

The Drama of Scripture

Redemption (Part 2 - Jesus)



This morning we are continuing our sermon series on The Drama of Scripture. We are spending two weeks each on the four “acts” of the biblical story: creation, fall, redemption, restoration. We could also use the words *ought*, *is*, *can*, *will*. Creation describes God’s design and the way things ***ought*** to be. Fallen describes how the world actually ***is*** due to sin. Redemption describes the way things ***can*** be because of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ.

Restoration describes the way things ***will*** be when God restores all things.

The New Testament uses a number of images and themes to describe the ***redemption*** that Jesus accomplished. Today we are going to consider only one of those: the Kingdom of God.

We are going to see how central the Kingdom of God was to Jesus’ mission on earth. The New Testament screams, “Jesus is the King who is establishing an eternal Kingdom.” Understanding this theme isn’t merely an academic exercise. If we believe that Jesus is the King who is establishing an eternal Kingdom, we will be passionate about seeking first God’s Kingdom and God’s righteousness.

Mark Batterson is the one who said, “I wonder if churches do to Christians what zoos do to animals” (i.e., making them tame and lethargic when they were created to be rather wild and dangerous). One of the things that can help us be less tame and lethargic is a heart-level understanding that Jesus the King invites us to enter this eternal Kingdom and to participate in its expansion. When we understand what this Kingdom is about, we become like the man who sold everything he had to buy a pearl of great price or like the man who found a treasure hidden in a field and sold everything he had to buy that field.

Wherever you are in relation to God, I invite you to take seriously these Scriptures that talk about Jesus’ Kingdom. As we look at how the “Kingdom of God” unfolds in the New Testament, we’ll pause to ask “So what?” Why does it matter that Jesus birth was framed up as a King being born? What are the implications of Jesus preaching the gospel of the Kingdom? Why does it matter that Jesus pointed to His miracles as evidence that the Kingdom was being established? Etc.

The birth of the King. Numerous statements and events surrounding the birth of Jesus stress that He was the promised King/Messiah. One of the core things that the angel

Gabriel told Mary that her son would be the King promised to David (which we discussed last week from 2 Samuel 7):

31 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

It would have been very natural for Mary and everyone else in Israel to think that Jesus would one day have political power and that He would finally get rid of the occupying Romans. That’s certainly what Herod thought when he heard about the child “who has been born King of the Jews.” This troubled Herod greatly, thinking that when Jesus grew up He would be a threat to *his* throne. Herod commanded that all the male babies younger than two years old in and around Bethlehem be slaughtered. Herod was trying to eliminate a rival to his throne.

So what? As we’ll see, Mary, Joseph, Herod, and everybody else (including Jesus’ disciples) misunderstood the type of Kingdom that Jesus was establishing. We’ll see in a couple of weeks that when Christ returns His Kingdom will subsume all other kingdoms. But in this “third act” of the drama of Scripture, the Kingdom of God is radically different than every other Kingdom. We too will need to allow the Holy Spirit to correct *our* misperceptions of the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel of the Kingdom.

About thirty years later Jesus began His public ministry. Mark 1:14-15 record the simple, basic message that Jesus declared when as He moved from town to town.

14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Mark calls this message “the gospel of God.” The word gospel wasn’t necessarily a religious term in the first century in the Roman empire; it simply referred to any “good news” that deserved to be declared. The good news Jesus announced included two statements and a response. First, Jesus announced that “the time is fulfilled” - they were living in the day when God was going to fulfill the promises made to His people (which we discussed last week).

Second, Jesus announced that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” The invasion has begun; God has begun to establish a Kingdom that will have no end. Significantly, instead of an invasion characterized by “shock and awe,” this Kingdom would be built one person at a time. That’s why Jesus called for a response to this announcement.

The only rational response for people who understood that God was on the verge of establishing a Kingdom that would never end was to “repent and believe in the gospel.” To repent doesn’t merely mean to feel guilty; it means to change your entire course. Let’s say you’re on I-70 and you want to go to Kansas City. If you are headed west, you

need to repent; you need to take the next exit, drive over the interstate, and begin driving east. In the same way, if you want to enter the Kingdom of God but you are not living under His reign, you need to repent. You need to admit to God that you have been your own king/lord/master and that you want Him to be your King/Lord/Master; you turn away from yourself and your sin and you turn to God.

And you “believe the gospel.” Living after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we understand the gospel more fully. We understand that Christ died for our sins - as our substitute - and rose from the dead victorious. When we believe the gospel, we become new creatures in Christ; we become sons and daughters of God; we enter into the Kingdom and gladly live under God’s reign.

So what? We need to understand that Jesus wasn’t merely calling people to try harder or to be better people or to start attending the synagogue more often. He was calling people to abandon their way of life and begin living in the Kingdom of God. You don’t have to enter the Kingdom of God; you can continue being your own boss, your own master. But Scripture teaches that one day “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord” [and King]. For some it will be forced submission; for those who believe the gospel it will be glad worship.

The good news is that the Kingdom of God is at hand; it is right here. The good news is that you can repent and believe the gospel. This inherently involves a break with the way you are living your life. You can only serve one master; you can only have one King.

Jesus’ mighty Kingdom works. The miracles Jesus performed met tangible needs; but they also declared that the Kingdom of God was advancing. In Luke 7 we have Jesus’ own interpretation of His miracles. John the Baptist, now in prison, sent his disciples to inquire whether Jesus was indeed the “expected one” or if they should look for someone else.

22 And He answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. 23 “Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

Jesus basically said that His miraculous deeds confirmed that He was the “Expected One,” the One described in Isaiah 61:1, the Messiah and King. Every time He healed a sick person, He was reversing the effects of the fall. Every time He cast out a demon He asserted His authority over “the serpent of old” who had deceived Eve. Every time He brought the gospel to the poor and to others on the margins of society, He was showing the kind of generosity that was always intended for humanity.

So what? Jesus’ miraculous works should inform our expectations about what is possible in our day as we live in the Kingdom. In many places the NT urges us to pray and ask God to heal and/or to deliver people from demonic influences. At the same time, it acknowledges that not everyone is healed of every disease or ailment. I don’t have a neat, tidy formula for experiencing the miraculous. But I believe Hebrews 11:6

with all my heart: “Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is/exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

Jesus’ teachings about the Kingdom. Jesus’ teachings (especially His parables) revealed a rather nuanced perspective about the type of kingdom that He was establishing. The parables, for example, in Matthew 13 explain that the kingdom would be like “the grain of the mustard seed” - the smallest of all the seeds, but one which would grow and become as big as a tree. In the same way the kingdom would be established one person at a time, but would eventually extend to the entire earth (See Matthew 13:31-32).

So what? My main encouragement for all of us is to be teachable and to believe what we’re told about the Kingdom. Let me give one example of the difference this could make in our thinking and our behavior. In Matthew 13 Jesus said that the kingdom is like a farmer whose enemies snuck in one night and sowed weeds in his wheat field (Matthew 13:24-30). When the wheat sprouted and bore grain, the weeds/tares became evident. The man’s slaves came to him asking whether he wanted them to pull up the tares. The farmer said, “No, allow both to grow together because you may uproot the wheat with the weeds. When the harvest comes, bundle up the tares and burn them; then gather the wheat into the barn.”

Living after the “fall” and before the “restoration,” we need to realize that God allows the wheat and tares to grow together. God allows the ungodly to live (and even thrive) alongside the sons and daughters of the Kingdom. This is the patience of God who doesn’t want to see people gathered up like tares at the judgment; He wants them to “repent and believe the gospel.” If we don’t understand that this is what the kingdom of heaven is like in this chapter of the drama of Scripture (Matthew 13:24), we might lose heart or be wondering if Jesus really is King.

The Crucified King. (John 18:36-37, John 19:17-22) In Jesus’ day, it made no sense that the promised “King who would sit on the throne of David forever” would be crucified. That’s why Peter “rebuked” Jesus when He made it clear that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified (Matthew 16). The fact that the King of kings and Lord of lords would be crucified makes it shockingly clear that the kingdom Jesus was establishing was different than anything they had experienced. After being arrested, Jesus said this to Pilate (John 18:36–37):

36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

You may remember that when the guards came to arrest Jesus, He had to tell Peter, “Peter, put up your sword. . . Cutting off people’s ears is not the way I’m establishing My

Kingdom.” Jesus would establish His Kingdom through suffering, weakness, and humility, not through violence, anger, and power.

So what? We believe in a crucified King. A King who said, “No servant is greater than his master. If they mistreated me, they will also mistreat you.” We need to make peace with the reality that the kingdom STILL advances through suffering, weakness, and humility. We don’t need political power for the kingdom to advance; we don’t need to be outraged over every perceived offense - either inside or outside of the church. The first disciples of Jesus were “untrained and unlearned” people, a persecuted minority; but they were accused of “turning the world upside down” because they knew how to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness; they considered it a privilege to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. The same should be true for us because our King was crucified.

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul explained that the resurrection of Jesus guarantees the victory of King Jesus.

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

This is a theologically dense passage, but one of the core things Paul tells us is that the resurrection of Jesus guarantees that the kingdom of God will be established and that every enemy of God will one day be defeated (evil spiritual powers and death itself).

So what? The resurrection of our crucified King speaks to the confidence we should have in this life - not confidence in ourselves or our giftedness, but confidence that the Kingdom of God will come in all of its fulness. There will come a day when we will no longer need to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done one earth as it is in heaven.” N.T. Wright says that the first disciples “believed that God was going to do for the whole cosmos what he had done for Jesus at Easter” (Surprised by Hope, p. 93).

Jesus’ mission for the Church. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The mission Jesus gave His people is as vast as His own mission to reverse the fall and establish His kingdom over all of creation. Of course our role is different than His, but the scope is just as broad. This passage is probably familiar to most of you, but hear it in light of the drama of Scripture (Matthew 28:18–20):

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20

teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

There are four “all’s” in these verses. First, Jesus has been given **all** authority “in heaven and on earth.” Does that remind you of anything? Genesis 1:1 tells us that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Just as the triune God created everything, the risen King has authority over everything. The fourth/last “all” is in verse 20: Jesus promised, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” We are not alone in this mission; the One with all authority will be with us **always**.

The second and third “all’s” are the **so what?** of these verses. Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of **all** the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The scope of our mission reflects the scope of the Kingdom Jesus is establishing. God promised Abraham that his descendant would bless all the families of the earth; the vision put forth in the prophets was that all the nations would come streaming into Jerusalem to worship the one, true, living God. This promise and vision are fulfilled in Jesus.

As Jesus’ followers we aren’t supposed to care only about ourselves and our “tribe”; we are to be passionate about seeing people from every grouping of people become apprenticed to Jesus. We watch the news as those who want to see people from every tribe, tongue, and nation become followers of Jesus.

Next week we’ll be baptizing people in each of our services. This is a way of disciples to “go public” and express that they have entered God’s kingdom.

Jesus also tells His disciples to “[teach] them to observe **all** that I’ve commanded you.” Dallas Willard called this the great omission in the Great Commission. Is it explicitly your ambition to “observe **all** that Jesus commanded?” If you read back through the gospel of Matthew, you will find that Jesus gave commands which involved every area of life; “every square inch” of our lives is supposed to reflect that we now live under God’s reign. Jesus commanded us (as a people) to have a very comprehensive influence in this world: announcing the good news of Jesus, delivering people from demonic powers (Jesus has all authority), noticing and ministering to people who are hungry, sick, and imprisoned.

As I mentioned earlier, I am haunted by the possibility that “the church does to Christians what zoos do to animals” - making us tame and lethargic. I hope you can see that the antidote is to get caught up in the drama of Scripture. Jesus is a King who is establishing an eternal kingdom. He invites us to enter that Kingdom and participate in its expansion.