

## The Gospel of the Kingdom

### Week 7 - Day 2: Paul's Kingdom Tour

**Ephesians 1:16-22 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**

Yesterday, we saw that the last half of Acts documents Paul's journeys to reach the Gentile world with the Good News! Today, I would like to take you on a kingdom tour alongside Paul by selecting key verses from each of his letters. These selections will capture the essence of Paul's overall gospel message and the overarching conversations between Paul and the local church to whom he was writing. Just like Paul, I pray that your heart may be enlightened to the hope of salvation found through the forgiveness of sins made possible by King Jesus, the rich inheritance of being a part of his kingdom family, and the victorious and powerful rule of King Jesus made available to the priesthood of believers!

Let's begin in Colossae! In opposition to other religious claims, Paul points out that spiritual fullness and vitality is *exclusively* found through a relationship with Jesus because of who he claimed to be and who Paul believes he is:

**Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.**

For Paul, it makes sense for the entire story to start with Jesus if he existed before all things were made. In other words, Paul starts with the notion that Jesus has eternally been God! In order to understand the human condition, let's follow Paul's journey to Rome. Speaking to a conglomeration of Jews and Gentiles, Paul points out the one thing that unites us all:

**Romans 1:21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

**Romans 3:23** ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

**Romans 8:20-21** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Out of his love and mercy, God chose to do something about this. Paul encourages the church at Philippi to hold onto the truths of this beautiful song which he may have sang while he was in prison there:

**Philippians 2:5-11** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus came to us to conquer the kingdom of sin and death! Paul's letter to the Galatians reminds them that in light of what Jesus has done, the true and simple gospel invitation is to come to Him by faith in his promises, which is entirely apart from the law:

**Galatians 2:19-20** For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**Romans 10:9** if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved

How does the Messiah save us? The book of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians constantly reminds us of the beautiful wisdom of the cross, that God paid for our sins so that we could become God's kingdom space in a new spiritual reality!

**1 Corinthians 1:18** For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?**

The kingdom of Jesus comes through the Holy Spirit where he is able to dwell with us, guide us, shower us with his love, rule us as Lord, and give us a new purpose! By faith, we have entered into his kingdom family under His kingdom authority! We have become His new kingdom space so that everywhere we go, we bring His kingdom on earth! This is how the kingdom has come here on earth!

**Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

This seems nice and all, but let's get real! How do we take into account a world that is still suffering from the effects of sin? Paul encourages us to embrace our suffering for the gospel that will inevitably come our way since the world and our flesh is still marked by the kingdom of Satan. They will inevitably be hostile towards God's kingdom. He challenges us to endure just like he expresses in 2nd Timothy, a letter written right before Paul faces his own death.

**2 Timothy 1:8-10 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,<sup>10</sup> and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.**

This endurance comes from the knowledge that even though the kingdom has broken through on earth, all things have yet to be fully reconciled back to God. One day, Jesus will return to judge the kingdom of sin entirely and the kingdom of God will restore all things both spiritual and physical. The prophets refer to this as the coming day of the Lord; a topic which concerned the Thessalonians greatly:

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.**

**2 Thessalonians 1:9-12 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to**

**be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The kingdom of God has broken through right here on earth via Jesus' decisive victory on the cross. At the same time, the kingdom has yet to be fully realized while we exist on this earth that is cursed by sin. So we wait in hope that all that is perishable will be made new:

**1 Corinthians 15:50-55 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"**

This does not mean we should seek to escape the physical world in favor of the spiritual world. While we continue to live hopefully for the eternal restoration of all things in the future, we become Jesus' kingdom representatives on earth who are sent out on His mission to reconcile all things back to Himself in the present just as he did for you and me!

**2 Corinthians 5:16-20 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

If our role in God's kingdom is anything like it was in the garden, we should expect to see humanity on the road back to peace and harmony through this ministry of reconciliation. This is the vision of the church that is driven by a certain lifestyle that involves the truth and grace of Jesus. Here is what Paul says to two of his disciples about how the church stands out in different communities:

**1 Timothy 3:14-15 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.**

**Titus 2:11-14** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Paul's last letter demonstrates how powerful reconciliation can be! God's rule brings harmony even to the most destructive relationships of society; a 1st century runaway slave (Onesimus) and his master (Philemon).

**Philemon 10-18** I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ”

Will you be a part of God's kingdom family and kingdom mission on this earth as we await the coming of Jesus?

-AJ Vanegas

**Share the Gospel:** Paul's challenge to us exists in the tension that God's kingdom can be made a reality here on earth while still waiting for the final judgment of sin and the permanent establishment of God's kingdom. The former message offers a life of intimacy with the Creator of the Universe, true and meaningful life change through Jesus' conquering of sin, and tremendous kingdom purpose on this earth through the Holy spirit. The latter offers hope for an eternal existence without sin or suffering!

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers:

