

Dallas Baptist University
Worship Formation Program
Redemption Homily
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The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

LEADER: CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST
PEOPLE: HE IS AND EVER WILL BE.

Introduction

A long, long time ago, there was a Great King who established a magnificent kingdom. Out of his great wisdom and love, this Great King provided everything that was necessary for the citizens in his kingdom to flourish. There was plenty of good food to eat, lots of important work to do, and many meaningful relationships to enjoy. The kingdom itself was remarkably beautiful, a veritable paradise of lakes and rivers, mountains and valleys, plains and forests, with sun, moon, and stars above, and every imaginable kind of plant, tree, beast, fish and bird below. Best of all, the King Himself was there, and He and his people enjoyed knowing each other well. Together, they lived in peace and joy in this magnificent kingdom.

But then one horrible, no good, very bad day, an enemy attacked this magnificent kingdom and it fell. How easily and how quickly the citizens of this magnificent kingdom betrayed their rightful King, and began to serve the Enemy, right there in their old King's own realm! This enemy appeared to be good, and promised the people great freedom and knowledge. But all they ended up with was slavery, falsehood, and eventually death. They exchanged the benevolent rule and blessings of their true king for the harsh tyranny and cursings of their new evil master. How foolish, how utterly foolish they were!

The Great King, however, greatly loved His people and His kingdom, and He determined to get them back. Even though they did not deserve His mercy, He would work out a plan over time by which He would defeat the enemy and restore His entire realm! At just the right time, the King sent His Mighty Warrior into His kingdom where he proclaimed the truth and conquered the enemy, even at great personal cost to Himself.

Many of the people realized the error of their ways and committed themselves again to their true King. Together, they purposed to serve Him faithfully, regularly offering thanks and remembering His gracious sacrifice on their behalf. At the end of time, the enemy and his evil influence were completely eradicated. The king and his people celebrated this victory with a great feast, and the king blessed his subjects in ways beyond which they could even ask or think forevermore.

This story is designed to illustrate the biblical themes of creation, fall and redemption in terms of the kingdom of God. After all, God is the Great King who established His magnificent kingdom in the beginning at creation (Gen. 1-2). Satan the enemy attacked God's kingdom and it fell into sin and death (Gen. 3). From Genesis 3 all the way to the end, Scripture tells us how God exerted His rule in Christ — His great warrior — in order to defeat His enemies and get His creation back.

Through the coming of the kingdom of God into the world in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God redeems the whole creation from evil, and restores it to Himself. If we are to understand the good news about redemption, the very gospel itself, then, we must understand this concept of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God, however, is a sadly neglected doctrine and is widely misunderstood. Many think that the kingdom of God is simply heaven above. Others

equate it with the church. Some think it is the future millennium. Still others identify it with personal piety or with social concern. All these definitions, unfortunately, fall short.

Instead, the bible teaches that the kingdom is best defined dynamically as the rule or reign of God. It is His absolute dominion and authority which He exerts powerfully over all aspects of reality and over every sphere of human existence. The kingdom of God is the sovereignty of God in action, especially as He exercises it redemptively against the evil in the world.

As 1 Chron. 29:11 states, "Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all," and as Ps. 103:19 notes, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; And His sovereignty rules over all."

Since it is better to show rather than to explain, let me tell you two biblical stories that put the kingdom of God on display and show how God's sovereignty exercised against evil brings redemption to His people and makes all things new.

There is no OT story that better illustrates the kingdom of God in action than the story of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage and captivity.

Israel's population during their 400 year enslavement in Egypt grew exponentially and their sheer size and power threatened the Egyptian authorities who sought to control them with hard labor. The nation found itself in a desperate situation and cried out to God for help. In due course, God raised up Moses who entreated Pharaoh to let his people go, that they might worship God and fulfill their calling as His people.

When the hard-hearted Egyptian King adamantly refused, God began to act with authority in the form of ten plagues. Upon the death of the firstborn, from which the

Israelites were spared by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, the stubborn monarch finally dismissed Israel from Egypt and they escaped.

But Pharaoh had a change of heart, as he was prone to do, and went after the Israelites in hot pursuit. With Israel's backs against the Red Sea and the Egyptian army closing in fast, God parted the waters, delivered His people with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, and drowned the Egyptians in the waves that crashed in upon them.

Israel's Exodus is the work of the kingdom of God! It manifests God's rule over the Egyptian gods and Pharaoh, His dominion over waters of the sea, and His powerful sovereignty exercised against oppression and evil, resulting in Israel's redemption. By kingdom power, God saved His people from miserable servitude. He delivered them from the unjust tyranny of Pharaoh. He brought them under His own reign and blessing. He showed them the way out!

And not only this, but Moses taught that Israel's deliverance from Egypt was so important that God expected the Israelites to remember it and celebrate it annually in a special Passover meal, so that all future generations would know that God had delivered Israel by His mighty power and kingdom.

Now fast forward if you will to the NT where we see another example of the kingdom of God in action. Only in the NT, God delivers a New Israel, the Church, from a different kind of captivity, a captivity to sin, death, and Satan, by a new Moses, Jesus Christ, who places believers under a new covenant which is to be celebrated by a new meal, the Lord's supper or communion.

According to the NT, like Israel of old, people are still in bondage and captivity, but it is a captivity and bondage of a different kind. It's not political bondage, or the

captivity of one nation to another. Rather, it is the spiritual enslavement of the human race and the whole creation to sin, to Satan, and to death.

To sin — for all people from birth and by nature are sinners who sin and who are in bondage to their ignorance, disordered loves, and errant actions. Romans 6.

To Satan — the strong man, the thief who has stolen, killed, destroyed, blinded and bound the human race in his dominion of darkness (as John 10 tells us).

To death — that mighty and dreadful foe, the wage of sin and last enemy which keeps people who through fear of death are subject to slavery all their lives (as Heb. 2: 15 tells us).

These wicked powers have wreaked havoc in our lives and on the earth. At a *personal level*, we are consumed with pride, overtaken by envy and anger, debilitated by laziness, and inordinately consumed with greed, food, and sex. We suffer from emotional disturbances, mental illnesses, and bodily diseases. Our lives are often miserable and difficult. *We need a way out.*

In *society*, corruption reigns. Marriage is undermined by divorce, serial monogamy, and the prospect of same sex unions. Families are wracked by internal discord, rampant materialism, and self-serving careerism. Political systems are tyrannical and corrupt. Politicians are deceptive and power hungry. The courts prostitute justice. Businesses are greedy and dishonest. The environment is polluted. The arts are degrading. Nations are at enmity and go to war. Religions express their hostility against others through terror. *We need a way out.*

Even the creation itself has not escaped the consequences of evil. Earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, forest fires, some diseases, and even animal pain and suffering demonstrate that “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of child birth right up to the present time” (Rom. 8: 22). *We need a way out.*

The world is abnormal. Society is corrupt. People are in bondage. Every person, every area of life, indeed, the whole creation, cry out for redemption and the coming of the kingdom of God.

This coming kingdom is exactly what God promises in the OT. In the Scripture Montage we heard a few moments ago, we learned of prophecies like Isaiah 9: 6 that speak of the coming government of God into the world which will redeem all things.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Or as we sang of the coming Redeemer in the great advent hymn “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” He is “Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.”

So at the right time, the NT announced the fulfillment of the great OT promises in the arrival of Emmanuel and the Kingdom of God. “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand,” said Jesus in Mark 1: 15, “repent and believe in the gospel.”

God’s rule and reign, His authority and dominion, His sovereignty in action was present in and through the life and ministry, the words and deeds of Jesus as He entered into conflict with and triumphed in victory over our enemies of sin, Satan, and death. So...

- Every time Jesus taught and preached the truth, — as in the Sermon on the Mount — that was the kingdom of God in action, crushing falsehood.
- Every time Jesus performed a mighty miracle — as in healing the sick — that was the kingdom of God in action, vanquishing disease.
- Every time Jesus performed an exorcism — as in the Gerasene demoniac — that was the kingdom of God in action, defeating Satan.

- Every time Jesus raised someone from the dead — as in the case of Lazarus — that was the kingdom of God in action, destroying death.
- Every time Jesus forgave sins — as in the woman caught in adultery — that was the kingdom of God in action, absolving guilt.

The purpose of the ministry of Jesus Christ, therefore, was the establishment of the kingdom-rule of God in the world, crushing falsehood, vanquishing disease, defeating Satan, destroying death, and absolving guilt, and so delivering all things from spiritual bondage, redeeming us and the creation, making all things new. This is the good news, this is the gospel, the gospel of the kingdom of God!

Now you may be a bit perplexed and wondering: Isn't the gospel all about the death of Jesus on the cross, not about the kingdom? That's a good question. But please understand this: The kingdom of God as His rule, dominion and sovereignty was manifested supremely in a most unlikely way, through the weakness and humiliation of the cross of Jesus Christ. There on Calvary, Jesus appears to be anything but kingly, anything but royal, anything but sovereign. But He was.

The kingdom of God is found in the cross of Christ and the cross of Christ is in fact the kingdom of God. There in conjunction with His resurrection, He atoned for sin, judged the devil, and defeated death. As the suffering servant and the lamb of God, He ruled from the tree and achieved the victory.

He is Christus Victor! Since the kingdom is the cross, Jesus called it a mystery, comparing it to an inauspicious mustard seed or a tiny pinch of leaven, stating nonetheless that it was the most valuable of all possessions, like a treasure hidden in a field and a pearl of great price, worth sacrificing everything in order to own it.

Though the Jews expected the Messiah to be a political deliverer — like Moses of old who saved Israel from Egypt — Jesus knew that the enemies He must conquer were not the Romans, but the far more insidious spiritual enemies of creation and the human race. His kingdom defied the popular expectations, and instead came in the unexpected and hidden way of his humble life and ministry, and at last in the way of the cross.

This triumph of the kingdom of God is worth remembering and celebrating. This is exactly what Jesus required. “For in the night in which He was betrayed He took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

So, just as Israel of old celebrated their deliverance from Egypt through God’s kingdom with a Passover feast, so the Church as the new Israel is to celebrate the victory of God’s rule over sin, death and satan in a similar way. And not just on an annual basis, but weekly, for it was “on the first day of the week,” that the NT church according to the book of Acts, “gathered together to break bread.”

So the kingdom of God has come. While its complete and final form has **not yet** arrived, still it is **already** here now, present in the world, doing its work.

For just as spring break is a taste of summer time in the midst of the semester, so also the kingdom of God is present in the midst of history, as we taste of its blessings now, and look forward to the summer time of God’s kingdom when Christ returns, the

Holy City the New Jerusalem descends, and the whole creation is restored in new heavens and the new earth. Amen, come Lord Jesus.

Meanwhile, the kingdom has tremendous implications on our lives now, students and colleagues, beloved in the Lord, it has tremendous implications on our lives spiritually, vocationally and relationally.

According to the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1, the *spiritual implications* of the presence of the kingdom is that we as believers have been blessed with every possible spiritual blessing that comes to us from heaven — chosen to be holy and blameless, predestined to adoption as God's children, redeemed through Christ's blood, forgiven for our sins, knowing the mysteries of His cosmic purposes, obtaining an eternal inheritance, and sealed with the Spirit to the day of redemption!

Now all these blessings we receive are not only for our good, but ultimately are to the praise of the glory of God and His grace! Attention, therefore, Christians: possess these your spiritual blessings in Christ your king!

Now if Christ our king has called us into His kingdom, He has also called us to *service in His kingdom*. But we must be very careful here not to limit or restrict kingdom service to service in the church. We must reject the sacred-secular dualism or any form of compartmentalized Christianity and recognize the comprehensive nature of God's kingdom rule over all creation and every aspect of life.

As Jesus Himself said to His disciples in the great commission, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Or as the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper put it, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign overall, does not cry: Mine!" Or as the

apologist and evangelist Francis Schaeffer said, “The Lordship of Christ applies to all of life and to all of life equally.” Or as we “red” in the words to the Christmas carol “Joy to the World,” He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found.” And that curse and those healing blessings are coextensive with creation itself and all aspects of life.

So we all have vocations in service to God’s kingdom that includes but also goes well beyond the walls of the church.

So, if you are on DBU’s faculty or staff, then God has called you serve Him with distinction through the exercise of your gifts in every aspect of your work for the common good, to the extension of God’s kingdom through the remarkably significant, life, church and world changing ministry of Christian higher education.

If you are a student, then make no mistake that God has called you to be, not just a student who is also a Christian, but to be a distinctively Christian student. God has called you to glorify Him in your studies, and doing this on the basis of Scripture by applying yourself gladly and diligently to the pursuit of truth, to the discovery of knowledge, to the development of various skills and disciplines, and to the cultivation of godly virtues.

For the real goal of your education is not so much to prepare yourself for a career, but to **so** shape your mind, character, and conduct that you are prepared to fulfill all your callings in life both private and public, by being rigorously renewed in your humanity as God’s image and likeness, reflecting Him and blessing others in every thing you are and do. This, my friends, will change you and not only you, but also the world.

Finally, the presence of the kingdom of God in the world today has tremendous implications *relationally*, especially as a man or a woman, as male and female, in relationships with the opposite sex, in marriage and family life, as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers, sons and daughters.

Can't you just imagine the kind of renewing impact kingdom spirituality and kingdom education can have on us as kingdom people who have the opportunity to experience and model the kind of love and unity that ought to characterize kingdom relationships in our churches, our marriages, our homes, our communities, and our schools. What a testimony, what an apologetic this "communion of saints" as the Apostles' Creed calls it, would be to the watching world. For as Jesus Himself said, "by this all ... will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13: 35).

So the kingdom of God has come and its transforming implications are astounding across the whole spectrum of life for us, for the church, and for the whole world. It is good news, a joy to the world, and it should make us leap, dance and sing for joy!

For our God is the great King who **created** a magnificent kingdom in the beginning, and though it has been attacked by an enemy, ransacked by sin and death and has **fallen**, God in grace and mercy has exercised his royal authority, and **redeemed** his whole creation through His Son and by His Spirit, and is restoring it and us to Himself as citizens and agents of His kingdom reign in the earth. This is why our Lord taught us to pray in this way, saying:

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

Now just imagine what it would have been like to experience the exodus, if you had been a young Jewish man or woman, say about 20 years old at the time! Your parents, brothers and sisters would likely be slaves, forced to serve ruthless Egyptian taskmasters 12-14 hours a day in the hot, scorching Egyptian sun, perhaps helping to build the pyramids. You would be laboring there right along side them. Quite likely some of your family members and close friends would have even died under such harsh and unjust conditions. Your life would be hard and bitter.

But then comes Moses with a word of hope that God was about to act and act He did and you saw it all: the 10 plagues, the Passover, and God's great miracle of parting the Red Sea. You realized God had remembered His covenant. You witnessed how He defeated your enemies and set your people free. You had hope for the future, for the very first time, for the redeeming action of God's kingdom was making all things new!

For you see, our God is a God of food and festivity, beginning with the creation banquet in Genesis and concluding with the marriage supper of the lamb in Revelation, and punctuated by the celebrations of Passover and the Lord's Supper in between.