

Christ Rules His Kingdom

I. The Kingdom of Power

II. The Kingdom of Grace

III. The Kingdom of Glory

¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Tell me, what comes to your mind when you hear the word, Kingdom? Maybe you think of reading children's books and fairy tales with kings and queens and castles and dragons and fair maidens needing to be rescued. Or maybe when you hear the word Kingdom you think about what happened in England a couple of months ago when King Charles III ascended the throne of the United Kingdom. Or maybe if you're like me, you think about sitting around the TV with your three brothers on a Sunday night watching Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom.

There are a lot of different ways we can look at that word "kingdom." But today we want to look at that word from a Biblical perspective. The Bible uses that word Kingdom a lot—over 150 times in the New Testament alone. You think of how Jesus began so many of his parables with the words like "The Kingdom of Heaven is like, a man sowing seed or it's like a merchant looking for pearls." Or you think of Jesus' words in Mark 10:15 where he says, "*anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*" Or even here in our text for the day where St. Paul speaks about how "*God has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*" In each of those cases when scripture uses the word Kingdom, it's not referring to a particular place or a location with the boundaries around it. Rather the word Kingdom refers to an activity, God's ruling activity, whether in our hearts or in our world.

Today on this Christ the King Sunday, we want to dig a little deeper into the concept of a kingdom, as we consider this theme:

Christ Rules His Kingdom

In fact, Christ rules three interconnected kingdoms, which are sometimes called:

I. The Kingdom of Power

II. The Kingdom of Grace.

III. And the Kingdom of Glory.

First, let's take up the kingdom of power. The Kingdom of Power is basically everything that Jesus rules in our world. Saint Paul begins by telling us exactly who Jesus is: *The Son is the image of the invisible God.* In other words, if you want to see what God looks like, then look at Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way: *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the*

exact representation of his being.” When people say that Jesus is just a really good man, or he’s a lot like God, you can say, “No, Jesus is the exact representation of his being.” Or as we confess in the words of the Nicene Creed, he is “very God of very God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father, through whom all things were made.” Through whom all things were made. Isn’t that what St. Paul says here in our text? *For in him, (namely, in the Son), all things were created.*

Now you hear those words and maybe you’re thinking, “What do you mean all things were created through the Son? Don’t we attribute the work of creation to the Father? Don’t we confess in the Apostles Creed, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth”? Yes, but that doesn’t mean that the Son didn’t have a role in creation. Think of the words of John chapter 1, for example. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* Everything in the universe, as Paul says, *things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

You might say that Jesus was the agent through whom the world was called into existence. But the Son is not only involved in the creation of the world. He’s also involved in the preservation of the world. How does Paul put it? *The Son is before all things* (in other words, he’s eternal) *and in him all things hold together.* That’s a neat picture, isn’t it? Jesus is like the glue that holds everything in our universe together. When you ask a scientist what keeps the planets in the solar system from flying off into space, he’ll tell you, “Gravity.” But if you ask him, “But where did Gravity come from?”, he can’t tell you. But you know the answer. Jesus created gravity. Or you ask a doctor, “What keeps our head on top of our shoulders and what keeps our body parts from falling out?” he’ll say, “Our muscles and tendons and sinews do.” But if you ask him, “But where did those come from?” he may be at a loss to provide an answer. But you know the answer. Jesus, the very Son of God, not only created every cell in our body. He also uses those cells to hold us all together.

That’s what we mean by Christ’s Kingdom of Power. Jesus uses his almighty power to rule over everything in our universe. He makes the rain fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. He puts people in positions of power and then he takes them down again. Sometimes he brings feasts, and other times he allows famines. Jesus is the King who is in control of our world.

Now sometimes, when people hear that, they get angry. They say, “If God is really the all-powerful, if the Son is ruling a kingdom of power, then why are things in our world going so poorly?” Or maybe more specifically, “Why is my life so hard? God, if you’re really in control, why don’t you fix the problems I see in my life and my world?” There are two ways to answer that question. The first is to remember that God has given mankind a certain amount of Free Will. And when people use their free will to rebel against God, we shouldn’t be surprised if things end up going poorly. And secondly, remember, Saint Paul said that everything was created not only through the Son but also for the Son. In other words, everything in the world was created not to give glory to creation, but to give glory to the Creator. We exist not to serve ourselves, but to serve God. We exist for God. But a lot of times, we get that backwards. We think that God exists for us. We think God should do what we want him to do. That’s like a pot telling the potter what the potter should do. That’s backwards. If we’re a lump of clay and God wants to form us into a beautiful vase and we resist God and stubbornly say, “I want to be an ugly old ashtray,” then God would have every right to throw us into the garbage can. But God didn’t do that. Instead of throwing us into the trash, God shows us his grace, In fact, you might

say that he has brought us into the second Kingdom that Christ Rules over, namely, II. The Kingdom of Grace.

Saint Paul refers to that kingdom here in our text when he writes, *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him* (that's another reference to Jesus being fully God) *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:19-20)*. In other words, because sin separates us from God, because sin creates the wedge between a holy God in an unholy human race, what did Jesus do? He took all those sins on himself, carried them to the cross and was punished in hell for every one of them. In so doing, he removed the wedge that once separated us from God. He brought us back together with God, or as Paul says, *he reconciled us to God*. Where we were once at war with God, we are now, by the blood of Jesus, at peace with God. And what's may be even more important, God is at peace with us. God no longer has anything against us, because every sin we've ever committed has now been stamped, "Paid in full by the blood of the Lamb."

My friends, if you know that to be true, if by the power of the Gospel working in your heart through word and Sacrament, you know that there is no sin that God has not forgiven you for in Christ, well then you can be sure that you are a member of Christ's Kingdom of Grace. God has worked saving faith in your heart. In fact, that's what St Paul is talking about when he writes here in our text, *For God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*. You think about that a minute. You and I were once living in the darkness of unbelief. We were dominated by our sinful nature. And then God rescued us. He brought us into the kingdom of his Son. And gave us forgiveness for our sins. And that forgiveness now changes us. God's grace changes us. It gives us the desire to do what is right, not because "I have to, not because I'm afraid of what will happen if I don't, but rather, because I want to, I'm grateful for the grace that God has shown to me. If you know what it's like to be compelled by the love that Jesus has for you, then you can know that you are not only in the Kingdom of Grace, but that the Kingdom of Grace is in you. Christ the King is ruling in your heart with his love.

And that brings us to the third of Christ's Kingdoms. And that's III. The Kingdom of Glory. Now when we hear the words, the kingdom of glory, our first thought is often, "That's heaven. That's where Christ reigns in all his glory and where someday we'll reign with him." And certainly, that's true. But the kingdom of Glory is actually broader than simply heaven. When you live in Christ's Kingdom of Power, recognizing that Christ is controlling all things for your good, when you live in a kingdom of Grace, knowing the underserved love God has shown to you in Christ, it changes the way you look at your life. You see your life not as an opportunity to serve yourself, but to serve your God and your fellow man. When by the grace and power of God, you do that, your life becomes beautiful, noble, glorious. And people look at Christians showing unselfish love for others, they say, "Oh, that must be what heaven is like." And they're right. We're showing them, through our lives, a glimpse of the Kingdom of Glory.

But of course, the ultimate fulfillment of that kingdom of glory will not be experienced by you or me until we breathe our last, or until Jesus returns in glory, whichever comes first. But until that time, we let Jesus' life be the pattern for our lives. What was Jesus' life like? Well, it wasn't very easy. He lived a life of sacrifice, he suffered, died and was buried. But notice what St. Paul says. *Christ is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn among the dead*. In other words, even in our lives are hard, even if we suffer, die and are buried, in the end we will follow in Jesus' footsteps. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory

of the Father, so will you and I be raised from the dead. And just as Christ is now experiencing a life without sickness or sorrow or pain or death, a life of unending glory, so will we. We'll join him to live a life of unending glory in Christ's Kingdom of Glory.

These days, we maybe don't think a lot about the word Kingdom. But maybe we should. Maybe there's a reason we celebrate Christ the King Sunday every year. Because when you know about Christ's kingdom, when you know that even if the world seems out of control, Christ is still in control, when you know that Christ has shown you grace that you cannot fathom, when you know that in Christ, God sees you as glorious, well, that makes all the difference in the world.

Maybe you are a mom with three kids who don't want to listen to you and your husband is not all that supportive. And you are just exhausted. You're not sure you can go on. But then you remember, "I am in Christ's Kingdom of Grace. Even though my family's love for me is not perfect, God's is. He covers me with his grace. He forgives all my sins. I'm in his kingdom. Or maybe you are in a hospital bed with machines beeping all around you. The doctors don't know what's wrong with you and you're scared. But then you remember, "Wait a minute. I'm in Christ's Kingdom of Power. Christ is still in control. Even if the doctors don't know what's going on, God does. He's not going to let my heart stop until he's ready to take me into the Kingdom of Glory." No matter what your situation in life, no matter how hard it may appear to be, you can still say, "I know that Christ is ruling over his kingdom. And by God's grace and to his glory, I know that I'm in that Kingdom. And that means that I am truly blessed!" In Jesus name. Amen.