

The Kingdom of God

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[Definition and Phases of the Kingdom](#)

Our topic for these three seminars is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God in the past and the kingdom of God in the future, but with special reference to the kingdom of God in our day and age. Indeed, I should like to put the main emphasis there. Because of that, it may seem to you that some of the things I shall say will border on the controversial. If that happens, have mercy on me for I am a very old man, and assisted euthanasia is not thought to be ethical! At the same time, let me take advantage of this numerous class to get your help in co-operating. So when you make your contribution or give your answer, or more importantly, correct me where I need to be corrected, I shall do my best to hear you and have a genuinely profitable discussion.

Distinguishing 'kingdoms'

It seems to me good to start off our thinking about the kingdom of God by reminding ourselves of the various meanings and connotations of the word 'kingdom'. It can mean the kingly rule of some sovereign. I quote from Daniel 4 where it says:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation. (v. 34)

Quite clearly those phrases are not concerning the geographical extent of the kingdom of God, but rather its endurance. It is talking of the kingly rule of God. And that is a usage of the term 'kingdom' that occurs elsewhere, and we shall find it helpful to remember it when we come particularly to the New Testament.

Then the word 'kingdom' can have a different connotation. It can refer to the people who accept or live under the rule of some potentate and, in many a context in Scripture, people who live under the rule of God. Such a passage is in Exodus 19, with its many echoes in the New Testament. This is God speaking to Israel at Sinai:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. (vv. 5-6)

Here the term 'kingdom' is not so much referring to the actual rule of the sovereign, but to the people that form his kingdom in the sense of the people that are under his dominion.

The term can be used territorially—the territory over which a king rules. The devil took our Lord up a mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth in a moment—all the various realms in which monarchs and others wielded their power (see Matt 4:8). Then sometimes the kingdom is described as belonging to different spheres. We are told by Paul that God will keep him ‘unto his heavenly kingdom’ (2 Tim 4:18). Or again, our Lord taught his disciples to pray according to certain principles, one of which was, ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt 6:10). In the one case, we are thinking of the heavenly destination to which Paul was looking forward to go. In the second case, it is a prayer that God’s sovereign rule, which holds sway without opposition in heaven, should one day come, and his kingdom and his will be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

Now let us notice, however, an important distinction in the use of the term ‘kingdom of God’. In one sense it refers to the rule of God that always was, and ever will be, and has ever continued without interruption. An example of that would again be in Daniel 4. Here the king is being addressed by Daniel about what is going to happen to him:

Thou shalt be driven from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and thou shalt be made to eat grass as oxen, and shalt be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee; until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. (v. 25)

That has been a permanent truth. There never was a time, and never will be, when that isn’t true. God in his sovereign rule, rules still in the kingdom of men. The fact that evil men come to power does not contradict this assertion, for God puts over it whomever he pleases and sometimes, in his sovereign will, he allows evil men to seize the reins of power in this or that country.

The kingdom of God then, in that sense, always was and always will be. On the other hand, the term ‘kingdom’ is used of what we may call the Messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God in the hands of his Messiah, in the hands of the Son of God, the Son of Man. And Scripture explains that that kingdom did have a beginning. So let us look in Daniel 2 for a typical statement of that truth:

And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. (v. 44)

You’ll notice the initial phrase, ‘In those days shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom’. It wasn’t in existence as Daniel stood there talking to Nebuchadnezzar. It was still in the future. A similar thing is said in Daniel 7, where Daniel says:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. (vv. 13–14)

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed. But we notice the time element: when those beasts are eventually destroyed, then there comes one like unto the Son of Man, and he comes to the ancient of days, and the kingdom is given to him.

That seems to me to be a fundamentally important distinction to make. We talk of the kingdom of God, in the one sense, as God who has always, and will always, rule in the kingdom of men. But that is a very different thing from what we think of if we're thinking of the second coming of our blessed Lord, when he shall come to establish his kingdom over the nations. That is not yet. Though, as I say that, I am aware of serious theologians and honourable believers who hold that our Lord, being the king of kings, is at this moment ruling, or should be ruling, over the kingdoms of men. I am putting forward the suggestion to you that that could possibly be a confusion in the use of terms. God rules in the kingdom of men and has never ceased doing it. As for our Lord, I have the impression that he shall take the reins of government when he comes. But you may think that is the first clear evidence of my aberration from the truth, and I look forward to your corrections if need be!

Let's read another feature about our Lord's Messianic kingdom. This is 1 Corinthians 15, and it is talking about the resurrection. It says that Christ is the firstfruits, and they which are Christ's will be raised at his coming:

Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death. And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all. (vv. 24-26, 28)

He must reign 'until . . .'. So now we have thought about the distinction in the meaning of the different connotations of the term 'kingdom'. Secondly, we have made the distinction between the kingdom of God: the permanent, always existent kingdom of God, and the Messianic kingdom of Christ that had a beginning and, in one sense, will have an end. It seems to me therefore that we have established some very clear parameters in our thinking about this topic.

'Phases' of the kingdom

Now let me observe another basic feature, particularly about the way the New Testament speaks of the kingdom of God. It calls attention to the different phases of that kingdom. So, for instance, we have rightly heard thousands of evangelists preaching the kingdom of God from our Lord's words in John 3, 'Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God' (v. 5). I am presuming that all of us, claiming ourselves to have been born again of water and of the spirit, would claim that we have already entered the kingdom of God. So let me try to see if my ideas are anywhere near the truth. Those of you who profess to have been born again, is there anyone of you that would say you have not yet entered the kingdom of God?

AUDIENCE: Not the one where we're going to govern with him.

DWG: This good man is saying, if you didn't hear him, that we've not yet entered into the kingdom of God in the sense of when he comes to reign. We haven't yet entered that kingdom. Here's a man who's got a question.

AUDIENCE: I consider the kingdom of God to be when we are in heaven.

DWG: When you'll be in heaven? I see. That's very interesting. Let's discuss it. 'Unless a man be born of water and the spirit', now I paraphrase it, 'he will never go to heaven.' Is that your understanding? You'll vote that through, will you? What it's saying, therefore, is that there is a door into heaven, somewhere in the distant future; the terms of getting in are that you shall be born again here in this life and then, when you reach that door, you will enter the kingdom of God. Anyone think to the contrary? There's a good man down there, at the back.

AUDIENCE: Wouldn't the kingdom of heaven be within us?

DWG: Now you've raised a very interesting question. You'd better tell us where that is found.

AUDIENCE: In Luke 17:21: 'Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'

DWG: Thank you very much. Now let me observe the context of that verse and to whom our Lord was speaking when he said it. He had been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, and he answered them, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, "Lo, here! or, lo there!" for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you' (vv. 20–21 KJV). Is it your feeling, good sir, that the kingdom of God was in the Pharisees?

AUDIENCE: No.

DWG: This is important, isn't it, because you will commonly hear from popular preachers that the kingdom of God is in everybody. You only have to let it out, so to speak, and all the potential is there. In my understanding, if you haven't been born again, you are not in the kingdom of God. So perhaps we ought to listen to alternative translations. 'The kingdom of God is within you'—in Greek that ought to be the simple preposition: *en* if it meant 'within'. In fact, the preposition used is *entos* which doesn't mean 'within'. It means, to paraphrase it in modern English, 'The kingdom of God is within our grasp'. In what sense? Well, standing there talking to them, was the king. And he was correcting a one-sided view of the kingdom. I say deliberately 'one-sided' because there is a sense in which it is true. As he went on to say to his disciples:

The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo here! go not away, nor follow after them: for as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day. (Luke 17:22–24)

There is a sense that when he comes in power and great glory to establish his reign, you won't need to tell anybody he's come. You won't have to say, 'Look, you'll find him over

there.' His coming shall be like the lightning from one end of the firmament to the other. All will see him when he comes to reign.

But there's another sense about the kingdom and it seems to me that this is what verses 20–21 are saying. The other view of it—the answer to 'the kingdom of God comes not with observation'—is that you can't watch it come. Why can't you? Because the kingdom of heaven is within your grasp. The king himself was standing there. There were no signs in heaven above, the moon hadn't turned to blood nor the sun been darkened. The earth wasn't shaking or the seas roaring. The kingdom of God, as come in Christ, was not to be observed by that kind of phenomenon. Why not? Here our Lord was talking about the spiritual aspect of his kingdom. And certainly John 3 will support me so far, at least to say that since the kingdom of God is a spiritual thing, you won't even see it if you are not born of God's spirit. And you certainly won't enter it unless you are similarly born of God's spirit because it is a spiritual thing. Anybody like to comment? Don't hesitate.

AUDIENCE: Colossians 1:13: 'He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.'

DWG: Oh, you are a lovely man, because you agree with me! That verse seems to tell me that I am in the kingdom of God's dear Son already. Anybody like to disagree with me on that score? No? Jolly good. So every believer is delivered out of the power and authority of darkness, the kingdom of the devil himself. And you'll notice the verb is in the past tense, 'He has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.' Even better if you translate it like it should be translated, 'Into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.' Oh, that glorious Son of God that expresses God to the full, because he is the image of the invisible God; the express image that makes him known to man, and all the love of an infinitely loving God is expressed in God's Son, the Son of God's love. And we have been translated into his kingdom. Ponder it, my brothers and sisters, and see whether you are going eventually to agree with me that that means that the kingdom of Christ is a presently existing thing. You don't have to decide on that issue until perhaps our third session, but it's one of the Scriptures that I shall appeal to eventually, to say that the kingdom of God's dear Son is a present reality and we have been translated into that kingdom already.

So my thesis is that the kingdom of God, in the hands of his dear Son, is, at this present phase of it, a spiritual kingdom. There will be another phase of it. So, to get that phase, let's think of 1 Corinthians 15:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (v. 50)

In the sense of the kingdom of God that this verse is talking about, we're certainly not in it yet. We are flesh and blood, are we not? Our bodies are subject to decay and corruption. And says the apostle, 'I say this very firmly that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither does corruption inherit incorruption.' What shall be necessary for me to enter that phase of the kingdom? Do tell me. Who would like to venture an opinion on the matter? What will have to happen to me for me to enter that phase of the kingdom?

AUDIENCE: Resurrected.

DWG: Are you hoping I'm going to die first? Well, he has regard to my advanced age, you see! That being said, if by the time the Lord comes again, I'm dead and buried or otherwise disposed of, I shall have to be resurrected to enter that phase of the kingdom. But if I'm still alive when the Lord comes, what shall have to happen to me?

AUDIENCE: You'll have to put on the incorruptible.

DWG: Yes, I'll have to put on the incorruptible. And what is that?

AUDIENCE: A heavenly body.

DWG: A heavenly body. What the Bible calls a spiritual body, not because it's going to be made of spirit. Our Lord demonstrated his resurrection body to the apostles, 'A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have. Handle me and see' (Luke 24:39). His resurrection body had bones and flesh. It is a spiritual body, says Paul. But if you were to ask me about my car, such as it is, and I ask you about your car, and I said, 'What is your car engine?' and you say, 'Mine is a petrol engine', you would think me more than ordinarily stupid if I said, 'Oh, you say that your engine is made of petrol.' No, of course not. A petrol engine isn't made of petrol, or a diesel engine made of diesel, nor an electrical motor made of electricity. When we say it's a petrol engine, we're talking about the power that activates that engine. Our resurrection body will be a spiritual body because it will be activated by spirit.

Oh, glorious thing, but I mustn't be tempted to dwell upon its glories. We are trying to follow out the idea that the kingdom of God, in the hands of our blessed Lord, is in different phases. And I think we have established that, in one phase of it, we are already in that kingdom. He has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. In another phase of it, we're not there yet, and for that to happen, the Lord will have to come, raise the dead and change the living. We shall put on immortality and incorruption.

The first phase

If, therefore, I have sown or re-emphasised that idea that there are phases in the kingdom of our Lord, now I want to talk about the first phase in our Lord's kingdom. And this can begin to be a bit more controversial so strain your eyes and look at it very carefully! Mark 1 says:

Now after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel. (vv. 14–15)

We notice the exactitude of the timing—the temporal clause 'after John was delivered up', not before. Secondly, that point in history was a very special point. It was a point at which 'the time has been fulfilled'. Up until then it hadn't been fulfilled. Now the time was fulfilled. And at the fulfilment of the time, our Lord says 'the kingdom of God is at hand'. The Greek verb is *eggizó* which means to draw near. So literally translated, it means, 'has drawn near'. We must try and be precise as to its exact meaning. Is our Lord saying the

kingdom of God has now come nearer than it was before, but it isn't actually here? Or is it that the Greek verb, 'has drawn near' means virtually 'has arrived'?

We can help ourselves to decide, perhaps, by reading from Matthew 12:

But if I by the spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.
(v. 28)

Here the word leaves no doubt: it has come. The kingdom of God, in the person of our Lord Jesus, acting in the power of God's Holy Spirit, 'has come upon you.' I want to suggest that is the first phase in the kingdom of God—in the sense of the kingdom of God in the hands of the Lord's Christ—and, in his own words, the kingdom of God has come.

We could look back at this moment to Matthew 11:

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
(v. 11)

Why so? In my thinking up to this point, I stand with those who will say the simple answer is that the kingdom of God, or, as here pronounced, the kingdom of heaven, came when John had been delivered up. The Lord told us that explicitly. When John had been delivered up, then Christ came and said, 'Now the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come.' John was the forerunner, pointing to Messiah and the coming of his kingdom. John himself died before that kingdom was established. He was not in it.

Now lest you think that this is arid, systematic theology, and you begin to thank God in your heart that God didn't write his revelation to us in systematic theology, but wrote it in the Bible, let me turn to another point! The kingdom of God in the hands of Christ, what was it like? What kind of a kingdom was it? And what was his rule like for those that accepted it?

AUDIENCE: Can you make a distinction between kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God?

DWG: Thank you for that question. I have only time now to give you a dogmatic answer. The clock is often an excuse for dogmatism! I know the matter is disputed. I personally hold that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are virtually the same, but the difference of terms is a matter of language. But having confessed and made a clean breast of my opinion, please do bring it up in the second and third seminars so that they who have stronger reasons can proclaim them. What I was about to say now is that the so-called Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5–7, are instructions, not so much for getting into the kingdom, but what the standards of behaviour are for those that are in that kingdom.

Under the yoke

But now let me end this session on a better known theme. Here is our Lord speaking:

All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son

willeth to reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt 11:27–30)

Notice our Lord's sense of his divine authority—the Father has given everything into his hand. Now he invites us to come and take his yoke upon our necks. The question is what did he mean by his yoke? Various answers have been given and perhaps there is truth in all of them. One favourite with many people is to quote the habits of ancient farmers as they ploughed their field. They would have two animals pulling the plough, both under a yoke. One side would be an ox and the other would be a donkey, and that was most unsuitable. So God forbid it, for it was not fair on either animal. Some others have said they put a senior ox in the one side of the yoke and a beginning ox in the other side. That made it easy for the beginning ox to get used to bearing the yoke because the bigger ox took the heavier part of the yoke. And that observation has been a comfort to many believers in the difficulties of life. They have felt, yes, they are under the yoke, but it's our blessed Lord who's in the other side of the yoke, and he carries the heavier burden. Let me not rob anybody of that comfort.

I prefer to start my thinking in the Old Testament, in 1 Kings 12. This is the story of what happened when Solomon died and all Israel came to Shechem to make Rehoboam king in the place of his father. The people came to the king and put a proposition to him. They said, 'Your father made our yoke very heavy. Now you make your yoke lighter and we will serve you.' What did they mean? They're talking about his rule as a king over them. In his final days, building temples for all his strange wives, Solomon acted the tyrant and made his rule far more rigorous than he had any right to do. And this is what the people are saying: 'Your father made his yoke intolerably heavy. Now make it lighter, and we will serve you.' The king consulted with the old men and they said, 'Yes, you do that. Make it easier and the people will serve you for ever.' He consulted the young men and they said, 'Nonsense. Make it ten times harder.' And the king listened to the young men.

When the people came again, he said to them, 'My father chastised you with whips. I shall chastise you with scorpions. My little finger will be heavier than my father's loins.' In other words, I'm going to make the yoke even harder. And the people revolted and never came back. So the term 'yoke' is referring to the yoke of a king, his government. Oh, delightful words, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' There rests the soul—forgiveness, peace, acceptance with God—a marvellous promise made true to all who come to him. Then notice the second bit, 'Take my yoke'. He is the king, and what he asks of us, and expects us to do, is not only to believe him and receive forgiveness of sins, but to take his kingly yoke upon us. What kind of a yoke will it be? Oh, the wonder of the answer Christ gives to that age-old problem, 'Come take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' You can see in which way my mind is going, can't you?

You have a whole day to think up your answers and problems, and disputes, and new ideas, and I welcome them sincerely. But as we go, let's revel in the wonder of it. Oh, the wonder of him who is heir to the Father, everything in this universe and beyond given into his hand, who invites us to come and he will give us rest. And then he offers us his yoke and

expects us to take it, assuring us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Let us give him thanks for that, and say in response,

King of my life, I crown Thee now,
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.¹

¹ Jennie E. Hussey (1874–1958), ‘King of my life, I crown Thee now.’

The Kingdom at Christ's Return

This is the second of three seminars devoted to the topic of the kingdom of God—in particular, the kingdom of God in the hands of his dear Son. We are considering the different phases in our Lord's kingdom, and yesterday we were thinking of that phase that began when John the Baptist was arrested and put in prison, and our Lord came to Galilee and began to preach 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Mark 1:15). And we saw further evidence that, by saying it is at hand, he meant it had come. Matthew records his saying to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:28: 'If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.' So that was what we were considering in our first seminar.

I want to move on now to talk about the kingdom of God in its other phase—when our Lord shall come again. And if we can, we will also consider the kingdom of God as it relates to this present time. Now it is our habit, as was established in the first seminar, that whenever I say anything wrong, which is quite frequently, you are allowed to protest with a loud voice, raise your hands or stamp your feet, so that we may all contribute and help one another to a firm and a clear understanding of the term 'the kingdom of God'. I therefore call upon you now to speak or for ever hold your peace, over those difficulties that you felt yesterday, but didn't have time to voice, and wanted to protest but were not able because of the exigencies of the time. Any questions now then? Or suggestions, protests or contributions? Ah, here's a good man leading. Yes, thank you, sir.

AUDIENCE: I just had one question and if you're going to be answering this as you progress, then we could skip the question and it'll be answered as we go. The verse was quoted from Colossians 1:13, 'He has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son'. And yet you also mentioned earlier that the kingdom is coming. In what sense are we in the kingdom now versus that coming kingdom?

DWG: That is a marvellous question. I'm so glad you raised it because that is going to be the burden of our consideration in this seminar and in the next one. Because it is my opinion, you may have feared it or guessed it already, that I am going to say that the kingdom of God, in the hands of his dear Son, has a very practical relevance to us now in this present age. So I fulfil your advice and will answer your question as we go along! Any other protests or questions or contributions? Don't be shy. It's you, sir.

AUDIENCE: With regard to the Messianic kingdom, how does that relate to the throne of David? I'm thinking of Isaiah 9:7: 'Upon the throne of David, and upon the kingdom'.

DWG: You mean, for instance, in the words of the angel to Mary? He should give unto him the throne of his father, David? Well, I myself think that that lies in the future. I shall be quoting as a key verse, given us by our Lord for the understanding of these things, Psalm 110:1 where God, Jehovah, says to the psalmist's Lord, that is the Messiah, 'Sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.' So in that verse quoted by our Lord, there were three phases. There was the phase first of his incarnation. Had the Messiah for ever been seated at the right hand of God there would be no point in God's inviting him to come and sit at his right hand. That very invitation presupposes a time when he wasn't sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. 'Come sit at my right hand', a verse quoted many times in the New Testament of our Lord's ascension and accession at the right hand of God. Now, secondly, the Psalm says, 'Sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.' This present dispensation, to use a technical term, was foreseen in the Old Testament: there was to be a period between our Lord's ascension and the accession at the right hand, on the one hand, and then his enemies being put under his feet when he comes again.

So the final fulfilment of those prophecies—he was to sit on the throne of his father David—I understand then to relate to his coming again. It is a very different thing from what James mentioned, about the restoring of the tent of David which has fallen down. The tent of David is not the temple in Jerusalem. It is, rather, David's house and dynasty, and with the coming of our Lord, born of the seed of David according to the flesh, now exalted at the right hand of God, he is the Son of David, par excellence. I don't think therefore that David's house has collapsed, but the time of his being manifest to sit upon David's throne might be still in the future. Does that come anywhere near beginning to make suggestions in the direction of answering your question?

AUDIENCE: Yes, it does very much. Thank you.

John the Baptist and his question

For time's sake, shall we proceed? I suspect I shall say a lot of provocative and erroneous things to bring forth all sorts of questions. But Matthew tells us, and so does Luke, that John the Baptist, the forerunner of our blessed Lord, when he found himself in prison, and Christ apparently made no attempt to come and release him, had certain misgivings. Now, some people say it would be wrong to suggest that John the Baptist had any uncertainty in his faith. How could he, they say, when he was the divinely appointed forerunner of the Messiah? Nevertheless, we are faced with the fact that at a certain stage he sent messengers to the Lord Jesus, and they were to say to the Lord, 'Art thou he that should come, [i.e. the one that was prophesied] or do we look for another?' (see Matt 11:2-3).

People who are afraid of suggesting that John the Baptist had any tremor in his faith whatsoever, suggest that John here had hit upon a tactic. He had announced the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah. He had baptised him, the God-given sign; he had seen the Spirit descend upon him as a dove from heaven, the sign that he is indeed the one that baptises with the Holy Spirit. So John the Baptist, therefore, had no real doubts. But he was a trifle impatient and couldn't quite understand why Christ, in his preaching, didn't get up and constantly say, 'Look here, crowd, first thing for you to notice is, I am the Messiah. Get that

straight to start with.' The fact is our Lord didn't seem to claim to be Messiah, not explicitly. In fact, sometimes when he healed people, he told them not to tell anybody. And John the Baptist was getting a little impatient, according to this theory, and couldn't make out what Christ was actually doing. So he hit upon this strategy. He would wait until our Lord was surrounded by a large crowd, and he would have two of his disciples placed in the crowd so that they could pop the question, 'Are you indeed the one the prophets prophesied of?' And our Lord would be obliged to answer.

I myself think it was more serious than that. According to the records in Matthew and Mark, John had preached that, not only was this the Messiah come, but he preached what the Messiah would do.

His fan is in his hand, he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor; and he will gather the wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire. (Matt 3:12)

And when the Pharisees came, John told them straight, 'You'd better start repenting. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees, gentlemen, and every tree that bears not good fruit will be cut down. You'd better start repenting very quickly' (see Matt 3:10). That was John's message. Not only would Christ baptise with the Holy Spirit, not only was he the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world, but he had come to execute the judgment of God.

And then Herod put John in prison. What do you suppose John was expecting Jesus to do? It wasn't a mere personal matter. As forerunner of the Messiah, John had declared that Christ would burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire, and cut down the trees that didn't bear fruit. And this evil woman, Herod's wife, if you could call her that, had thrown him in prison and was determined to end his life. Why didn't Christ come and deliver him? There were footsteps down the path. Perhaps this was the Lord? No, it was the gaoler, with his bread and water. And eventually he sends to Christ, 'Are you really the one that should come?'

John was expressing what nowadays we would call the problem with evil. When I was a student years ago, trying to learn a little Hebrew, there was in the class with me a Jewish student. He came from Germany; his parents had perished in Hitler's gas chambers. And I remember on one occasion his saying to me, 'David, your Jesus is not the Messiah; he cannot be the Messiah because the Scriptures prophesied that when the Messiah came he would put down evil, and your Jesus hasn't done anything of the sort. And don't just stand there telling me that he set up a spiritual kingdom. That's only an idea you Christians cooked up when your expectations of Jesus didn't get fulfilled.' So the question of how the Messiah would deal with evil is a fundamental question to our faith, is it not?

The day of vengeance

Let's look at Luke 4, the famous passage because it's programmatic. Our Lord visited Nazareth where he was brought up, and they handed him the scroll and he read the passage from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovering of sight to the blind, To set at liberty them that are bruised To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18–19, cf. Isa 61:1–2)

He closed the book and began to say, ‘Today is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears’ (v. 21). And preachers galore have rightly commented upon this, how wonderful it is that he closed the book exactly where he did, and said, ‘This much is fulfilled’, because the very next phrase was, ‘the day of vengeance of our God’ (Isa 61:2), and he had certainly not come to fulfil that at his first coming.

But now let us notice what exactly the day of vengeance of our God meant for his contemporary Jewish people. Let’s look back at Isaiah 61 and see its context. You see the passage our Lord quoted at Isaiah 61:2, ‘To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God.’ What day of vengeance? Well, let’s look at chapter 63 and here we have depicted one that comes from Edom, with dyed garments:

I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine vat? [And he replies] I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with me: yea, I trod them in mine anger and trampled them in my fury; and their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment. For the day of vengeance was in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. (vv. 1–5)

Notice the coupling of ideas: ‘the day of vengeance . . . and the year of my redeemed’. Because Isaiah is not talking about vengeance in the sense of revenge; he is talking about the day of vengeance when God will rise up and avenge his people that had been desperately persecuted by the wicked. The people in the synagogue at Nazareth would have been delighted had our Lord proceeded to that phrase about the day of vengeance of our God, and said, ‘That is going now to be fulfilled.’ In their understanding, that would be God sending the Messiah to rescue his people, to see that justice is done, to avenge them of their adversaries. And when he indicated he had not come to do that bit, many, like John the Baptist, were disappointed. He had not come to do it yet.

Our Lord told a parable about this very thing. It is found in Luke 18. He told a parable to the effect that men are always to pray and not to faint. And the parable ran like this: There was a widow in a certain town and she came to the local judge, pleading with him to avenge her—not revenge, avenge—because the local businessmen had been cheating her in some way or other. And she looked to the judge to intervene and avenge her of her adversaries and see that justice was done. All she wanted was for the judge to fulfil his responsibility and avenge her but the judge at first wouldn’t. I suspect he probably played golf with the businessmen, and so he did nothing. But the woman couldn’t be satisfied. She kept coming and coming until the judge said, ‘Though I fear neither God nor man, yet if I don’t deal with

this woman in a moment and do what she wants, she'll destroy me.' And so he intervened at last, and avenged her (see Luke 18:1-7).

And Christ said, 'Shall not God avenge his elect who cry out to him day and night?' This is what we have to pray for. Some people say it's no Christian prayer; a Christian should never pray that prayer. Well, our Lord told us we should. We're always to pray because the very character of God is involved. The unrighteous judge didn't care for God or man, yet he was moved by the prayers of the woman, eventually, to see that justice was done. And shall not God do so? What's our estimate of the character of God? Will he not one day intervene and see that justice is done? Of course he will. And to give up praying is to suggest that God is more unprincipled than that unjust judge. The Psalms have raised the question, 'Oh thou, to whom vengeance belongeth, how long, O Lord, doth thou not intervene to save us from our persecutors?' (Ps 94). How many Jews went to their death in Hitler's camps, praying in their hearts that prayer from Psalm 94? Our Lord was aware of it, of course. Part of the Messiah's programme would be precisely that. Psalm 96 had the answer to it, where the psalmist suddenly calls upon the trees, the mountains, the woods, the rivers, and everything else, to clap their hands, for he says:

Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth [in the sense of now begun to reign]. For he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness. (Ps 96:10, 13)

That's part of the Christian gospel too. Paul preached it to the Athenians on the Areopagus:

Because he [God] hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained. (Acts 17:31)

Our Lord himself told a parable in Matthew 13 of what the timetable was going to be; the famous parable of the Wheat and the Tares. The farmer sowed good seed in his ground. It brought forth wheat, eventually, but while he slept, the enemy put in tares and when the wheat and the tares began to grow so that they could be distinguished as to which was which, the farmer's servants came and said, 'Would you that we should root up the tares?' And the farmer said, 'No, let both grow to harvest lest attempting to root up the tares now, you root up the wheat as well by accident.' The interpretation the Lord gave of the parable was this: that the field is the world—not the church; pray notice that and don't believe St Augustine on that score!—that the field is the world. The wheat are the sons of the kingdom, the tares are the sons of the evil one. Christ will not attempt to intervene to root up the tares until the end of the age.

This is the programme that the Messiah himself gives, and his answer to John was to tell his servants to witness what they had been seeing with their eyes the miracles that he did of healing and mercy. Jesus has given them the evidence that he is the Messiah, for the miracles of healing and the message of mercy and his gospel message are demonstrating the fulfilment of Isaiah 61. But fulfilling the day of vengeance—that is avenging his people, and the day of judgment upon the ungodly—that waits for the future phase of his coming.

Now, let me stop. You're not here to be preached at, my apologies. Yes, there's a man has a question.

AUDIENCE: Isaiah 61 also says that he will deliver the people from prison, but John is not thinking about them?

DWG: Well, you could actually think that, couldn't you? The question was, what kind of a prison was he getting people out of at that time? So that's a very apt question.

AUDIENCE: Could you explain the difference between vengeance and avenge.

DWG: Revenge is if you hit me on the nose, I get my revenge and hit you on the nose, possibly twice over for good measure!

AUDIENCE: So then if the widow was avenged, she would get what was rightfully hers, but because the judge exacted a penalty, that's revenge?

DWG: If somebody pains you and you get your own back on him, that's revenge. But when you take your case to the court and the judge gives sentence, he's not executing revenge; he's the impartial judge, but he's seeing that justice is done: that's avenge. The Greek has different words for it so it makes it clear: our language has its limitations that confuse people! Lots of questions. Here's another.

AUDIENCE: I have just a question. If John the Baptist was expecting the Messiah, how can he declare, 'This is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world'?

DWG: That is a very perceptive question, because you'd have thought he'd have sensed by that that the Lord had to suffer, for how could the Lamb take away the sin of the world without being sacrificed.

AUDIENCE: In my mind, if he was expecting the Messiah to come and reign, there is no suffering.

DWG: Well, I can't answer for John the Baptist. I say this seriously, you'll have to ask him when you get to heaven. He may rebuke you for listening to that fellow Gooding, and give you another interpretation! He may not have seen that the judgment had to wait until after the sacrifice. The two on the road to Emmaus had read the Scriptures talking about the future judgment and the victories that the Messiah would bring (see Luke 24). They hadn't quite got it that the Messiah must first suffer and enter his glory. And the prophets, so Peter tells us so diligently, were sure the Messiah was coming, but they searched at what time, and what kind of a time, the Spirit of Christ that was in them had indicated when he spoke of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow (see 1 Pet 1:11). It wasn't always clear to the Jews the order that those events must take. There's a question over there, I think.

AUDIENCE: I have a comment about what you said in regards to the difference between revenge and vengeance or avenge. It's possible that the judge may deem it necessary that someone was struck a blow or something like that, and that nothing would be given in return, and that that was their just desserts, I guess you could say. Whereas that person may deem that it's his right to have revenge. I don't know if I'm making myself clear, but I think the judge is one who holds the right to make that judgment as to whether something should be returned like Jesus said, 'You were taught eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, but I say to

you that if someone strikes you on the cheek, then you should turn the other cheek.' It's a whole different economy, a different way of looking at things.

DWG: I'm not sure I've got your question. Are you saying that a judge might impartially decide that, because someone had injured you, he might give you the right to go and injure him to get your own back on him?

AUDIENCE: No, the contrary. The judge may deem it that it was right that I got what I got in the first place.

DWG: I may not quite have gathered you, but your question is useful to illustrate these different points. What our Lord said to his people in the Sermon on the Mount, as to how they were to behave, we notice that he behaved himself exactly the same. When he was buffeted, he endured it, in other words, turned the other cheek. When he suffered, he threatened not, Peter says. But Peter adds that he committed himself to him that judges righteously. Christ did not teach that there will never be executed the righteous judgment of God upon sinners. They who crucified him will reap the judgment due to them unless they repent. Christ himself, as he went to the cross, committed himself to God who judges righteously. And when the women came, kindly women that they were, and wept to see that young man, Jesus, being so cruelly tortured and about to be crucified, he spoke to them a little sternly, 'Don't you weep for me, start weeping for yourselves.' For if this kind of thing is done in a moderately civilised country, with established law and order, when the very authorities break their own rules to crucify an innocent man, if these things are done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry tree, when men's ego comes to its great harvest and its destruction? What then? You'll call on the mountains to fall on you because the righteous judge will come and execute judgment (see Luke 23:28–31).

Well if we are happy with that so far, all I'm doing now is to state the very obvious and commonplace truth that, according to Christ, there were to be phases in his kingdom, and the first phase fulfilled the opening verses of Isaiah 61. But the fulfilment of the day of vengeance, and then the execution of the wrath of God, such as depicted in Isaiah 63 and in the book of the Revelation likewise, as he treads the winepress of the wrath of God upon the enemies of God, that was to be not in the first phase, but at his second coming. It's what I shall call the third phase, but you may be content to call it the second phase. But it's coming— that phase when he shall come in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels.

Christ's second coming

Now that prospect raises the question: the Old Testament never said there were to be two comings, did it? I can't think of a passage that says there will be a first coming of Christ, and a second coming. There are prophecies that are difficult to explain if it were all intended to happen at once. For instance, one said he would come on a donkey, the other said he would come in the clouds of heaven. Difficult to do it simultaneously, both at the same time, I imagine! But there is no explicit statement in the Old Testament that there were to be two comings. It is a very big part of our Christian gospel, nevertheless, that there are to be two

comings. There was one in the past, and there will be a second coming. Where did we get the idea from?

We got it from the Lord, of course. He told the disciples he was going away, much to their surprise and consternation. If he went, he would come again (see John 14:3). But it was also in the Old Testament, not explicitly, but in a verse I've already quoted,

The LORD said unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. (Ps 110:1)

This is the verse from the Old Testament most frequently quoted in the New Testament, because it goes back to our Lord. I mustn't be tempted to go on down that line, but that verse is a compendium of Christian doctrine and is useful for establishing all kinds of things. It's useful to establish the deity of the Messiah. Our Lord used it in his arguments with the Jews in the temple courts. It's used also in the book of the Hebrews to point out that the sacrifice of Christ is finished, the work of sacrificing is done. Our high priest doesn't stand: he has sat down at the right hand of God. And Hebrews observes that with the sacrifice having been completed, all our Lord is waiting for now is, 'until I make thine enemies thy footstool.' That's what he's waiting for. And, of course, he spoke the parable we've already quoted, 'Let the tares grow with the wheat until the harvest comes' (Matt 13:30). It then is Christian doctrine and it goes back to our blessed Lord himself.

Has that second coming, the coming of the kingdom, anything to do with us? Or is it something we may make a note in our diary for the year whenever we think it will happen, and that it's something that's going to happen, so thank the Lord for that, and now we forget it? Or has the future phase of the kingdom of God any relevance for our lives now? Well, let me put it personally to you. The coming phase of the kingdom of Christ, when he shall come in power and great glory—will it have any impact on your life? Would anybody here like to confess its impact, if it means something to you, or has helped you in your Christian life? Oh, there's a man.

AUDIENCE: In 1 John 4:2–3, I would like to hear what you have to say about that verse that says 'Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.' So it's not a future tense, but my understanding is that it's a present and ongoing tense. And so that coming is relevant to us now because it's not talking of something that's just to happen in the future.

DWG: Well, in verse 2, 'Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come', that is a perfect participle in Greek. 'Is come' is in the old English sense of 'has come'. 'The master is come and calls for you.' That is old English for 'has come'. Modern French is similar, *Je suis venu*, 'I am come', meaning 'I have come'.

AUDIENCE: I understood that it meant 'has' or 'is' come and 'is coming'.

DWG: You shouldn't trust me, you know—apprentice that I am in Greek! But as far as I know, this is a perfect participle. You could argue it means 'has come' and the effect of that coming remains, but normally you wouldn't use that perfect participle of a future event.

The Kingly Rule of Christ

When we broke off in our second seminar, I was asking the question, what impact does the coming phase of the kingdom of God have on our lives? I can tell you, if that saves a bit of time, some of the impact it should have. For instance, it led to the conversion of the dying thief, did it not? For in the moment of his surrender to Christ, he said, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom.' It's very interesting to follow in the gospel of Luke, the train of thought that seems to have gone through that criminal's head as he hung on the cross.

Justice and judgment

At first he abused Christ like his fellow criminal, but then apparently he began to think, as best he could within the pain of his crucifixion, and turned to rebuke the other criminal: 'Dost thou not fear God,' said he, 'seeing we are in the same condemnation?' (23:40). The same as who? Not just that 'we two are in the same condemnation', but, 'we are in the same condemnation as this man.' And how was that a ground for fearing God? Why because, as the thief explained to his fellow criminal, 'We receive justly the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing amiss.' But then, how is that a ground for fearing God? Well, it's a very important ground. It raises the whole question of where we get our sense of justice from. And that's a very profound instinct in the human deep-seated conscience.

The little child whose brother has just snatched away his toy, and mother hasn't noticed the crime, and she sides with her elder son because he's a nice lad who's got the toy. And the young chap says, 'That isn't fair.' But where on earth did the young fellow get the idea that this world was meant to be fair? Where did he get that from? Instinctive, isn't it, put there by our Creator. And if our Creator stands behind our basic sense of justice, then the fact that, in this world, horrible injustice can be done and an innocent man condemned to die just like us criminals—'we deserve it, he didn't'—what is to be deduced from that? The dying thief is fast coming to the notion that there would have to be a future judgment after this life. And do you know what? He suddenly felt he wanted there to be one. Isn't that strange? He'd done all he could to avoid justice throughout his long life, and now, as he came to die, he was hoping there was going to be justice because these fellows that had crucified him, not to put too fine a point on it, were the most specious hypocrites. If there was no justice, they would win. And he hoped there would be a day of judgment. Put it to your unconverted friends, 'Don't you want there to be a day of judgment?' It's an integral part of our gospel, you know. There's going to be a day of judgment.

‘Clap your hands,’ says Psalm 47:1. Who in his senses would want evil to go on for ever unpunished? You begin to see how, thanks to the spirit of God, this criminal’s conscience was working. Jesus would come again; he would come in his kingdom and there would be a judgment. And then, of course, he faced the question, ‘And what shall happen to me?’ What had he heard of our Lord—how much had he heard? Did he hear him pray for those that crucified him—did that give him some hope? And he prayed his prayer of repentance, ‘Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom.’ He hadn’t been in the habit of obeying any kingdom in his criminal life, but now he found the very idea to be his salvation, that the Messiah would allow him to come and obey him in his kingdom. That’s a proper-going kind of conversion, isn’t it? It’s not merely getting my sins forgiven and then living as I please; it’s a request to be allowed to enter the kingdom and obey the King.

Worthy of the kingdom?

It should have an effect on us, surely. May I quote you from what Paul writes to the Thessalonians?

Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God; to the end that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: if so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power.

To which end, we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire of goodness and every work of faith, with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:5–7, 11–12)

And now we have a doctrinal problem, don’t we? What does Paul mean when he’s praying for these folks that God would count them worthy of that coming kingdom? Is entrance into that kingdom dependent upon our merit? No, indeed not. The way into his kingdom, be it his millennial kingdom or his eternal kingdom, is told us quite precisely: ‘Blessed are they who wash their robes, [that is, in the blood of the Lamb (see Rev 7:14)] that they may have the right to the tree of life and enter into the gates of the city’ (Rev 22:14). It is altogether through the blood of the Lamb that we are cleansed and made worthy to enter his kingdom.

Well then, what is Paul talking about, that God may count you worthy of the kingdom for which you suffer? It seems to me that the answer is simply at the level of practice, and I simplify it with my childish mind. The Lord comes and he takes us up to be with him. He comes in glory to execute his wrath on unbelievers, some of whom we may have worked with in our place of employment. When they become aware that we’ve been taken to glory, but they are consigned to perdition, what will they think? Do they say, ‘Well, yes, she had very peculiar ideas. She was kind of religious, but to give her her due, she never told the smutty jokes that the rest of us told. She was always keeping time. She wasn’t ashamed of her Saviour, as she called him, and she spent her time and money and energy, and really served him. We thought she was a crank, but to give her her due, she really believed it, and

lived it. The Lord has taken her to heaven? Well, jolly good stuff.’ Or will they say about that man, Gooding, ‘Him? Well, he joined the rest of us in our riotous behaviour and in our swindling of the income tax in our business lives. Oh, yes, he went to church on Sunday, as far as we could tell, but he was an old hypocrite when it came to business. He didn’t deserve to be in that kingdom.’ What will the world say?

‘Pray God,’ says Paul, ‘that he may count you worthy, regard you as worthy, not in a sense that you deserve or merit salvation, but that you have lived worthily of the calling with which you were called’ (v. 11). Tell me, before I go further into other extravagances; am I anywhere near the truth in my interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 1? My question being, what does the apostle mean, praying that God will count us worthy of the kingdom for which we suffer? Oh, there’s one, I have one question here coming.

AUDIENCE: I would agree, because Paul says, ‘Walk worthy of the vocation with which you’re called’ (Eph 4:1).

DWG: Yes, I’m glad you agree, sir. I’m just a little frightened lest you agree too soon! But you agree. Anybody else got a comment on it? I ask because, in my innocence, I can’t remember when I last heard a sermon preached on it, so to speak. I’ve heard multitudes of sermons saying salvation is by grace through faith. Amen, I say, because it is absolute truth. I haven’t heard so many sermons preached on this bit, but perhaps in your church it’s constantly preached there anyway!

So the thought of that coming kingdom is meant to have a practical effect on our lives now, as we have a sense of the age to come. To quote one more example, when our Lord took the apostles up the transfiguration mount, according to Matthew, he said that what they were to see was the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. It was a vision of the Lord coming in his kingdom, helping to explain to Peter and company what our Lord meant when he earlier said, ‘He who would save his life or his soul shall lose it, and he that is prepared to lose his life or his soul, shall save it. What shall a man give in exchange for his soul or his life? What shall it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lose his own soul or life?’ (see Matt 16: 25–26).

Why, Mr Preacher, do you keep using the alternative—is it ‘life’ or is it ‘soul’? Why don’t you come straight? Well, because the Greek word is *psyche*, and it has many meanings. It can be translated ‘life’ and is used to mean simply physical life in some places. In other places, it’s the word our Lord would use of that bit of us that survives death. ‘Fear not them that destroy the body, and after that there’s no more they can do; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell’ (see Matt 10:28). ‘He that loves his . . .’—how would you have me translate it, his life or his soul?—‘shall lose it’ (John 12:25). The gospel preachers, good men they are too, will ask you, ‘Have you got a soul? How is your soul getting on? Is your soul saved?’ Happy you are if you can say, ‘Yes, my soul is saved. I can tell you the very date and the time when the light dawned in and I trusted the Lord, and my soul was saved and never will perish.’ Thank God for that, but can I ask you a question? This soul of yours that is saved, where do you keep it? Have you got it in a nice box and put it in a vault in the bank so that when the Lord comes, you’ll say, ‘Lord, give me half a minute, I’m just going to the bank to get my soul’?

Which kingdom are you living for?

Well, you can't do that with a soul, can you? What do you do with it? A soul, as you see, is a life, and not just your physical life but all things that go with it. Your time, for instance, and your love and your ambitions. You have to spend your life, don't you? You have to spend your time. You have to spend your energies. You have to spend your love. You say your soul is saved, thank the Lord for that. You still have to spend it, and the question is, what will you spend it on? When Peter heard that our Lord was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, he objected most strongly: 'Lord, you've got that wrong. You need more positive thinking,' said he. 'You're going to be a success.' Peter had invested a tremendous bit of his soul, so to speak, in Christ. He'd left his job, he'd gone away from home, he'd put his energies into preaching for Christ, gone round Palestine preaching for Christ, hours he'd spent, time, love, affection. If Christ was going to be crucified, the whole lot had gone down the drain. 'No, Lord, you're not going to die. No, you'll not be crucified, you're going to sit on a throne and I'm going to sit right beside you.'

And our Lord had to correct him, 'Peter, you must be careful. He that loves his life, his soul, and tries to keep it, shall lose it. He that loses it for my sake, shall keep it' (see Matt 16:-25). How could you expound the conundrum? Because there are two ages: this present age and the coming age. There's a coming age when he shall come in the glory of his Father and the holy angels, and we shall see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And the question is, which age are you spending your soul on? Spend it for the age to come, and you keep it. Spend it on unworthy things, and you lose it, don't you? 'Don't love the world,' says John, 'because the world passes away' (see 1 John 2:15-17). And in the sense that John means the term 'world', anything we spend on the world is but temporary. The world passes away. Spend it on things that are going to last. Invest in that coming age.

AUDIENCE: I appreciate what you're saying. I think I'm getting the gist of it, but when you emphasise soul, I'm wondering exactly what you mean by that. When I think of Paul in his closing prayer in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, he prays that they will be wholly sanctified, in spirit, soul and body. I'm wondering what difference you're making between spirit and soul? Man is a triune being, I take it, and that is one verse that fine men of God misquote, because they speak of body, soul and spirit. I think the Holy Spirit has a reason in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. I think it's very significant that the Holy Spirit puts the spirit first, and it's 'spirit, soul and body'. And, therefore, when you say 'soul', I'm struggling with my understanding of soul there, or spirit.

DWG: You'll forgive my saying it, but I am delighted to hear you struggle. When it comes to defining soul, I struggle too!

AUDIENCE: Correct me with your wisdom, but I believe often in Scripture, in our English Scriptures, the word 'soul' is used where we might use the word 'spirit'.

DWG: Well, there are occasions when Scripture itself uses the term 'soul' and 'spirit' almost interchangeably. Things that are said of the soul are said of the spirit and therefore people have concluded that they are two terms which appear to be different but actually mean the same thing in the end, and apply to the same thing. For myself, I think that can be generally

true, but there are certain things that are said of the spirit where you could not possibly put in place the term 'soul'. 'The words I speak unto you, they are soul, they are life?' No, they are spirit, they are life. 'God is soul?' No, God is spirit. There are areas where soul and spirit are two different things. They may overlap, but I think they're not the same thing exactly. But, sir, there is only time that constrains me, but I'm glad you raised it. I think it's a question to be faced, what do we mean by 'soul'? That God aims to sanctify spirit, soul and body—that is so. Our bodies are not completely sanctified at the moment. God intends to complete his work. And the question of our souls likewise comes up.

And I'll give you another reason for thinking seriously about these things—not so as to argue with one another and fall out and form another denomination! But it's there to think about because, as you now know, there are evangelicals who deny the soul completely. They'll say man is a soul, not that he has a soul, and they regard the human being as being nothing but physics—non-reductionist physicalism, it's called. They believe that when the Lord comes, there will be a resurrection. There'll be a resurrection of the body, but God has the computer programme, or whatever you call it, the cell index or whatever, and can rebuild us, and is not short of potassium to do it with. But there's no soul, they say. And in our conversation with our scientist friends, in the advancing brain science now, if we meet at that level at all, we must be prepared to give a reason for the hope within us that there is a non-material part to the human being. But on this matter of soul, I recommend it to you. I make the observation that some of our thinking has been infiltrated by Greek philosophy. It was Plato that taught and used the term 'immortal soul'. You'll not find the phrase 'immortal soul' in Scripture. The soul lives on, yes. You won't find the actual phrase 'immortal soul' in Scripture, and sometimes I think we've borrowed a little bit too much from the Greek philosophers!

The kingdom of God and the church

But now, if you give me permission, I must move on because I promised to talk about the present phase of the kingdom of God, and to argue my thesis that the kingdom of God does have to do with us believers in this present age. If you say, 'But why should that ever have been in doubt?' it rests on a very extensive knowledge of Scripture. Because, whereas in the gospels you will hear much said about the kingdom of God, when you come to the Epistles the change is noticeable. The references to the kingdom of God in the Epistles are very rare compared with their occurrence in the gospels. From that, many have concluded that is because the kingdom of God is a Jewish concept. Our Lord came and offered the kingdom to the Jews. They refused him and his kingdom, and the kingdom was put in abeyance, and now in this age we have the church. The kingdom of God will be resumed at our Lord's second coming in power when Israel is restored. But, really speaking, the kingdom of God is nothing to do with us, and they will cite the obvious fact that nowhere is Jesus called the King of the church.

It is a valid observation that the Epistles do not use the term 'kingdom of God' anywhere near as frequently as the gospels do. And it is also right, surely, to point out that the church, typical of this age, is not, in its terminology, co-extensive with the kingdom. 'Church' isn't

the same thing as 'kingdom of God'. If I may use a humble illustration: I was born under the reign of his majesty King George V, and his gracious queen, Queen Mary, who was a believer and used to give away the tract, *Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment* to her officers and men and anybody else she came across, because she was brought to assurance of salvation through George Cutting's tract. But now, under his majesty King George V, his queen, of course, was special to him. Was she in his kingdom or not? At the coronation of the king, she was obliged to come and kneel before him, and accept him as her sovereign. She wasn't like the rest of us. She had a marvellously privileged position, and I should find it very difficult to say that she wasn't in the kingdom. She was his bride, but she was subject to his rule as everybody else was.

But let me not content myself with the marriage. Let's look at some verses that talk to us in this day and age, people in the church and Gentile church at that, to whom the kingdom of God is meant to be a very present reality. This is Paul talking:

Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will; and I will know, not the word of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness? (1 Cor 4: 18-21)

That's a typically Hebrew way of talking. It doesn't mean that the kingdom of God is nothing to do with words. The words that are given us are inspired of God, but it's a Hebrew way of talking where we would say that the kingdom of God is not merely words, but it's in power. 'And you'll find it out,' says Paul, 'if I come to you with a rod that the kingdom of God [that is, the kingly rule of God; one of its meanings we noted in our first seminar], that the kingly rule of God in Corinth, in your church, is not just in words but in power.' That solemn exhortation reminds me, at least, that the kingly rule of God is relevant not only to me as a personal individual, but relevant to situations in the churches.

Let's go to Romans 14, shall we:

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (v. 17)

Once more, it's a typical Hebrew way of talking about it. The kingdom of God is not anything to do with eating and drinking? Well of course it has a lot to do with eating and drinking. We're not to get drunk, to start with, and we mustn't be gluttons. And the kingdom of God will talk to us eventually about our food and clothes, and things. But this Hebrew way of talking means that the kingdom of God is not simply about, or predominantly about, food and drink. The kingly rule of God is predominantly about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We should take the context into account, of course. Paul, in this chapter, is talking about the difference between eating meat and eating simply vegetables. This not the same problem as dealt with in 1 Corinthians 8 where it was a question of whether or not you should eat things offered to idols. The offering of stuff to idols could carry with it much more serious implications. Paul is not discussing that here. It is whether it is right to eat meat or should you eat only vegetables. Secondly, it's

about days. Should you regard one day as special or should you regard all days alike? And, of course, some Christians were thinking one thing and other Christians were thinking another, and how do you settle the point?

Paul is pointing out that in these matters, which are technically called 'matters of indifference' by the theologians, Scripture doesn't explicitly say. And where you have things where the Scriptures do not explicitly say this or that, you mustn't lay down your own rules for other people. You must respect their conscience. Why is that—because, ultimately, it doesn't matter what they do? Well, in a sense, you'd be right to say that, but in another sense, you'd be very wrong. Because, as Paul points out, the man who has a conscience against eating meat, it's to the Lord he has a conscience. He feels it would displease the Lord if he ate meat. Don't you interfere with that man: to his own Lord, he does it, and you're not his Lord. You feel that you can happily eat meat, and it's to the Lord you eat it. Well, carry on eating it. Don't let the other chap blame you and despise you or criticise you for doing it. He has no Scriptural basis on which to criticise you. He disagrees with you very strongly, but there's no Scriptural basis. You eat it to the Lord because you feel it would please the Lord and it's perfectly alright. Likewise, one man keeps a special day: he keeps it to the Lord. You make all days alike: you make them all alike to the Lord.

The principle now at stake in these matters of indifference is not, 'Well, thank God there are lots of things where we can do as we like because Scripture doesn't say.' It's not quite that. It is that we must make up our own mind, and that is a very valuable thing because now we've got to make up our own mind personally before the Lord Jesus in the conscious knowledge that one day the Lord will come. We shall stand before his judgment seat and we shall have to be prepared to answer his questions. You come to the Lord, and the Lord says to you, 'My dear man, such and such a day, you ate a lot of meat, didn't you?'

'Yes, Lord, I did.'

'And in your heart of hearts, you felt it was wrong and it would displease me, didn't you?'

'Well, to be honest, Lord, yes, I did. I did feel it would displease you.'

'Why did you eat it then?'

'Because that brother Gooding told me I was to eat it and said "Don't be so daft not eating it".'

And the Lord will say, 'Did you say Gooding? Oh, yes, Gooding. Did he die for you? What do you mean doing something that displeased me because Gooding said it?'

This is the rule of God in the hands of his Son, in day-to-day living.

It's a good thing that we're not given complete commandments about every particular in life, because it leaves us an area where now we are obliged to come to the Lord and make up our minds before the Lord on the principle that we're responsible to him directly, and he will call us to account. We have to exercise our judgment then, and do what, in our hearts, we honestly feel the Lord would have us do, and not do what we feel he wouldn't have us do— and so we build up character. I repeat, it's exceedingly important for me in these things not to interfere with you, and important for you not to interfere with me, and recognise the Lord's authority. I am the Lord's servant and you are the Lord's servant. We are responsible to him. Actually, if you follow what Paul is saying, it wouldn't matter whether you ate meat

or didn't eat meat; that isn't the point at issue. The point at issue is on what grounds do you decide to do what you do? Is it to please the Lord? I'm doing it for the Lord's sake or I'm not doing it because I don't think it would please the Lord. You can do it if you think it's okay, but I can't. And I'm building up that character, that habit of considering the Lord, even in my most personal affairs.

And I'm not to judge my brother. Oh, the sad divisions amongst believers who have dared to take the place of the Lord, and tried to force their fellow believers to do things that Scripture itself doesn't command, or not to do things that Scripture itself doesn't forbid; but they've forced them to do it because some strong-minded, or as the Bible might say, weak-minded, man wants to impress his will and uniformity of behaviour on everybody else. So it's not *laissez-faire*, do as you please. The kingdom of God, the rule of God, is primarily concerned with righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit, and to split churches on things that are not fundamental doctrines of the faith goes against the whole purpose of the operation. Righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit—that's the kingdom of God at work in this present age. If our dispensationalism should become so extreme that we say the kingdom of God is nothing to do with us in this present generation, then we should be very careful lest the carelessness it induces in these matters proved to be a road that leads to sorrow and division.

Seeking first the kingdom of God

One final thing, for this is the last seminar of the whole conference, and I listen to you saying, 'Hallelujah', but we still have five minutes more! There's another Scripture that seems to me to be relevant to our present situation, though it occurs in the Sermon on the Mount, and I have left it until last. As you'll see, I am not myself of the opinion that the Sermon on the Mount was given to Jews and is not applicable to those that are in the church. So, in my estimation, the verses I now quote from chapter 6 about the kingdom of God are relevant to us in our daily practical living.

Be not therefore anxious saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (vv. 31–33)

The question is, what does our Lord mean by this command, 'Seek first the kingdom of God'? In my youth, I thought it meant, 'Before it comes to the question of your job and earning your living, and these other things, and doing your studies, seek first to spread the gospel.' That wasn't bad for a youth, was it, to have that idea? It felt that I ought to get out and give out some tracts or something, put spiritual interests first, and make my career second. That's still very good advice, as a rough rule of thumb. But it means more than that, surely, because you notice the context. Our Lord is talking about daily work and first he observes why the Gentiles go to work. What are they seeking, going to work? First and foremost, most of them are seeking food and clothes, for if you don't go to work, you don't get the money to buy the food and the clothes, and the odd Ford Chevy or something, and a

decent house, and a lakeside summer home! ‘Don’t you be like the Gentiles,’ says Christ. ‘What do you mean? We have to go to work too, don’t we? We have to go to work to get food and clothes.’

Oh, really? Is that the first reason why you go to work, to get food and clothes? You lot of old Gentiles! That’s why the Gentiles go to work, primarily to get food and clothes. ‘But,’ you say, ‘you have to be a realist; you have to get your Kellogg’s cornflakes or something to eat, or else you wouldn’t live, and then you couldn’t get converted, and then you couldn’t go to heaven. You’ve got to be practical.’ The Lord is practical—your heavenly Father knows that you need these things; and work is one of the ways that our heavenly Father has appointed to us for getting these things. We have to go to work, and its secondary dividend is food and clothes, but it’s not its primary dividend. Listen to our Lord, ‘When you go to work, let your primary purpose be to seek the kingly rule of God in your lives.’ Not merely to get money to support foreign missions, though that’s a very good reason to work hard for. But the primary reason is to seek the kingly rule of God, the kingdom of God in that sense, and notice what comes with that—his righteousness. Because to seek his kingly rule and to submit to it day after day in my daily life and at my work, is to build up a righteous character. That’s the first reason for sending people to work.

The Lord sent me to work as a teacher, and to do some research. It was difficult sometimes to get the balance right. If you didn’t do the research, you didn’t get promoted. If you didn’t adequately teach the students, you weren’t being fair to them; and some, only a few, could test your patience! How shall I decide it? ‘Bother them, and let my career take first place.’ But, wait a minute. I am to seek first the kingly rule of God in my life.

I may have told you before, but let me tell you again because I can’t forget it. I sat in the home of a good Christian man, now retired from work, devoted to the Lord, and a man that constantly put God’s things first. He had a post as a company secretary, and in our country that meant he was partly accountant and partly lawyer. He, therefore, had to sit in on the board meetings of his company. His company, being a big company with many different places where their factories and things were, were beginning to fiddle the books in a very big way by the way they were distributing certain assets here and there and elsewhere. And the income tax inspector became suspicious and demanded to meet the board. As company secretary, he had to be there though he had no control over policy. Eventually, the income tax inspector asked precisely about these assets, and the chairman of the board turned to this Christian man, and said, ‘Please answer.’

He said to me, ‘In that moment, I realised if I told the truth, I should lose my job.’ He had a wife and children, and a house and a mortgage. What was he to do? If he had been seeking first his food and clothes, and house, he would have joined in the deception that the board was trying to put on the income tax inspector. If that was the prime consideration, he would have kept his job, but then he would have lost the main purpose for which the Lord sent him to work in the first place—the kingly rule of God and the righteous character that comes under that kingly rule. He said, ‘David, I decided to tell the truth, and I told it.’ And after the meeting the chairman came to him and said, ‘We shall not require your services further.’ Ah, but there was built into him by that decision one more building block into that righteous character that God is aiming to produce in us, both for now and for eternity. It is my thesis

that the kingdom of God does have to do with us, in a very practical sense, both in our behaviour in the churches, and in our business and family life outside. Ponder that.

If you feel that in these matters I have zeal but lack in some knowledge then please write to me. Would you be so kind as to do that? I mustn't allow more questions on account of the time, but these are serious matters. I was brought up among dear folks who told me that the kingdom of God has nothing to do with us in the church. I was told by one senior man how foolish it was to suppose that the Sermon on the Mount could teach us anything. It was written, he said, for the Jews under the time of the coming tribulation when they would be obliged, under persecution, to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' He said, 'We don't have to pray that prayer, do we? My kitchen larder is full of food.' Must I be taught the lesson too, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'? I still am dependent on him, surely, to give me my daily bread. He does it, basically, by my work. I think I must primarily seek his righteousness that comes by obeying his kingly rule. Oh what sadness it would be if I got the food and clothes at the expense of obeying his kingly rule, and putting his kingdom first.

Let us pray.

Blessed, Lord Jesus, we have been thinking about thy words, and now we come to thee. Give us clarity of thought as we meditate upon them where we are still mistaken, and see trees as men walking. Then, in thy patience, perfect our sight, we pray. Above all we ask, since by God's marvellous grace we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into thy kingdom through the Son of his love, give us grace to heed thy words and, in all things, to seek the kingdom of God first, that we might build under thee that righteous character that thou dost seek to promote within us. And for thy mercies and thy grace, and for thy forgiveness and thy precious blood shed on our behalf, and for thy presence with us, this we do praise thee. And as thou seest our need, from time to time, fulfil the promise that we have been thinking of in this conference. Come to us, Lord Jesus, and appear to us that we might recognise thy voice and thereby take courage to live and serve thee until the dawn is come again. For thy name's sake, Amen.

About the Author

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