

WELCOME AFTER SABBATICAL

Good morning, everyone! I feel like saying, “welcome back!” ... But it wasn’t you that was gone, it was Jeanine and me. We have been on a Sabbatical for 5 weeks where we took some rest and also a vacation. On our second week, both of us also had a journey with COVID and spent about 8 days getting past that and had to cancel the Chicago part of our vacation. We wanted to go see my daughter-in-law, Madi, graduate from seminary, but we caught up with them in California, where my son Brett is now, then we all made our way to Arizona to visit with my mom and other family members. We came back to Florida, and since we were “exiled” from Pursuit (not really) we had the chance to visit other churches to see how they “do church” and also have some down time. So, thank you and the elders for affording us that time to get away.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

It is time to start something new here at Pursuit! We like new things – kinda. We will have a chance to share some things about the Sabbatical in a few weeks at the potluck that we are planning, but one thing that I have been thinking about is the Kingdom of God. It is a major metaphor of the Bible, and yet we seem to prefer other metaphors. We know God as a Father and that intimacy is new since Jesus came. Yet we forget, or do not know God as a King.

The Bible uses many metaphors for our relationship with God. As I said, the favorite among our culture might be God as our Father or being part of his family; we like that one! There is also the metaphor of being the Body of Christ; we like that one too! There is the metaphor of the Church being the bride of Christ; we like that one too. There are others: we are God’s “field”; we are also described as a “temple of God.” So, the Bible is replete with metaphors that describe our relationship to God. Yet I think that one that gets too little attention is the idea of the Kingdom of God; God as a King and we are his subjects in the Kingdom.

So, I want us to take some time to explore our relationship to God in these terms, as our King. It seems to me that is the major metaphor of the Old Testament. In

order to do this, we are going to proceed through the book of Matthew in the New Testament. Matthew is one of the gospel accounts of the life and teachings and ministry of Jesus. It talks extensively about the Kingdom of God. He uses the metaphor of God as a father extensively too, “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name” ... and yet there is a clear portrayal of God as a King and his Son Jesus reigning with him.

But besides the simple reality of recognizing God as a King, there are important aspects of God’s rule and nature as a King that will help us to relate better to God and our world. When we understand God’s sovereign rule over all aspects of the universe that will help us to not to fret (so much) when things go bad. When we understand that God controls all things and is “good” in everything that he does, we can trust him to rule our lives. When we see that his law is for our good to instruct us, we can learn to rule our own passions and not make up our own ideas of right and wrong. When we know that Christ is not just our mediator, but also a King, we can relate to him more fully as he really is; not just a prayer partner, but the King with all glory and power!

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Since this is a topical sermon, I wanted to select a couple of passages that relate to God as King.

1 Samuel 12:12–22 (ESV)

¹² And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the LORD your God was your king. ¹³ And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴ If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. ¹⁵ But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king.

- We see God acting as a King in protecting his people from Nahash a foreign King.
- We see the people wanting a human King (who would be Saul).
- And we see God letting them set up a second kingdom to see how it would be to have a human king and a heavenly one (not so good).

God spoke to David about making his line and eternal kingdom of his son.

2 Samuel 7:11b–13 (ESV)

^{11b} ... Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

In Isaiah we also see prophecies of God sending his son into the world as savior and King,

Isaiah 9:6–7 (ESV)

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

And so, we see that the Bible is replete with explanations of God as a king and Christ coming to rule for him. Furthermore, we trust God more because of the prophecies; he foretold the events to help the people get ready.

SERMON INTRODUCTION

It was probably about 1970 when my family got their first microwave oven. The technology was not new: My dad was in the Air Force in the 50's and used to

work on microwave communication towers. He would put a hotdog on a stick and put it into the microwave beam in front of the dish to cook it. I wonder what that did to the signal? “We’ve got a bogie at 5 o’clock – oh it’s gone now...” Maybe that is where the UFO stories come from...

It took a while for us to learn how to use the microwave oven too. One of the first things you learn is that you generally don’t cook things in it for 10 minutes – it’s much faster than that. You would also hear on the News some public interest story that you should not dry your cat in the microwave. It took a while, but society started re-orienting around this innovation. People learned the new rules, the products, like TV dinners could not use foil anymore, and on and on. But the thing is, as wonderful as this invention is, and as indispensable as it is to us today, it took a while for people to come to accept it. Same thing with all the other inventions like the calculator, or the personal computer, or the internet, or email, or smartphones, or “self-driving” cars. It takes a while for people to accept things.

When Jesus started his ministry, he came preaching, “**Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand!**” He was saying, “get ready, something new is here.”

And yet they were not ready to receive it. They needed to repent – to get ready because something entirely new was coming.

If something as minor as a microwave is difficult to adopt, how much more when it is something large, like a new government, or form of government, or a new intervention by God into your religion. That’s huge!

Isaiah 43:18–19 (ESV)

¹⁸ “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 44:3 (ESV)

³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

God told them that new things were coming. New life and the Spirit is coming like a river in the desert, yet they were difficult to accept.

What was coming is what was promised, but often not easily accepted. The religious leaders that were not ready. The weak and desperate and sinners and those excluded from any hope, were ready. The good and the prominent and successful were not ready. "Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

Q> The coming of the Kingdom of God sounds like a good thing. Why did people need to repent because it was coming?

OUR SITUATION

The other day, John shared with me a good illustration of repentance the based upon our adoption of another modern invention; the GPS. In early GPS systems, if you went off the prescribed path, "It would say "Recalculating" and it would go nuts for a minute until it figured out how to get you where you wanted to go. That is the GPS repenting and changing course. When we take a wrong turn, we have to consult our GPS to help us out. It shows us how to get from our current "errant" location to where we want to get. We have to decide to repent and actually follow the GPS.

When we think about the Kingdom of Heaven, our first thought ought to be that since it is a Kingdom, it is God that is King. That means that he is the authority that we need to align ourselves to.

When God asks us to repent, he is saying, you need to stop and see where you are and re-consult his authority on where you need to be going. Not only is God the authority on how to get there – He is ultimately the only one that knows where we need to go- right? We need to re-orient ourselves to him as the only one that knows how to get us to where we are going. Repentance is our constant

re-orientation back to God. And I mean constant since we are continually taking wrong turns.

Sheep in a flock might be in another example. They have no idea where they are supposed to go, but the dog chasing them and guiding them is following directions from the master. The sheep are constantly repenting of their errant directions and being kept together toward an end goal.

The Lord God is the master, the Holy Spirit is the guide dog in this example, continually steering us in the right direction, back to God.

Because of our malfunctioning internal steering system, we need to continually repent back to God as our King and Master.

Fortunately, God gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us back. As we read in Isaiah, "I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring and my blessing on your descendants." Knowing God as our king and master is the goal, and he gives us the means to get there. We should not only think of the Holy Spirit in such crass terms as of a "GPS," but it is one of his mercies that he gently reminds us, when we get off course.

"Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

But what was it that was coming? The Kingdom of Heaven coming to earth.

As we have seen, God was known as a king in the Old Testament, but somehow, in saying the "Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," meant that there would be a new dimension to how he reigned on earth! Something new was coming.

Some people would not like the fact that God was going to be more involved. That is true of people today. It is probably a major reason that many people do not want to come to God, to repent, because they do not want to follow God; they don't want his meddling in their lives. They want to remain autonomous.

Even though it has been 2000 years since this thing was new, it has to be accepted before the benefits can be ours. When it is accepted, when people repent, this thing that is now 2000 years old, is new to them!

We need to understand God as our King in several dimensions in order to better follow him and obey him.

God has the right to rule. First of all, let's start where the rub is. People do not want to accept God's right to rule. This is silly as an ant walking across my kitchen not accepting my right to squish him. He is in my domain.

The other night we spotted a roach walking along the wall. Jeanine saw it and stood up to get some raid and it immediately started running for cover. We managed to find it and spray 500 times as much raid that was needed upon it.

But the fact that God is the creator gives him the right to rule and decide what he wants. He is always good and merciful, unlike me with the roaches. God made men and women, the highest part of his creation, to be a being like himself, having a trinity of relationships inside; in our case the mind, the emotions and the will. He made us moral beings with a perfect capacity to deny sin and live in relationship with God and fulfill the purposes he had for us.

God says this in Isaiah 44:6–8 (ESV)

⁶ Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. ⁷ Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. ⁸ Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

Besides being the creator, God is also **sovereign**. That means that there are no restraints on his authority. This is a mark of King; in his realm he is the only authority. When we say that God is **sovereign**, we also understand that since he is all powerful that it is not just what he wants to happen, but also the power to make it happen.

We can always say that “whatever is, is what God wanted to happen.” That can sound terrible especially if it is something like someone getting cancer or even dying, but it is good to know that it was under God’s control, and under his grace and mercy. The alternative is that God is not in control and therefore unable to keep any of his promises. But we know that he is in control because of how he works throughout history.

But it is God’s will for this world to continue for a time, despite death and disease and war and rebellion against him. This is the theater that God has created to show who he is. That he will heal and will comfort and will keep being a solution to these problems and even overcome death through Christ. There is suffering for a time, but finally, it will be brought to an end.

1 Corinthians 15:24–26 (ESV)

²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Q> What difference does it make for us?

A big part of repentance is trusting God’s authority to reign and rule over you. When we do this, the new thing that has been with us in effect for 2000 years since Christ came, becomes new to you. We need to accept God’s right to rule and reign. When we surrender and repent, the benefits that God wants to give to us can be ours.

God offers each person forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift. What we need is to turn to God, confessing our sin of trying to live on our own and turn to God. He is the only one that knows what we need and also the only one that can give us what we need. We need God and for our relationship with him to be restored.

WE CAN WELCOME THE KINGDOM AND GOD’S RULE BECAUSE IT IS RULED BY GOD AND CHRIST HIS SON.

We can welcome the Kingdom and God’s rule because it is ruled by God and Christ his son. We can trust him because of his character.

Q> Why do we distrust authority?

As Americans we have a long history of distrusting government. Our whole system of government was deliberately made convoluted in order to keep anyone from seizing power. There are three equal branches of government. The Presidency, the Congress and the Supreme Court. They each can overrule the other. The States themselves also have their own powers. We have an electoral college that prevents even the federal elections from being skewed by very populous states against the more rural states.

This was all because of the abuses that people suffered under the rule of kings in Europe or in countries where even the church ruled the state. We know that power corrupts. When people get power, they abuse power and so the founders of our country, wanting to set up a country where the people ruled had to devise means to keep individuals from taking power. Because they knew that mankind is corruptible they devised ways to protect from that.

We are deeply, naturally distrustful of kings in this country and that may be why we tend to ignore the metaphors in the Bible that speak of God as a King; it is a foreign concept to us.

We also don't trust authority because we know our own nature. We know ourselves and that we would not trust ourselves not to become corrupt given the opportunity.

Besides mankind being corruptible, we are also rebellious. Just like the kings in Psalms 2 were rebelling against the dominion of King David over them...

Psalm 2:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

Each of us has that same disposition against the Lord. When we sin we are rebelling against his rule. And we do it a lot – everyday even.

And besides being corruptible and rebellious, we are also confused. We do not understand our own heart because of the confusion within us because of our mind, emotions and will each working on a different agenda. Our hearts drive the car of our lives and we are laying down in the back seat. We don't know ourselves.

Jeremiah 17:9–10a (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind..."

We cannot understand our own heart. Depressed yet? Got depression? The good news is that the Kingdom of God is at hand! God has not abandoned us to our own sinful devices. He is merciful and sent his own son Jesus Christ to pay the very penalty of our sin on our behalf. When we repent and grant God the right to rule he forgives us, restores us and gives a new remade heart and most of all the Holy Spirit to live in us!

We should distrust ourselves, but we should trust God our king! When we get to know him as a King, we have a richer way to understand him in all of his dimensions.

We know that God is always loving. He is not trying to squash us like a bug.

We know that God cares about Justice. He cares for the poor and the orphan and the foreigner (illegal immigrant) and the widow and prisoner. He demands that we do too!

We know that God is always good. Jesus said, "Who alone but God is good?"

Matthew 7:9–11 (ESV)

⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Q> What difference does it make for us?

When we know God as a King and who he is, we are able to trust him. This is because he always wants good, he is in complete control and wants to protect us, and he has all power to do as he wills.

When we know God as a King and who he is, we are able to trust him.

WE NEED TO LEARN TO LIVE AS CITIZENS IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Besides understanding God's right to rule and also understanding the goodness of God, **we need to learn to live as citizens in this new kingdom.** We are citizens of two kingdoms: an earthly one and a heavenly one.

We will explore that subject as we progress through the book of Matthew in the many parables of the Kingdom that Jesus explained.

We are going to see God's law and moral requirements. We often want to flee God's law and call it "legalistic" and somehow make a dichotomy of law verses grace. But we need to get past that. We need to learn to see God's law as good and beneficial.

Our society today is suffering because we abandoned the belief in God's law, so we are left trying to make our own and failing miserably.

Q> What difference does it make for us?

This will help us not be dismissive of what God the king is teaching to us and requiring of us. It will teach us truly how to act as Christians, but also how to turn to God in repentance to receive his forgiveness and grace.

CONCLUSION

When you look at the big picture of Biblical history we see God setting up a kingdom to be ruled by men and women and have dominion over all the earth. When Adam and Eve fell into sin all of that was ruined. They were no longer able to rule even themselves, but God did not abandon the human race. The history of Israel is of him calling a unique people where he would reign as King, then one day it would be clear that all that was meant to happen through Israel is

actually fulfilled in his son coming as a savior first, then a ruling King in the end of time.

In the meantime, he has appointed us as ambassadors of the new kingdom, for us to preach the gospel to everyone so that they too can be in the kingdom.

God has redeemed us from sin and death and restores our inner nature so that one day we also will be able to rule with him in the new heavens and the new earth! The bible starts in a garden, God with man, and ends in a city, the new Jerusalem, God with man again living in peace.

Repent! The Kingdom of heaven is at hand!

The new is here and more is coming!

Please pray with me.