God. It already is here and so we triumphantly co-reign with Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:14, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.”

Truly as we worship God this day, the Lord is bringing forth the victory! God’s Kingdom is not weak or impotent; in fact with each conversion, it is growing, thriving, and assaulting the gates of hell.

Matthew 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Yet it is not yet here in its fullness and so we suffer with Christ, but we are never undone.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

Though we are part of God’s Kingdom which is triumphing, nevertheless it only has come in part today. As such, we at times do suffer humiliation and do struggle. But get this, though we suffer, nevertheless we are not undone for our treasure and hope is not of this world! And that leads us to a conviction which seems to defy logic.

Romans 8:37, “Nay, in all these things [e.g., “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword] we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

¹³ Compare Luke 17:21

¹⁴ Compare Acts 3:21

¹⁵ Compare Revelation 20:7-10

¹⁶ Compare 2 Peter 3:10

¹⁷ Compare 2 Peter 3:12-13

¹⁸ Compare Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15

How do we overwhelmingly conquer?

We know that our greatest foe is Satan, and his end is the ruining of the believers faith. Accordingly when evil and bad times come, Satan would use it for evil, BUT God uses it for good unto the strengthening of our faith!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Family of God let us view this world aright! In Christ we are apart of a winning team such that even when it looks like we are defeated, we know that God in His providence is bringing about victory! As such,

- Though afflicted, we are never crushed.
- Though perplexed, we need not despair.
- Though struck down, we are not destroyed.
- Though we are persecuted, we are never forsaken!

That is the triumph of Christ’s kingdom!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on December 2, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church