
The Kingdom of God

SCOTT HOEZEE

Everybody has their own kingdom in life, the writer, Dallas Willard, once noted. Your kingdom is that place where your will and desires shape what happens. Maybe you have this in your department at work; maybe it is at home with your family; maybe it is between you and your dog; but a kingdom is where someone's influence creates a certain kind of living space and shapes the lifestyle carried out in that space. Now ultimately, the only kingdom that will matter or that will ever last is the kingdom of God, where God's will and desires determine the shape of life itself. Today on *Groundwork*, we will ponder that kingdom, as we encounter it now, and as we anticipate the kingdom's fullness yet to come. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now in the last program of a five-part series that we have been calling basic Christianity.

DAVE BAST

Right. These are the basic ideas or doctrines or beliefs that most Christians in most times and places have held to. So, we talked about our understanding of God: God is the Creator, God is the Father, but also God is Father, Son and Spirit as Christians have come to know him; and then we talked about human beings: Our nature, our fallenness, our sinfulness, our need for a savior; and then, of course, salvation—what Christ has done—and our response of faith and love and obedience.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, now on this fifth program we come to a very significant part of basic or mere Christianity, and that is this whole idea of the kingdom of God; and of course, to begin we can note that in most places, certainly in North America, but probably in a lot of places in the world, too, kingdom is a little bit of a foreign word. I mean, unless you are talking about Disney's Magic Kingdom at Disney World...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Otherwise we tend to think that kingdoms were things from long ago and far away. We have images of knights in shining armor or maybe some TV show set back in the medieval ages when people still talked about kingdoms, but today we think more about countries and nations and states, and even countries that have a king or a queen yet...we have Queen Elizabeth in England, King Willem-Alexander in the Netherlands, they are kings and queens, but they really...

DAVE BAST

They are mostly ceremonial, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that are really over a nation, not a kingdom.

DAVE BAST

Right; but the New Testament speaks through and through about the kingdom of God. In fact, it was Jesus' most common subject. He didn't talk about the democracy of God or the republic of God; he talked about the kingdom of God, because for Jesus it is a one-person rule kind of idea. It is not participatory in the sense that everybody has a vote. It is God's rule. That is really what God's kingdom means; and it is what Jesus not only proclaimed and preached, but taught us to pray for. So, in a sense, this is really the last chapter of basic Christianity: Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven; and what we look forward to...we often talk about heaven being the goal of the Christian life, but really, it is the kingdom that is the goal of the Christian life, when God's rule or reign comes in its fullness and transforms the whole universe, as well as us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right.

DAVE BAST

Into beings who are fit to dwell with him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if we look at something like Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist...what did he say? The kingdom of God is at hand. John gets thrown into prison. Jesus says: Well, I cannot improve on that message; so Jesus' very first sermon in Mark 1:15: The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News. So, we aren't going to understand Jesus...and of course, most of his parables were about the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God is like...

DAVE BAST

Which means the same thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The same thing, yes.

DAVE BAST

Matthew often says: The kingdom of heaven; but that is just a euphemism, because they often avoided using the word God or the name of God; so it is the same idea...the kingdom of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is all over the place; so, to get clear...and we alluded to the great writer, Dallas Willard, who died recently...he wrote a wonderful book called *The Divine Conspiracy* some years ago, and he talked a lot about kingdom; and indeed, he said the kingdom of God is that place—that realm—where God calls the shots; where what God wants to happen, happens; and wherever that happens, it is in the kingdom; and for now, that is not geography. For now, the kingdom of God is not a point on the map. For now, the kingdom of God is wherever the lifestyle of God, as embodied in Jesus, is carried out.

DAVE BAST

Right; and it is also important to stress that the way you get into it is not just by physical birth, the way you become a citizen of your country or any given geographical location; the way into the kingdom, Jesus says, begins with repentance, as you just quoted that initial verse in the Gospel of Mark: Repent; for the kingdom is at hand. So, it means to turn away from our sin, turn toward him. In other places in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus says we need to be born again. We need the power of the Spirit to come and transform us inwardly. You think of Jesus' famous conversation with Nicodemus. The story I like to call Nick at night, you know. Nicodemus comes to this teacher and says: What do I have to do, you know,

to enter the kingdom? And Jesus says: Nicodemus, you have to be born again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you cannot do it. It has to come through the Spirit of God; and where that happens—where people are born again—where they are by grace motivated to repent—they enter this kingdom; and when Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, started to want to explain what the kingdom is...so, what does kingdom living look like? If you are a citizen of this spiritual kingdom...it is not geographic; it is not a point on the map...what is it going to look like; and Jesus begins by explaining in the Sermon on the Mount. He says: Well, if you are a citizen of the kingdom, you have this kind of perspective:

DAVE BAST

^{5:3}Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God). ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So, when Jesus starts to talk about, well, what is it to be a member of the kingdom, he says: You are going to have this kind of perspective, which to the rest of the world will look upside down, backwards, and crazy, because Jesus is here lifting up the poor in spirit; those who are weeping; those who are meek, weak; the people who seem to be on the wrong side of history to the world's perspective, they are kingdom people.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; biblical scholars or teachers—commentators—often use that phrase that you just used, Scott: The upside down nature of the kingdom, because it turns the world's values on their head; and honestly, for most of us, if we are being honest with ourselves, if we are going to talk about who has really got it good, which is what I think blessing means in this context, we would say: Blessed are the rich, blessed are the powerful, blessed are people who call the shots...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

They are the ones who rule the world. They are the ones who run things. Blessed are people who fly around in private jets to international conferences; blessed are people who run multinational corporations; and Jesus turns it all on its head and says: No; it is the poor, it is the meek, it is the powerless, it is those who are willing to suffer for their faith, it is those who are hungry and thirsty, not for things, but for the righteousness of God...for the justice of God. They are the ones who, in God's sight, have it all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which means that wherever the kingdom of God is...and again, it is a spiritual reality in our hearts among the people of God...wherever the kingdom of God is in evidence, it is going to be in some tension with the rest of the world, which introduces us to something that in theology we often talk about, and that is the *already* and the *not yet* of God's kingdom; and we will ponder that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are in the last program of a series called basic Christianity, and we really want to unpack the idea of the kingdom of God, and how important that is for all of us, really...for our faith, for our expectation for the future...and we have just been talking, Scott, about the upside down nature of the kingdom. As Jesus describes life in it, he

turns on their heads peoples' common ideas about what the good life is like. Rather, it is all about righteousness and the Word of God and the will of God and the people who pursue that—who live that way—who live for those kingdom values are the ones who ultimately will inherit the earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is something, we believe, that is visible now. So, we said in the first segment: Look, the kingdom isn't a point on the map, but that doesn't mean it isn't real now. When I was a kid, sometimes in cartoons or on TV shows, you know, sometimes somebody would threaten to smack somebody. They are going to slap you, or something, or they are angry and they would say something like: I am going to knock you from here to kingdom come; which is kind of a strange way to put things...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But what that means is, I am going to hit you a very long ways away from here to some future point when the kingdom comes; so kingdom come was only future, but for Christians, it is not only future, it is today.

DAVE BAST

It is going to come fully only when Jesus returns.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And when we are talking about the kingdom of God, ultimately that is the idea that we are pointing toward, the return of Christ in glory; which is, again, part of basic Christianity; but Jesus says with his coming into the world, you can already see it—it is already...because wherever he is, he is the king; so, wherever the king is...in people's lives, in hearts and actions and behavior, the kingdom is already there.

So, for example, this text from Luke Chapter 17, when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied:

^{20b}“The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, ²¹nor will people say, ‘Here it is or there it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” And there he stood, right among them. Get the point? Where Jesus is, the kingdom is already present.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is an *already* dimension to the kingdom because it is in us—it is in our midst. The Holy Spirit lives in our hearts now; Jesus is in our midst through that Holy Spirit; so the kingdom is here, and we are supposed to live like those Beatitudes that we read in the first part of this program. We are supposed to incarnate in how we live and in how we treat each other...we are supposed to incarnate and show people the contours of the kingdom already now. The not yet part is, as you said, Dave...Jesus has not fully returned and turned everything in the universe into the visible kingdom. That will come, but already now, it is true; and at the very end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, John of Patmos gets a glimpse of this; because what happens early in the book is that an angel comes and peels back history's curtain just a little bit, and when that happens, John writes:

^{4:1}After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven, and the voice I had heard first speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this;” ²and at once, I was in the spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it, ³and the One who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby; a rainbow that shown like emeralds encircled the throne.

DAVE BAST

⁴And surrounding the throne (John goes on to say) were twenty-four other thrones; and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumbles and peals of thunder. In front of the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven Spirits of God. ⁶Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

So, this is John's picture, not of the future somehow...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Not of heaven as the place where people go when they die, but of reality here and now. The great scholar, Richard Bauckham, a British New Testament scholar, says that in the book of Revelation heaven doesn't represent the realm of the blessed dead, heaven represents ultimate reality.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

It is the reality that we cannot see—that we cannot observe—as Jesus said: You cannot observe the kingdom; but God is actually reigning right now...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right now.

DAVE BAST

On the throne. No matter what happens here on earth, he is behind the scenes in power and glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is so important. We often do, as you said, Dave, people think of the book of Revelation as only about the future, but what John saw wasn't the future, that was the reality then, already in the late First Century AD, and it is the reality today. If here in the early 21st Century...if an angel could do the same thing for us that he did for John, just peel back that curtain that keeps us from seeing the dimension beyond our ordinary dimensions, we would still see that figure—that Jesus—sitting on the throne. Right now, we cannot see that ordinarily; the world cannot see that ordinarily unless they see it in us...in how we live.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; and if we went a little further in Revelation, into the next chapter, Chapter 5, we would see the vision expand to include the Lamb—the Lamb who was slain. John hears a voice say: The Lion of the tribe of Judah is the One who has conquered; and when he turns to look he doesn't see a lion; he sees a lamb that has been sacrificed. So, the victory has been won, and that is the *already* part of the kingdom. It was won when Jesus died on the cross, but yet, we are still waiting for its finish—its completion.

I think it was the New Testament scholar, Oscar Cullmann, who first used the analogy of D-Day and V-Day to describe this already but not yet character of God's kingdom. D-Day, you know, that was the decisive moment—the invasion—and it was successful; and from that point on there was no question, really, about who was going to win the war; it was going to be the Allies; but yet, there was a tremendous amount of fighting and suffering that continued...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, almost another year.

DAVE BAST

Yes; until final V-Day or Victory Day; and that is the time we find ourselves; in between the times of the already but not yet kingdom of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why we long for the fullness, of course: Maranatha—come, Lord Jesus. We know so many people are suffering now, and we all suffer in various ways. So, we long for that fullness of the kingdom to come; but meanwhile, it has to be shown in us.

You know, to this day, Dave, if you talk to devout Jewish people, and claim that: Well, Jesus was the Messiah you were waiting for. You Jews are still waiting for the Messiah. He already came. One of the first things a devout Jew will say to you is: Oh, yes? Where is his kingdom then? The Messiah came? Where is his kingdom? Because they have this vision that it would come all at once; whereas, we have this *already* and *not yet* vision; and the right answer to that question is: Well, I hope you can see God's kingdom working itself out in *me*—in the Church—the kingdom is bigger than the Church, but it includes the Church; and it is our job to make that kingdom visible in *this* time.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, we are all citizens of two kingdoms, I guess you could say, or of two countries or of two cities, to use St. Augustine's famous formulation: We are part of the city of Man, so we might have a passport if we travel internationally. It might say on the cover: United States of America or Canada or Great Britain or Uganda, or whatever. We are citizens of countries—of earthly countries—but more properly and fundamentally and importantly, we are citizens of the city of God—of the kingdom of God; and that needs to have a way that shapes our everyday living inside and out in every aspect, and that is the thing we will talk about as we conclude this program.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are looking at the kingdom of God, and we just said, Dave, if the kingdom of God is a reality for us already now, and it is, then it has to show up; and so, the short answer to the question: Well, what part of life is affected when you are a citizen of God's kingdom already now? And the short answer is: Everything...all things. If you really believe that Jesus is on the throne right now and we are citizens of his kingdom, you cannot just say: Well, I guess that will affect about two-thirds of my life, and then a third of my life will be lived outside the kingdom; no. All of it has to be a kingdom existence for us; and we want to wonder a little bit what that might look like.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; and I think the first thing we want to stress is somewhat of a negative point, but it needs to be said. We are not going to bring the kingdom of God in by any of our efforts. We are not perfectible. None of us is individually. Our society is not. There was a famous book written by Sir Thomas Moore, actually—now, the Catholics call him St. Thomas Moore—in the 16th Century that he called *Utopia*, which is Greek for *no place*; and it has come to mean that perfect place—that perfect society—and Moore is saying right from the outset: It is not going to happen, not in this world. It is going to take God to bring in the kingdom. That is why we associate it with the Second Coming of Christ, and why we long for and pray for that. We say, as you said earlier, Scott, maranatha—come, Lord Jesus—to bring in and complete your kingdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, we don't fool ourselves as to how much we can accomplish. We do plead for justice; in fact, we have done a justice series recently on *Groundwork*, on the importance of justice. So, we lead just lives. We advocate for justice. We advocate for all those people Jesus blessed in the Beatitudes: The weak, the meek, the poor in spirit, the lowly, the mourning people in our midst. We advocate for them, but we realize we are doing this because we are citizens of the kingdom; we are doing it because God is going to fully bring the kingdom; but we cannot fool ourselves that if we can just get the government to just do the right things in a given country, we will become the kingdom in the United States or in Canada or New Zealand or something; no. We are modest about that...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But still, every part of life is affected. I think a second idea ties in with discipleship, and that is that as kingdom people, Jesus expects us really to become more and more like him.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; it is the image of Christ that is the point of our salvation. We have talked also in the past about the connection between justice and righteousness; and this fundamental idea in this series that we stress the righteousness that comes by faith, or justification by faith; that is our hope for salvation. We don't hope to become good enough by our own efforts, where God has to say: Ooh, wow; there is a good one. That is a perfect person. I am going to take them. No; we trust in Christ and what he has done; nevertheless, we also stress, as the Bible does, the need for us to grow individually and collectively in *real* righteousness of behavior—in Christ-likeness of behavior—including social justice; seeing our societies, our communities, transformed into places of shalom, of peace, of wholeness, of flourishing and righteousness. This isn't a left or right issue for Christians, as we sometimes set it up. This is not liberal versus evangelical or conservative. This is a kingdom issue, and all of us need to be drawn into it: The pursuit of the life of Jesus, both in ourselves and in our communities.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And one of the big things that will mean, and one of the ways we bring shalom and foster it is through forgiveness. So, Jesus wants us to be like him; so when he taught us the Lord's Prayer, he said: Your kingdom come, your will be done; but he also said: Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us; and that little two-letter word *as*, which is also just two letters in Greek, that packs a wallop, because that means if I don't forgive other people's sins, it means I don't understand the importance of *my* sins having been forgiven. I don't get it. If we have been forgiven, we forgive others. That is a major part of kingdom living and being a disciple of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

And maybe here is a third thought that we could leave with you: Jesus often compares the kingdom in his parables, and most of his parables actually are about the kingdom in one way or another, but he often compared it to leaven...the way leaven works in dough; or the smallest of seeds, like a grain of mustard that is planted, and yet it becomes a great tree eventually. He compared the kingdom to little things—to secret things. He talked about the way seed is sown in a field and it grows night and day; it even grows in the dark when you cannot see it; and in that way I think he is trying to clue us into the fact that the most important advances of the kingdom—the way it is going to come—might not be real open and obvious. They might not be big, huge things. They might not be sweeping, revolutionary changes. They could be simple, subtle, silent things; and that means that our lives can be like that, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, the leaven or the yeast in dough...part of the point of that image for Jesus was that it disappears. You put the yeast in the dough, you cannot see it; but it is in there. It is in every part of the dough, and you know that when you bake it and it rises and you see the effects of the yeast in the end; and so, when we are at work, when we are at school, when we are at home, when we are walking through the mall or sitting on the beach or going to a movie, we are supposed to be like that invisible yeast. Everywhere we go we are leavening the whole lump. We are advocating for the poor, we are forgiving people's sins, we are...all of it...everywhere we go, whenever we make life a little bit better, a little bit more like Jesus, then we are helping to display the reality of the kingdom.

You know, again, we did a justice series recently, but as somebody once said: In some ways, this isn't rocket science. It is really as simple as Micah 6:8: He has already shown you what to do; act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God; and in all of these ways we show that, already now, we are citizens of that kingdom that will one day be all in all.

DAVE BAST

May it be so. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee. We would like to know how we could help you continue digging into scripture. So tell us by visiting groundworkonline.com and we will look at the passages and topics you are interested in on *Groundwork*.

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