

*<sup>1</sup>In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

*<sup>6</sup>Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

*<sup>7</sup>He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

*<sup>9</sup>After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*<sup>10</sup>They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

### **Jesus Rules and Reigns Over His Threefold Kingdom**

Imagine being the disciples standing there on the Mount of Olives as Jesus is blessing them, and then his feet start lifting off the ground and he rises up right in front of them until a cloud hides him from their sight. The other times he had appeared arisen, he just kind of appeared and disappeared in an instant, but this time was different. This time his exit was slower and more deliberate, with a bit more finality to it. They watched him go up into heaven.

#### **Jesus Ascends—Now What?**

What do you think they were thinking as they stared intently into the sky after he was gone? I think I would have been thinking, "I guess this means goodbye—but wait, is that it? Where's the rest of it? I thought there would be some big kingdom stuff happening, but this is a little anti-climactic! It's just us disciples here—now what?" Then all of a sudden two men dressed in white, just like on Easter Sunday, appeared to them and ask a simple question, **"Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus will come back [just as you've seen him go]."** This isn't goodbye forever, it's goodbye for now. It's like the angels are teaching them the first game of "See ya' later, alligator," to which there's only one response: "In a while, crocodile." He would come back, and in the meantime, he wasn't going to be absent, but his presence would certainly be different.

At his Ascension, there was some big kingdom stuff happening; it maybe just didn't happen with the pomp and circumstance we'd expect. Jesus was returning to heaven to take his seat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, which is not a defined location, but a position of authority. He would resume ruling and reigning on high. That's our theme today—**Jesus**

***Rules and Reigns Over His Threefold Kingdom.*** And we'll spend time understanding what is meant by a threefold kingdom 1) of Power, 2) of Grace, and 3) of Glory.

## Jesus Teaches about the Kingdom of God

Jesus spent a lot of time trying to teach the disciples about his kingdom, and most of that time was spent trying to help them understand the middle one, the kingdom of grace. He had taught them throughout the gospel accounts about how the kingdom of God had come near and what was needed to enter it. He had taught them many parables about the kingdom of God being like a mustard seed or a Sower spreading seed or a landowner or a king. He had taught them that the kingdom wasn't a physical place to be recognized, but was in the midst of them, an invisible kingdom, not like the kingdoms of this world, but his gracious rule in their hearts. Luke tells us that even after he rose, Jesus kept teaching on this subject. **"He appeared over the period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."** (1:3).

## Looking for the Wrong Kind of Kingdom—Our Kingdom of Power

But even Jesus, the master teacher, struggled to make headway with the disciples about the true makeup of his kingdom. You can see that from the question they ask after everything was said and done. Jesus had suffered, died, and rose for the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. He had declared his work finished, and told them about the "other place" he was going to prepare for them, a reference to his "kingdom of glory", and after all that, the disciples ask a question that proves their still back on square one or two. **"Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"**

What kind of kingdom they were looking for? They were looking for Jesus to use his almighty power to bring about an earthly kingdom of power, a kingdom restored to their fatherland, a messianic reign in Israel. They were looking to have their earthly suffering ended and their fortunes restored, a real rags to riches tale from being the despised vassals of the Roman empire to being the political superpower that Israel had once been during the time of King David and Solomon. That's the sense in which they hoped Jesus was going to redeem Israel.

Even now, the Jewish nation is still sitting around hoping for the restoration of physical Israel to glory, as are some Christians, called Zionists, and others called Millennialists who are looking for a physical thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. But Jesus, the only true Messiah, clearly proclaimed his kingdom was not of this world. Now we can get caught up in some of those kingdom-power aspirations too if we think we can secure our earthly welfare and fortunes simply by electing a political messiah who will make everything great again, or the candidate who will take care of everyone, or the one who will finally help the nation of Israel. The Psalmist tells us, **"Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save."** (Psalm 146:3).

We can also get focused on the wrong kind of kingdom when we get sick of the cross and want to put on the crown here on earth. We know that Jesus reigns over the whole world in what is called his **1) kingdom of power**. By him all things were created with almighty power. He can calm the violent storm, he can levitate off the ground, but we tend to think that his power ought to be used according to our opinion of what would be beneficial to us. So we get impatient and angry at God because we feel he's holding out on using all that almighty power to

make things better for us, a little easier, a little more comfortable, as if becoming a little more comfortable and at home in this world is a good thing. For me it sounds like this, “Lord, why won’t you use some of that almighty power to stop my daughter from getting sick so that I can have a little better, more relaxing time in my kingdom here on earth. Lord, why won’t you use your power to do away with the effects of teething on toddlers that turns my cute curly headed son into a screaming maniac in the middle of the night, because this children’s Tylenol isn’t cutting it. It’s your kingdom of power, Lord, but I would like it used right now to ease my suffering and restore my kingdom.

### Jesus Refocuses Them on His Kingdom of Grace

Now the fact of the matter is that Jesus does rule the world in his **1) kingdom of power- even when it doesn’t feel like it to us**. But on the day of his Ascension, Jesus was trying focus them on a different kind of kingdom entirely. So he rebukes their question **“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”** (Acts 1:7) But then he gives them the promise and assurance of “power,” but power to be used to serve in his 2) kingdom of grace. **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** (8)

Jesus was promising to baptize them with the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would come at Pentecost. That outpouring would assure them of their place as forgiven sinners in Jesus’ kingdom of grace and equip them for the task. Jesus has also poured out his Holy Spirit on us in his word and in the rebirth of water and Spirit at our baptism. Jesus’ kingdom of grace is all about him graciously reigning in the hearts of believers through word and Sacrament, assuring them of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

It’s also a kingdom that God insists must be spread, not by the force of an army, but by his believers carrying on the sweet gospel message that others might come to know it as well. Luther asks and answers the question, *“How does God’s kingdom come?” this way. “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.”* So those who believe it are the ones who must also spread it to the ends of the earth, and to people who sit on the bleachers next to you all summer long, to the hospital workers that care for you during the illness God permits.

And rest assured, God has equipped you with power. All along down through the ages, Jesus has used his kingdom of power to gently preserve and protect his Church so that it will endure throughout the ages, and in his kingdom of grace, he has promised that as we speak and testify in the name of Christ, the Holy Spirit will speak through us as we do it.

### The Kingdom of Grace Is What Leads to the Kingdom of Glory

So Jesus uses his 1) kingdom of power in service to his 2) kingdom of grace, and his kingdom of grace is what he uses to bring people at last into 3) **his kingdom of glory- when he returns**.

The angels who appeared there reminded the disciples this wasn’t the end, it was only “see you later”. Jesus would return “in a while” just as he came, coming on the clouds, and this

time with the souls of all the saints in heaven. That's the day we know as Judgment Day, when every knee will bow and everything will give way to Christ's kingdom of glory forevermore. In that kingdom, there will be no more hunger or thirst or pain or suffering, and we shall see Christ as he truly is, face to face, and all the heights of heaven, and everything that has breath will praise the lamb forever more. Oh, the vision of that kingdom is glorious, and the king of that kingdom is ***Jesus the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords***, the One who is ***Faithful and True***. That is the true kingdom we've all been longing for! And he brings us to it through the kingdom of grace.

### Now What?

So how does God want us to prepare for glory and make sure that we're not on the wrong side crying for the mountains to cover us when Jesus comes back? He wants us to be hearing the message from which faith comes, letting it dwell among us richly, and meeting together often to encourage each other with it. He wants us washing daily in the remembrance of our baptism, and eating regularly of the Supper he has given to strengthen our faith. Jesus reigns in his kingdom of grace through his means of grace—the Gospel in Word and Sacrament—and it's the only way that he has promised to do so.

So he wants us meeting, feeding, forgiving and serving in the kingdom of grace he suffered to make us a part of. It came at no small cost to him, and in the wonder of wonders, he did for the joy of having us as his own people forever. Hear Luther's beautiful confession, "*He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.*" (Luther's explanation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article. Small Catechism)

Come Lord Jesus, quickly come and take us through your kingdom of grace to the kingdom of glory you've prepared for us from the foundation of world. Amen