

**PART 5**

**What Is the  
Kingdom of God?**

## 56• **Is the Kingdom Now or Later?**

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The Kingdom of God was the core subject of the ministry of Jesus. He spoke the word *church* only three times in the gospels (see Matthew 16:18; 18:17) but talked about the Kingdom some 130 times. He "loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25), but His focus was on the Kingdom. If we are to be like Him our focus will be the same: First on the Kingdom, then on the Church.

In its widest scope, the Kingdom is the rule of God over every aspect of creation—from the core of every atom to the rim of the universe and beyond. This includes the visible and invisible dimensions of all that is, everything that has been, will ever be. Nothing is exempt from the Kingdom's reign. This remains true even though Satan has come against the accessible parts of the Kingdom: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence [such as the beheading of John], and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). Violence reaches only that part of the Kingdom that has been committed to man; Satan cannot reach the Kingdom's heavenly source. Hence, Jesus' words to Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

In other aspects, the Kingdom is in the process of expanding its rule now, and in heaven will reveal its total presence and purpose. The final display of Kingdom glory is foretold in Scripture: "Then comes the end, when He [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Isaiah foretold

the Kingdom's presence: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government [Kingdom] will be upon His shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6).

The Kingdom is the medium through which God has extended spiritual authority for believers to rule and reign with Him (see Ephesians 1:18-20; 2:6; 3:10). In this capacity it is possible for one to be near the Kingdom but not in it, to be an heir of it but not exercise the power of it. Most tragically of all, it is possible for one to read about it in Scripture but not to have the personal revelation of it. To one young man Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

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Jesus spoke of the "Kingdom" about 130 times in the gospels; forty times He designated the "Kingdom of heaven" and 71 times the "Kingdom of God."

Observe the difference. He answered the Pharisees this way: "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" (Luke 17:20-21). When Pontius Pilate quizzed Him about the Kingdom, He answered differently: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). In response to Pilate, Jesus was apparently speaking of His future earth-based Kingdom in the Millennial reign. Read the word *now* in the context of "no longer is My Kingdom from here."

On the Day of Ascension the disciples asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom [an earthly kingdom] to Israel?"

He responded, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:6-7). The disciples

were given "power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases" and sent out "to preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:1-2). The future Kingdom of the Millennial reign on earth was not their concern.

Is this understanding correct? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Scripture provides us with no clear distinction. John the Baptist told the people in his day, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). That message of repentance must be the dominant Kingdom influence in our lives.

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### **What Is the Difference between the Kingdom and the Church?**

Matthew is the only gospel writer who records the word *church* and only three times (see Matthew 16:18; 18:17). The first mission of the Church-the Body of Christ-is to reveal the Kingdom and her glorious King. The modern Church has shifted that focus-to the local bodies of members. In so doing, the Church, which was birthed at Pentecost, has cut herself off from Kingdom authority and power. Herein lies the failure of modern Christianity and its lack of New Testament superiority. The current Church has friendly persuasion-but nothing more. Her gospel is powerless; it has no impact on the masses.

The Church exists solely because the Kingdom came first. The Kingdom is infallible; the Church is subject to error. The Kingdom does not submit to the Church; the Church submits to the Kingdom. The Kingdom does not draw its power from the Church; the Church draws her power from the Kingdom. The Kingdom is free from humanity; the Church is dependent on it. The Kingdom of God is preexistent, pre-eminent, predominate; the Church is subservient to the Kingdom. The Kingdom is cosmic, universal, unlimited by distance or age; apart from the Kingdom, the Church is confined to time and space. The Kingdom

is the shout; the Church is the echo. The Kingdom is the substance; the Church is the shadow.

Unfortunately, most of Christianity has reversed the order, placing all or most of its value upon the Church or denominational fragments of it. The Westminster Catechism, for example, composed by England's leading Divines in 1646, devotes a chapter to the Church but nothing to the Kingdom. The Kingdom and the Church, in their sequential order, are both revelations of the same rule and government of God. Kingdom rule is fixed and unchangeable; Church rule is not. Kingdom authority is as inalterable as gravity; Church rule is frequently under the administration of unreliable men and women. Kingdom power is sovereign, irresistible, eternal. It emanates from the nature and character of God; Church power is frequently a mere contest directed by circumstances. While the Kingdom reigns, the Church argues. The Kingdom is ruled by a King—the risen, glorified, reigning Christ; the Church is often ruled by religious politicians. Though God intends that the Church draw her power and authority from the all-sufficient Kingdom, the Church has determinedly drawn upon herself.

The result of ignoring the Kingdom is that churches corporately, and Christians personally, experience power failure. Power does not originate with the Church. Power comes only from the Holy Spirit through the Kingdom. Those who reject this are left with nothing. The Church receives the "anointing" and ministers it to the people. Without the Holy Spirit, churches have no life-source and become simply religious organizations.

Many historic denominations in America are dying for this reason: They reject the Scriptures teaching about the Holy Spirit's baptism and gifts and rely on their own strength. Many churches have abandoned the Bible and have opened their doors to "doctrines of demons." Paul expressed it this way: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). The Holy Spirit is the only life-source for the Church. There is no other.

## 59. **What Is Our Authority in the Kingdom?**

The Kingdom is the rule of God in which He has also extended spiritual authority to believers to rule and reign with Him (see Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). He said, "Behold, I give you the authority ... over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). The Gospel of the Kingdom, which presents the parables, the keys and other constituents of Kingdom power, is much, much more than a mere presentation of Bible facts (see Matthew 4:23; 24:14; Mark 1:14). Authentic Gospel is the vocal declaration of Jesus' atonement, accompanied by the Holy Spirit's anointing, which draws into one message all the spiritual and physical benefits of Kingdom authority.

Where the full Kingdom Gospel is preached it will be confirmed with "mighty signs and wonders" (Romans 15:19). Much of the modern Church rejects spiritual gifts, which contain Kingdom power. In that state, the Church is left with little more than religious argument. All the while, the Spirit is saying to the Church, "Come to the Kingdom!"

The Old Testament foretold the Kingdom: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). The New Testament affirms the Kingdom: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

## 60. **How Is the Kingdom Demonstrated?**

Only within the boundaries of the Kingdom of God is the Church presented. With that understanding, we can better embrace the following

Scriptural promises about the work the Church will do to demonstrate the Kingdom. The Church will:

Teach repentance (see Matthew 3:2)

Cast out demons (see Matthew 12:28)

Understand mysteries (see Matthew 13:11)

Use the Kingdom keys (see Matthew 16:19)

Preach the Gospel (see Matthew 24:14)

Receive an inheritance (see Matthew 25:34)

Baptize new believers (see Acts 8:12)

Teach about Jesus (see Acts 28:31)

Move in power (see 1 Corinthians 4:20)

Walk through the entrance into the everlasting Kingdom (see 2 Peter 1:11)

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## 61. What Is the Gospel of the Kingdom?

The word *Gospel* means "Good News" and to be authentic must be presented with the original New Testament message and power intact. It should not be edited or compromised. Jesus said to the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus was emphatic. His instruction, "Teach them all things," referring specifically to the Church at the "end of the age" is unmistakably clear. He expects the modern Church to be taught "all things" that He commanded the first-century Church to observe. There is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). The Church, through the final century, is to be taught the original "one faith" He taught the first-century Church. There is to be no change.

## 62. **What Three Preaching Commissions Did Jesus Give?**

On three different occasions, Jesus commissioned disciples to preach the Gospel publicly. The first two times, they were commanded to speak to the Jews only and not to the Samaritans. He said, "Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matthew 10:5-7). The final commission, the "Great Commission," was given after the resurrection and at the time of Jesus' ascension. Taking the disciples to the Mount of Olives, He instructed them to go into all the world. Specifically, He said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20). Observe Jesus' language: "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Jesus intended there to be no change in the belief and practice of the last-century Church from that of the first-century Church.

## 6. **What Is the Abundant Life in the Holy Spirit?**

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American poet Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) wrote, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." While this may be true for many, it is not the life Jesus intended for us-and placed within our reach. He desires that we experience the serene life available in the Holy Spirit (see John 16:33). Is such a life possible? Yes. We can enter into a state of life that is elevated above the mood swings of the world (see John 10:10). It is only here that we step into the "secret place" of the Most High (Psalm 27:5).

Paul assures us that the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding will protect both our hearts and minds through Christ (see





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Philippians 4:7). We can turn to the wonderful example of Stephen who, while being stoned to death, saw heaven open and Jesus standing before him. Was this the first time Stephen had experienced such serenity? Not at all. It was serenity that enabled him to face this moment. When John Huss was being burned alive at the stake he burst into a joyous song. While religious frenzy gripped the crowd around him, John was bathed in the serenity of heaven. It is inward serenity in times of crisis that is the great achievement of the Christian life. This is what Scripture describes as the abundant life.