

THE KINGDOM COMES

The Kingdom matters

It has never been more important for the church to be reminded of the realities of the Kingdom of God. Our hope and security are not in the kingdoms of men. Jesus stated emphatically, "*My kingdom is not of this world...* (John 18:36)ⁱ and neither are we of this world if we have entered into His Kingdom, a Kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28). This age and all that is in it will someday pass away, but we will continue on, our lives established firmly in the eternal Kingdom. We cannot lose sight of this foundational truth; it is what grounds our lives solidly upon eternal purpose. In this paper we will explore how the coming of Christ marked the Inauguration of the Kingdom. We will see how the purpose of Christ to extend God's reign in the hearts and lives of men throughout the earth through His church has been the Continuation of the Kingdom. Finally, the return of Christ will usher us into the Eternal Age, where we will witness the Consummation of the Kingdom. The revelation about the Kingdom of God undergirds the teaching of the entire Bible. Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr. states, "The Scriptures reveal God using a number of metaphors, but the primary imagery which biblical writers used for God was that of a divine King (e.g. 1 Sam. 8:7). Alongside the basic conviction that God is the supreme King is the belief that He reigns over creation as His Kingdom (Ps. 47:1-9; 83:18). In this general sense then, God has always been the sovereign reigning King who rules in heaven over all things (Ps. 103:19; 113:5; Matt. 5:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 1:16; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 7:15)."ⁱⁱ Therefore, the Kingdom of God has always existed in the eternal realm and was made manifest on earth in the creation of man. However, man's sin led to his lost condition and eternal separation from God and His Kingdom. From the beginning it has been the mission of God to restore man into His Kingdom and to restore His Kingdom into the life of men. The Scripture

tells us that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). We understand the Mission of God (the *Missio Dei* as it is called in Latin) correctly emphasizes that God is the initiator of His mission to redeem, through the Church, a special people for Himself from all of the peoples of the world. He sent His Son for this purpose and He sends the Church into the world with the message of the Gospel for the same purpose. "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."ⁱⁱⁱ In this paper we explore the Kingdom and how the message of the Kingdom relates to the mission of God as it is extended through the people of God.

The Kingdom is mentioned over one hundred times in the Gospels alone. It is referred to as the Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Christ, the Kingdom of the Lord and the Gospel of the Kingdom among other variations. First we understand that these terms are synonymous, all referring to only one Kingdom. For example the Kingdom of Heaven is a Semitic form used by Matthew and the Kingdom of God is a Greek form used by Mark, Luke and John.^{iv} This is important in helping us to avoid any confusion about there being more than one Kingdom. Adam Clarke states, "God designed that His Kingdom of grace here should resemble the Kingdom of glory above. And hence, our Lord teaches us to pray, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."^v Paul reminds us in Romans chapter fourteen verse seventeen that the Kingdom does not consist of the gratification of sensual passions, or worldly ambition; but is spiritual—righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Spirit. Having now received this Kingdom what are we to expect in its consummation in the age to come? Clarke states, "Righteousness, without mixture of sin; peace, without strife or contention; joy, in the Holy Spirit, spiritual joy, without mixture of misery! And all this, it is possible, by the

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, to enjoy here below. How then does heaven itself differ from this state? Answer. It makes the righteousness eternal, the peace eternal, and the joy eternal. This is the heaven of heavens!”^{vi} One could say that the central theme of the Gospel recordings is the Inauguration of the Kingdom, in which Christ came to embody and provide all mankind entrance into—now and forevermore! It could be said that the Kingdom, like the King was and is and is to come. The prophets had prophesied concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God in passages throughout the scriptures. Daniel wrote, *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever”* (Dan 2:44) and, *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed”* (Dan 7:13-14). Isaiah prophesied concerning the Kingdom when he wrote, *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this”* (Isa 9:6-7). The prophets wrongly interpreted the prophecies and misunderstood the Kingdom, envisioning an earthly king coming to restore Israel’s sovereignty, its pride as well as its position of international power. The result was that many in the time of Christ’s coming could not receive Him as Messiah because they did not properly understand the scriptures

concerning the Kingdom of God. The difference in their thinking cannot better be expressed than by the saying of Bernhard Weiss, “He and they laid the accent on different halves of the phrase, they emphasizing ‘the kingdom’ and He ‘of God.’ They were thinking of the expulsion of the Romans, of a Jewish king and court, and of a world-wide dominion going forth from Mt. Zion; He was thinking of righteousness, holiness and peace, of the doing of the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. So earthly and fantastic were the expectations of the Jewish multitude that He had to escape from their hands when they tried to take Him by force and make Him a king.”^{vii} So we understand how important it is we have a proper understanding of the teachings of our Lord concerning the Kingdom. We see that as a result of misinterpreting the scripture the religious leaders in Jesus’ time rejected Him as Messiah, missed the coming of the Kingdom, and were responsible for inhibiting others from properly responding to it. Without a proper understanding of the Kingdom we risk misinterpreting much of the Gospel message that Christ came teaching, failing to properly relate our life in Christ to the purpose of His coming, as well as misrepresenting the message of the Kingdom to the world. Those who misinterpret the scriptures will inevitably wrongly define the Kingdom. The result of this will be a gross distortion of our Lord’s teachings and a perversion of the purpose of His church as we seek to fulfill His purpose in manifesting His Kingdom in this Age. Ultimately, we will fail to properly relate our lives both individually and corporately to the purpose for our existence. An incorrect understanding of the Kingdom will inevitably result in erroneous philosophies, doctrines and practices becoming pervasive in the church. We have seen examples of this throughout the history of the church and can be witnessed today. For example: The theology of “Apocalyptic Fatalism”, is a belief that there is no hope for this lost age. This belief carries the idea that the Kingdom is only realized in the Age to come and therefore we look to and wait for the return of

our Lord with little purpose but to survive this evil age. However this escapist mentality robs the church of its authority, its power and its purpose. It also has the potential of endlessly delaying the end of this age by abdicating the responsibility in which Christ invested all authority and power and dominion—to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the nations of the earth. George Eldon Ladd in his book the Gospel of the Kingdom described this position as, “A defensive attitude, our main concern being self-preservation. We assume a defeatist interpretation of our significance and of our role in the world and find it extremely difficult to justify our present existence...”^{viii} The opposite extreme would be the idea that the Kingdom is here consummated in this Age, on this earth. People who fix their hopes upon a kingdom which is to be consummated in this Age are certain to be disillusioned. This type of “Dominion” or “Kingdom Now” theology works to fully establish God’s Kingdom on this earth. They strive to right every wrong, to Christianize the government or control society through Christian law believing that Christ’s Kingdom will find its fulfillment in this Age if we pray hard enough, serve long enough and exert enough influence we can change the world. Because the church has wrongly defined its goal, the mission of the church is changed entirely. Rather than carrying out the commands of our Lord the church becomes bogged down with an impossible social agenda leading it further and further from the cause of Christ and closer and closer towards a secular humanistic existence. We forget that Christ prayed for His church, stating, “*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world*” (John17:16). His prayer was that they being in this world might be sanctified or set apart from this world by the Word. It was the Word, the Words of the prophets and the Words of Christ which were meant to enable men to enter into the Kingdom and enable the Kingdom to enter into men. We can never forget the Kingdom was meant to transform lives and whole communities from the inside out not from the outside in. The Gospel writer, Luke,

tells us that God had entrusted the prophecies to the religious leaders of Israel and with this knowledge they were to interpret the prophecies and prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah, that they might receive and enter into the Kingdom. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day saying, *"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering"* (Luke 11:52). This key of knowledge He was speaking of was the correct understanding and interpretation of the scriptures which should have led them by revelation into an understanding and acceptance of Christ the Messiah and the Kingdom of life He came proclaiming. So we see that our entering into and experiencing the life and blessing and eternal purpose of the Kingdom is dependent on a correct understanding of the Kingdom. Our definition of the Kingdom truly does matter.

Definition of the Kingdom

It is imperative that we come to a proper understanding of our definition of the Kingdom. Any definition must address the seemingly contradictory statements in the scripture concerning the Kingdom. The scripture speaks of the Kingdom of God as having come as a present reality (Matthew 12:28), and yet it speaks of the Kingdom as being something that will manifest not in this, the Church Age, but in the Age to come, the Eternal Age (Matthew 25:34). The Kingdom of God is spoken of as a personal inner spiritual redemptive blessing (Romans 14:17), which is experienced at the time of and only through the new birth (John 3:3), and yet it will extend to all nations and throughout the whole earth (Revelation 7:9; Revelation 11:15). The scripture tells us that having been born again, we are now in the Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13), but we look forward to an abundant entrance into the Kingdom of our Lord in the eternal Kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). The Kingdom of God is a realm in which men are entering now (Matthew 21:31),

and yet it is a realm in which men will enter in the future (Luke 19:11). In the last example we find Jesus instructing the people about the Kingdom. In this parable we find a key that leads us to our definition of the Kingdom. In verse eleven and twelve we read, “*Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the Kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: ‘A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return’*” (Luke 19:11, 12).^{ix} We see here that a kingdom is not a place or a time but rather authority to rule and reign. The word kingdom comes from the two words king and dominion. Simply put, a kingdom is the place where the king has dominion. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is where God has dominion. Essentially, our definition of the Kingdom is Christ’s rulership, His Lordship. This definition satisfies both the Old Testament prophecies and the Gospel teachings of our Lord. We understand that the Kingdom is the reign of the Messiah as a King over a Kingdom as it is begun in the lives of individuals who make up His body the Church spreading throughout the earth and stretching into eternity. So when we talk about the Kingdom we are talking about Christ’s kingship, His rulership. Therefore our definition of the Kingdom is not subjected to times or places but rather wherever the King has dominion we find the manifestation of the Kingdom. Again, it could be said that the Kingdom of God like the eternal King was and is and is to come. Jesus said about the Kingdom, “*The kingdom of God does not come with signs to be observed or with visible display, Nor will people say, Look! Here [it is]! or, See, [it is] there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you [in your hearts] and among you [surrounding you]* (Luke 17:20-21).^x

The Inauguration of the Kingdom

In the same way that the prophets recorded their prophecies pointing to the coming of the Kingdom, the Gospel’s record that Kingdom being made manifest. The coming of Christ was

the incarnation, the embodiment or the Inauguration of the Kingdom. It is in Christ we see the Inauguration and through His body the Continuation and in His return we see the Consummation of the Kingdom. Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr. writes, “The New Testament teaches that this final worldwide stage of the Kingdom of God began with the incarnation of Christ. He and John the Baptist announced the good news that the Kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). But contrary to common Jewish expectations, Jesus and His apostles explained that the worldwide reign of God on earth would not come immediately in all of its fullness. Instead, Christ inaugurated this final stage of the Kingdom in His earthly ministry (Matt. 2:2; 4:23; 9:35; 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 16:16; 23:3; John 18:37). It continues today in the church (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 4:19-20; Col. 4:11), but it will reach its ultimate end when Christ returns in glory (1 Cor. 15:50-58; Rev. 11:5). When that day finally comes, the will of God will be done throughout the earth just as it is done in heaven.”^{xi} In John chapter one, we are told that Christ was the Word and was with God from the beginning (John 1:1). We know He came to earth and was made in the likeness of a man in every way, sharing in their humanity (Hebrews 2:14, 17). John says that Christ came unto those who were His own but most rejected Him. However, to those who received Him and His message He gave the right to become the children of God (John 1:11,12). Through the prophets, the Law, the Psalms until John, God reminded man of this promise and Israel’s fathers foretold the ministry of the Messiah and the coming of the Kingdom. Matthew records these events in this way, “*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John*” (Matt 11:12-13). These two verses, twelve and thirteen, could be transposed for better understanding. Indeed in Luke’s account they are. “*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom*

of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it” (Luke 16:16). So we see that the Law and the prophets foretold the coming of the King and the establishment of His Kingdom until John the Baptist. John came announcing the Kingdom of God is indeed at hand. If John came announcing the Kingdom in Matthew chapter three verse two—Christ came manifesting it throughout the rest of the Gospels. The Kingdom of God has invaded this evil age, establishing the Lordship of Christ, manifesting the life and power of God, and making available the blessings of God in the Eternal Age to all those who would receive the Kingdom. Matthew writes, *“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’”* (Matt 4:17).^{xii} *“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people”* (Matt 4:23).^{xiii} Jesus not only came proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom but demonstrating it in power. Jesus drove this point home when He stated, *“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”* (Matt 12:28). He states the power and authority with which I minister is evidence that the Kingdom of God has come to you. Mark records, *“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’”* (Mark 1:14-15).^{xiv} Jesus makes the Kingdom central to His mission and central to His message. In Matthew chapter six verse thirty-three Jesus taught that man’s life consisted of more than his temporal basic needs such as what he would eat and drink, how he might clothe himself, or where he might find shelter. As important as these things are to our very survival His instruction was to seek the eternal Kingdom of God, to seek His rulership, His kingship, above everything else, trusting God to care for our basic needs. Again looking at Matthew six verse nine, Jesus taught the disciples as they

prayed they should pray for the Lord's will to be eternally and unequivocally done in their lives just as it was done in heaven. In this way the Kingdom would come as God's will and reign were established in and through the hearts and lives of His people. We understand that the Kingdom coming is directly tied to His will being done on earth as it is in heaven. The International Bible Encyclopedia states, "By this let it appear that Christ's kingdom is come, let God's will be done; and by this let it appear that it is come as a kingdom of heaven, let it introduce a heaven upon earth. We make Christ but a title Prince, if we call Him King, and do not do His will: having prayed that He may rule us, we pray that we may in every thing be ruled by Him"^{xv}. George Eldon Ladd said, "This prayer is a petition for God to reign, to manifest His kingly sovereignty and power, to put to flight every enemy of righteousness and of His divine rule, that God alone may be King over all the world."^{xvi} In His Kingdom He is Lord of all.

Receive the Kingdom

The Scripture speaks of the great difficulty even impossibility of men entering into the Kingdom when trusting in man, in riches, in self's righteousness. In Matthew chapter five verse twenty Jesus told the people that if their righteousness did not exceed that of the Pharisees, Israel's religious leaders, they could never enter the Kingdom of heaven. This was an astonishing statement since the people had always looked to the Pharisees to define for them the requirements of the law necessary to observe in order to assure right-standing with God. This must have resulted in questioning how could any man achieve this righteousness if the Pharisees with their much learning had been unable to earn it based upon their own understanding and careful observance of ritual. However, what was not understood was the grace of our Lord, the grace of the Kingdom. Ladd says in his book *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, "The Kingdom does not ask to find in ourselves the righteousness that it demands; God alone can give us the

Righteousness of His Kingdom. God's Kingdom does not ask us to create the life that it requires; God's Kingdom will give us freely that life. God's Kingdom does not set up a standard of holiness and state when you achieve this level of holiness you may enter the Kingdom; it alone has the power to produce this holiness in us. God's Kingdom makes only one real demand of us—repent, turn, and decide! Receive the Kingdom, its life, its blessing, its righteousness, its holiness.”^{xvii} So everyone when confronted with the Gospel of the Kingdom, the good news of the King and this glorious new Kingdom He is inviting us to join, must choose their response very carefully. To reject the message of the Kingdom is to reject the blessing and eternal life of the Kingdom. To accept or to receive the Gospel of the Kingdom is to accept the King and His dominion over every aspect of human existence. We cannot depend upon our own goodness, our wealth, our status in community. We must simply give our lives to Him and trust Him to receive the life and blessing of the Kingdom. We transfer our allegiance from one king to another. We serve a new master and we must serve that master wholly. Jesus stressed this in His encounter with three individuals in the Gospel of Luke chapter nine verses fifty-seven through sixty-two. The first individual boasts about his readiness to make Christ his Teacher, to become a disciple, a follower of Christ. Christ, however, warns him to think very carefully about his decision and to understand fully the implications. Christ demanded that a resolute decision be made. We need to understand that we may receive the blessing and the promises of that Kingdom but that Kingdom makes certain demands of us. The King has every right to expect our observance and commitment to His authority and rule, remember He will be no “token king”. The next man Jesus calls to come along side of Him, to respond to the message of the Kingdom. This man as well expresses his desire to receive the blessing of the inheritance by entering into that Kingdom, however, he needs time to adjust his priorities to put his affairs in order, to fulfill traditional

family obligations. His commitment to the other things in life makes it clear that he is not seeking first the Kingdom. Rather he is seeking the Kingdom in addition to everything else he has filled his good life with. Let it never be forgotten that delayed obedience is no obedience at all. The third man also expresses his willingness to embrace the Kingdom—but with conditions. He is told, no man who answers the call to service in the Kingdom and then later looks back, or is found reluctant, wavering or halting in his loyalty is fit for the Kingdom. What the Kingdom demands of everyone is the response of will, willing obedience to Christ's total Lordship. In our lives, He is either master of all or master of none. Jesus makes this very clear when He says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven,"* (Matt. 7:21). He here states emphatically that to call me Lord is to enter into the divine order of relationship with Him and to commit oneself to total obedience to the will of the Father. You cannot call Him Lord and you will not enter into His Kingdom if you are not submitted wholly to Him as Master. To these who profess to have entered His Kingdom but do not do His will He says, *"I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers"* (Matt. 7:23). These have clearly never entered into His Kingdom.

Understanding the Kingdom

To those receiving the Kingdom Jesus tells many parables to illustrate His Kingdom rule and its expansion in and through their lives. Several of these stories begin with the statement, *"The kingdom of Heaven is like..."* Jesus' parables illustrated to those He taught truths about the function and purpose of the Kingdom of God. In Matthew chapter thirteen verses forty-four and forty-five, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a great treasure or a fine pearl. Upon finding it a man is to relinquish everything, that he might possess it. He here signifies that the Kingdom is to be possessed above all, no matter what the cost. He places here infinite value upon the

Kingdom. In verses thirty-one and thirty-three He teaches us concerning the nature of the Kingdom and compares it to a seed and yeast saying, "...*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.*" He told them still another parable: '*The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough*'" (Matt 13:31-33). The common theme in these parables is the small initial introduction of the Kingdom in either seed form (the very smallest seed) or as yeast and then the very rapid and total expansion of that Kingdom. Christ's strategy for extending the Kingdom first in individual lives and then throughout the world recommends that the gospel be implanted like yeast so that it leavens, or planted like a seed so that it grows. This was God's plan from the beginning, that the Kingdom comes among men not with overwhelming force but the unstoppable power of a seed planted in the hearts of individuals. He envisioned that seed growing up and bearing the fruit of the Kingdom in the individual life. In this way the Kingdom would work its way into the families and extend into communities and spread from nation to nation in every generation. In Matthew chapter thirteen verses one through twenty-three Jesus also uses the concept of a seed to teach on the Kingdom. In Mark's account of the "Parable of the Seed" we are told that this is the most important of all of the parables. Indeed, if you are not able to understand this parable He states, "*How then will you understand any parable*" (Mark 4:13). He states that the seed is the message about the Kingdom and it is to be sown into the human heart. In this parable we are made to understand that it is not the quality of the seed that determines the harvest but rather the quality of the soil or condition of the human heart. In Matthew chapter thirteen verse nineteen, states that if the message of the Kingdom or the seed is

not understood, received or properly regarded due to inattention or carelessness the enemy will come to strip the seed from the soil of the human heart, resulting in fruitlessness. He continues in verses twenty-one and twenty-two to describe conditions that might exist in the human heart that will affect the effectiveness of the seed to produce an intended harvest of the life and the blessing of the Kingdom in our lives. He teaches that trouble or temptation (due to shallowness) will cause the power of the seed to never be realized in our lives. He describes how persecution, affliction or attack, for the Word sake will cause us to abandon our faith in the Word of God. He reveals how the worries of this life, cares of this world, anxiety and fear and the distractions of this age, even the deceitfulness of wealth (a greed or the love of money) has the power to distract us from the blessing of the Kingdom that is meant to be introduced into our lives through the planting of this seed. Through this teaching, we understand that much of the life and blessing of the Kingdom which manifests in our lives in this Age is dependent upon our faith and receiving the Promises of God in our heart. We trust in the Word of God to make manifest that which He has promised. However, our faith is not in our ability to believe alone, but rather in the eternal power embedded in the Kingdom promises of our Lord. Later in Mark we find Jesus comparing the Kingdom to a seed, this time stating that the seed or the Word of the Kingdom is truly miraculous. Mark writes, *“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head”* (Mark 4:27-28). We have no real power over the Kingdom anymore than we have power over the seed. We may initiate its coming by planting the seed and if the conditions of the human heart are right the seed will produce. Night and day we sleep and we arise; we cannot affect the seed, we cannot make it grow or stop its growth. The seed produces in its own power, not through any effort of our own. In the same way the

message of the Kingdom is a seed that is planted in the soil of our lives. If the conditions are met and the seed is allowed to take root and grow it will produce in and of itself the blessing and the life of the Kingdom within, first the shoot then the head and then the full harvest of the seed. Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom gives us a basic biblical law for Kingdom expansion—it is something that must grow and it can only grow if it is planted. In the individual and in a society it will begin very small and then grow. The result of this is divine—a miracle as Ladd states, “The Kingdom of God is a miracle. It is the act of God. It is Supernatural. Men cannot build the Kingdom, they cannot erect it. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of God; it is God's reign, God's rule. God has entrusted the Kingdom of God to men. It is our responsibility to proclaim the Good News about the Kingdom. But the actual workings of the Kingdom are God's workings. The fruitage is not by human effort or skill but by the life of the Kingdom itself. The Kingdom comes to men today in the same way it did from the beginning. God's people come proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. It comes quietly, humbly—it comes as the seed sown into the earth. It can be rejected by hard hearts, it can be choked out, its life sometimes to wither and die. But it is the Kingdom of God. It is eternal and it brings the miracle of divine life among men. It introduces them into the blessing of the divine rule.”^{xviii} In this way the Kingdom of God functions.

In Matthew sixteen we are introduced to the Keys of the Kingdom. Jesus explains how the message of the Kingdom introduced as a seed is the basis for the expansion of the Kingdom in the life of an individual and through His Body the Church. We have already seen according to Luke chapter eleven verse fifty-two the key to knowledge was their ability to rightly interpret the scripture and because of their inability to do this they were unable to enter into the Kingdom and consequently hindered the masses from entering in as well. It is for this reason that Jesus told

the religious leaders, *"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit"* (Matt 21:43). Jesus now begins to look to this people who will prove fruitful concerning His Kingdom. We will see that it is to this new people He will offer these same keys (a right conception of the scripture) making them capable of unlocking the Kingdom to all who will enter. Jesus travels into the region of Caesarea Philippi and there He asks His disciples a decisive question, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they answered, Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you [yourselves] say that I am? Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Then Jesus answered him, blessed (happy, fortunate, and to be envied) are you, Simon Bar-Jonah. For flesh and blood [men] have not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven* (Matthew 16:13-17).^{xix} You have received this by revelation of the Spirit. This was not revealed to you through your physical senses. This is not a conclusion that you have come to through education or reason. Jesus responds to Peter with these very important words, *"And I tell you, you are Peter [Greek, Petros — a large piece of rock], and on this rock [Greek, Petra — a huge rock like Gibraltar] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades (the powers of the infernal region) shall not overpower it [or be strong to its detriment or hold out against it]"* (Matt 16:18).^{xx} He here states that upon this rock He will build His church. Peter later describes this church as a, *"chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus uses the Greek word *Ek-klesia*. This is the Greek word used in the Septuagint for the people of God; a people called unto God. Christ is here saying that He will call out a people unto Him and they will be His people.^{xxi} The foundation of this church would not be Peter, as it has been wrongly understood (see the Greek

bracketed in verse eighteen) but rather the foundation would be this knowledge revealed by God. He states emphatically that He will build His church on this revelation knowledge and His church by proclaiming this revelation will extend His Kingdom. George Eldon Ladd states it this way, “The Kingdom of God, as the redemptive activity and rule of God in Christ, created the Church and works through the Church in the world to accomplish His divine purpose of extending His Kingdom in the world”^{xxii} and also, “Thus the mission of the church is not only that of employing the Keys of the Kingdom to open to both the Jew and the Gentile the door into the eternal life which is the gift of God’s Kingdom; it is also the instrument of God’s dynamic rule in the world to oppose evil and the powers of Satan in every form in their manifestation. When God’s people lose sight of this fact, we betray our character as the Church.”^{xxiii} Jesus promises that all of the forces of hell cannot stand against the advance of His church or His Kingdom. We are here reminded of the language used by Matthew to describe the manner in which the Kingdom has been advancing. He stated in Matthew chapter eleven verse twelve, the Kingdom of Heaven has been “*forcefully advancing*” since the days of John the Baptist. Ladd states, “God’s Kingdom is at work in the world and is engaged in a mortal struggle with evil. The Church is the instrument of this struggle. Conflict therefore must ever be an essential element in the life of the Church so long as this age lasts.”^{xxiv} Jesus concludes, “*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*” (Matt 16:19). Effectively, we are given the keys that unlock the blessing of the Kingdom in the Eternal Age bringing the life and blessing of that Age into this Age, not only applying them in our own lives but preaching them as the Good News of the Kingdom to all mankind. Ladd explains, “In a real sense of the word it is the Church—the disciples of the Lord—who use the keys (the Knowledge of the Kingdom as

it is revealed by the Gospel of the Kingdom) to perform the function of binding and loosing; but in a deeper sense, it is the working of the Kingdom of God through the Church which accomplishes these eternal ends.”^{xxv}

The Continuation of the Kingdom

As we have already seen in Luke nine beginning in verse fifty-seven and continuing into chapter ten everyone when encountering the Kingdom must decide how to respond—to submit one’s life to Christ’s Lordship or to reject it. Having received the Kingdom, we not only enter into the life and the blessing of the Kingdom but we enter into the Mission of the Kingdom as well. Everyone that has received this Gospel of the Kingdom has therefore entered into the Kingdom and the Kingdom is being manifest in and through them. In Luke chapter ten Jesus sends out seventy disciples ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go. He commissions His disciples with this command, “*Go, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves...Heal the sick that are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'*” (Luke 10:3, 9). Matthew records, “*As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons*” (Matt 10:7-8). Jesus told them, “*He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me*” (Luke 10:16). We must understand we are carriers of the Kingdom. God’s Kingdom has come among men but each one must receive it with a willing heart and a submissive will. Ladd explains how the Kingdom is meant to advance, “The Kingdom of God does not function in a vacuum but is entrusted to men and works through redeemed men, His disciples, who have given themselves to the rule of God through Christ.”^{xxvi} We could say that as Jesus was the incarnation of the Kingdom, today we are the embodiment of that Kingdom.

We are the embodiment of that Kingdom to the world by becoming proclaimers of the Gospel of the Kingdom. The church is the collection of disciples each one charged with the proclamation and the manifestation or the Continuation of the Kingdom throughout the world. We see this clearly in Christ's command to all of His true disciples to both preach the Gospel of the Kingdom and to prove its validity by demonstrating its coming in power (Mark 16:20). We see that the Kingdom came and was made manifest in one man Christ Jesus. He was the incarnation of God's redemptive plan. The Kingdom was made manifest in Him as it was preached and demonstrated in power. Henry Blackaby states, "To be in relationship with Christ is to be on mission with Him. You cannot be in relationship with Jesus and not be on Mission."^{xxvii} It is imperative that we are able to see our new life in the Kingdom with eternal perspective and eternal purpose. We exist to finish what Christ started. In the book of John Jesus prayed, as you (God) sent me into the world; I am sending them (disciples) into the world. The Message translation reads, "*In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world*" (John 17:18).^{xxviii} Christ clearly defined this mission near the end of His earthly ministry, "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*" (Matt 24:14). We are told that this Age will end and the Eternal Age will be ushered in only after the Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached as a testimony to all nations. We can never forget the power that is in the seed of the Gospel. Ladd states, God's Kingdom works in this world through the power of the Gospel."^{xxix} It is for this reason that Jesus commanded the disciples "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matt 28:19-20). In this we understand that I am a carrier of the

Kingdom and in me the Kingdom is advancing. But only as I preach it, only as it is manifest in me. So, wherever I travel and wherever I preach—the Kingdom of God is advancing.

The Consummation of the Kingdom

In the Book of Revelation from chapters five through seven the apostle John saw this glorious end. Seeing into the Eternal Age, he witnessed a gathering of all nations worshipping before the throne. He saw that those nations formed one people and had been made a Kingdom reigning forever. Christ's coming Kingdom is made up of people from every nation and culture. This was made very clear to John the apostle through a vision he records in the book of Revelation. He describes a scene he witnesses in Heaven. *“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth’”* (Rev 5:9-10). He makes it clear that these are the redeemed from every tribe and language and people and nation in Revelation chapter seven when he writes, *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’”* (Rev 7:9-10). This is how the Eternal Age will begin. The Kingdom was made manifest and is a present reality but we understand that it is only fully realized in the Eternal Age. Paul writing to the church in Ephesus speaks of the end of this age, the climax of all ages, the Consummation of the Kingdom when he writes, *“Making known to us the mystery (secret) of His will (of His plan, of His purpose). [And it is this:] In*

*accordance with His good pleasure (His merciful intention) which He had previously purposed and set forth in Him, [He planned] for the maturity of the times and the climax of the ages to unify all things and head them up and consummate them in Christ, [both] things in heaven and things on the earth” (Eph 1:9-10).^{xxx} In the climax of the ages, the Consummation of the Kingdom, we see Christ above all and His enemies beneath His feet. Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr., writes, “God’s holiness and glory in His heavenly throne room is so overwhelming that all creatures there honor him with unqualified voluntary service. On earth, however, creatures rebel and refuse to acknowledge God as King, and evil kingdoms rise up to oppose God’s Kingdom. The hope that Scripture presents from cover to cover is that this disparity between the heavenly throne room and earth will be eliminated one day (1 Chr. 16:31-36). God will judge the wicked and bring redeemed humanity into a new creation (Isa. 65; Zech. 14). When this transformation takes place, only God’s Kingdom will stand and voluntary obedience to him will extend to the ends of the earth as it does in heaven (Ps. 97:1).”^{xxxii} Paul speaks of this final defeat of all God’s enemies in his letter to the church in Ephesus, “*He exerted (power) in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His [own] right hand in the heavenly [places], Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named [above every title that can be conferred], not only in this age and in this world, but also in the age and the world which are to come. And He has put all things under His feet and has appointed Him the universal and supreme Head of the church” (Eph 1:20-22).*^{xxxii} The eternal age will be ushered in as Christ the conquering King subjects everything, including Himself to God, who will rule eternally as All in All. Again Paul writes, “*Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.**

For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:24-28).^{xxxiii} As we have already seen the Kingdom has always existed because the King has always existed. However man became separated from his King and his homeland because of sin. From the very beginning God promised to restore man to his rightful, created position in His family. This remains the Mission of God until man is restored into God's Kingdom and God's Kingdom is restored to man. Then John rights in Revelation, "And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever'" (Rev 11:15-16).

xxxiv

Final Thoughts

I came into this study in a rather backwards fashion. Over the years I have worked to develop what I call a Biblical Missiology. This form of Biblical missional thinking has caused me to narrow my understanding of the Mission of God to what I believe are the roots or foundation. As I have narrowed my study I believe that this teaching concerning the Kingdom lies at the foundation of all that we do as individuals and as the church. As I have taught this from nation to nation including here in the US I have been astounded at the response I have received. Many, even among the mature, have commented that they have never heard such teaching. This is hard to believe considering how foundational and fundamental this teaching is to the core of our beliefs. Some have come to me in tears expressing the hope they have found in the message of redemption and righteousness which can only be received as a free gift by

receiving the Kingdom. Some have commented that it is too complex; however I only believe that it is complex if we begin with incorrect assumptions and wrong definitions. Hopefully this paper has served to make the subject more understandable as well as spur further study and teaching of the Kingdom of God.

ⁱ All biblical quotations are taken from the NIV version unless otherwise stated.

ⁱⁱ IIM Magazine Online, Volume 4, Number 15, April 14 to April 20, 2002 article entitled What is the Kingdom of God by Dr Richard L. Pratt Jr.

ⁱⁱⁱ International Missionary Council, Moltmann 1977, p64

^{iv} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 32

^v Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2005 by BibleSoft, Inc.

^{vi} Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2005 by BibleSoft, Inc.

^{vii} International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc

^{viii} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 134

^{ix} Holy Bible, New King James Version, Luke 19:11, 12

^x Holy Bible, Amplified version

^{xi} IIM Magazine Online, Volume 4, Number 15, April 14 to April 20, 2002 article entitled What is the Kingdom of God by Dr Richard L. Pratt Jr.

^{xii} Holy Bible, New King James Version

^{xiii} Holy Bible, New King James Version

^{xiv} Holy Bible, New King James Version

^{xv} International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc

^{xvi} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 21

^{xvii} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 97

^{xviii} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 64

^{xix} Holy Bible, Amplified version

^{xx} Holy Bible, Amplified version

^{xxi} From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

^{xxii} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 112

^{xxiii} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p 121-122

^{xxiv} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p 121

^{xxv} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p. 115-116

^{xxvi} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p 116

^{xxvii} From Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, Third Edition, p. 58, excerpted from On a Mission with God by Henry Blackaby and Avery Willis Jr.

^{xxviii} THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language © 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved.

^{xxix} The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd p.125

^{xxx} Holy Bible, Amplified version

^{xxxi} IIM Magazine Online, Volume 4, Number 15, April 14 to April 20, 2002 article entitled What is the Kingdom of God by Dr Richard L. Pratt Jr.

^{xxxii} Holy Bible, Amplified version

^{xxxiii} Holy Bible, New King James Version

^{xxxiv} Holy Bible, New King James Version