The Kingdom Consciousness of a True Disciple (Part Two) By Jay Wegter

IV. In Christ and His work, the future, a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17) has already come. The age to come (though not in its global fulfillment yet) is penetrating this present age. (continued from the Kingdom Consciousness article, part one)

E. The cross is at the center of God's plan of glory, rescue, and restoration. It is at the cross that the triumph of God's Kingdom is accomplished. At the cross He battles the power of evil and gains the decisive victory (Col 2:11-15). His resurrection is the dawning of the first day of the new creation. The end of universal history that Jesus announced will finally arrive in fulness. The gospel of the Kingdom is an announcement about where God is moving the history of the whole world. Jesus employs a popular Old Testament image to drive this home: *one day the world will be the Kingdom of God*.ⁱ

In the secularized, relativistic age in which we live, we are ever prone to divide up our complex lives into compartments in order to keep things "manageable." To our own discredit and shame, we even attempt to compartmentalize the eternal truths of God—often *partitioning them off* from the demands, pleasures, and activities of life. "Kingdom thinking" brings us back to the reality that this is a moral universe over which heaven rules. It is a moral universe solely because of one reason, the Creator and Ruler of this universe is holy. Moral cause and effect (crime and punishment—obedience and blessing) are not impersonal laws and forces. The inviolate law of moral cause and effect is a reflection of the righteous character of the God of the universe who governs His creation. (For example, see the promises made to those who fear God in Psalm 34.)

This universal truth of God's moral government must be the backdrop for properly understanding the cross of Christ. The landmark third chapter in Romans on the revelation of God's righteousness in propitiation, redemption, and justification, ends with these words: "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (Rom 3:31). For, in the incarnation and work of Christ, God in the flesh comes to address the outcome of His broken moral law. This fact should shake us—stagger us—and ever be fresh and exhilarating to us. God in Christ takes on the burden of His own wrath for the sake of His people. God absorbs His own wrath in the Person of Christ in the work of propitiation (Rom 3:25-26). The holy justice which His character demands, He Himself provides in the substitutionary death of Christ. Penal substitution is the heart of the gospel.

In the Person and work of Christ, *Agape* love reaches out of eternity into time. The age to come has broken into time and space. Christ crucified for sinners is at the center of our worldview (1 Cor 2:2). Time and eternity meet in Christ. As *Logos*, Christ unifies all reality in Himself (temporal and eternal, material and immaterial, being and becoming).ⁱⁱ His resurrection 'nails' us to eternity. The age to come, which will endure through all eternity, has arrived in the Person of Christ.

This is the point of Kingdom thinking—for the people of God, end-time judgment has already come at the cross. The "hell" they should have justly endured was borne by Christ in His passion. Christ entered our alienation and dereliction. He came to earth and radically identified Himself with our cursed existence (Gal 3:13)—He was the *man of sorrows acquainted with grief* (Is 53:3). During His humiliation, He was the believer's "sympathetic High Priest in training" that He might become our merciful and faithful High Priest (see Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16; 5:7-9). He even bore the emotional and social consequences of our sin with its shame, sorrow, suffering, rejection, betrayal, fear, grief, death, and separation from God.

FOR DISCUSSION: Describe the ways in which the cross of Christ defines your life—where you have been, what you were, what you are now, how you are to walk, where your power for holiness comes from, what you will be.

F. The cross marked the decisive turning point in the destiny of all men, fallen angels, and the entire creation itself. Thus, the scope of the coming Kingdom is cosmic—extending to the entire creation.

To preach the Kingdom of God is to proclaim the eschatological reality that God will manifest Himself as King—invading human history in a series of climatic events which will set up the final form of world order. The church is not the Kingdom—but the church manifests the Kingdom as a kind of 'outpost' of the coming Kingdom. For, the church is made up of the citizens of the Kingdom. Christ has called believers into His body, the church. Through faith and repentance, they have submitted to the redemptive lordship of Christ—they have believed the "gospel of the Kingdom" (Mt 24:14).

When Jesus was proclaiming the Kingdom, He was announcing the imminent end of the world and the arrival of a violent, militant, apocalyptic upheaval of the present world order (Heb 12:25-29; Mt 24:29-35). Here is where our weakness in theology and our failure in Scripture meditation are revealed. Our concept of heaven is far too ethereal, like floating spirits without bodily form, wispy clouds and harps. This is far from the truth. For the scope of Christ's eschatological rule will be cosmic. The extent of His realm will reach to the entire creation. God's renewal is across the whole range of human life, in all of our relational spheres, but also extends to the non-human creation. In Romans 8:20-23, Paul pictures the non-human creation as groaning in anticipation of renewal. Under the bondage of decay and futility, the whole creation is yearning for the time when the final liberation of God's people will take place. For then, the creation too will be liberated from the bondage of sin. Lions will lie down with lambs (Is 11:6).ⁱⁱⁱ Salvation will extend *as far as the curse is found*.^{iv}

The Bible promises that we may expect a glorious renewal of life on earth, for, the age to come will be endlessly thrilling in its adventure of living with God on the new earth (Rev 21). His presence will pervade every act and we shall be more fully human than we have ever been—being liberated from sin, death, and all that hurts or harms. The Kingdom of God will be restorative and comprehensive. All of human life and all of creation will be restored to serve the Lord as they were meant to do. This is 'cosmic holiness' in other words, the teleological goal of every created thing will be fulfilling its design and purpose to the glory of God. This is the goal of the biblical story. The Church today has left this out of its Christian worldview, as mentioned above. As a consequence, they have seen God's ultimate plan for us as being heavenly and spiritual, and that view leads us to imagine that spiritual things (immaterial things) are God's chief concern. Thus, it is common today to believe that a spiritual heaven is God's greatest good for us and a renewed earth and our physical existence on it must somehow be second best.^v

This is where so many in our churches today are blind to the reality of the Kingdom of God and the new heavens and earth (2 Pet 3:10-13). All things in every place will be subject to Christ—the exalted Christ is "head over everything for the church" (Eph 1:22). The church today has done a poor job of

keeping the present and the future elements of the Kingdom joined in its devotion to Christ. We need to preach the relevance of the Kingdom, and the significance of the breadth of its scope.^{vi}

The world was oblivious, and still is, to the scope of the triumph which Christ accomplished by His death and resurrection. Paul proclaims in Colossians, All the fullness of salvation dwells in Christ. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him I say, whether things on earth, or things in heaven" (Col 1:19-20).

The Father was pleased to have all redemptive power dwell in Christ who is the Agent for, and goal for reconciliation (Col 1:20). To reconcile (*apokatallacia*)—in its redemptive sense means to exchange hostility for friendship. The prefix conveys the idea of complete reconciliation. God's reconciling of man to Himself is necessary because of the enmity of sinners toward God in their natural mind (Rom 5:8-11; 8:5-7). Man's corruption is an effrontery to God; the fact and existence of corruption requires reconciliation before relations can be restored.

But, in what sense does Christ reconcile all things to Himself? "All things" reconciled by His blood cannot mean universal salvation. The broader (non-salvific) meaning of reconciliation in Colossians 1:20 points to the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the millennium when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father (Phil 2:10; Rom 14:11).^{vii} "Having made peace,"—the participle is inserted to indicate the reconciliation is not a cosmic miracle in which the universe is changed outside of man. BUT, that reconciliation is primarily concerned with relationships that are restored. Peace here is not primarily defined in the negative—that is by erasing or canceling out hostilities—but reconciliation points to positive content with positive blessings—spiritual blessings impacting the prosperity of the whole man.^{viii} By His obedience, Christ, the last Adam, restores the creation that was cursed for Adam's sake. This fact is monumental—the direction of the universe, including those who live in it, is forever changed because of what God does through a man, Christ Jesus.

At present, heaven and earth are not now united. Kingdoms are in conflict; sin brought the universe into a state of corruption, decay, and deterioration. Sin destroyed harmony. Through the blood of His cross the sin principle is conquered—the curse is borne, the law satisfied, peace is made and restored. Through Christ and His cross the universe is brought back to its proper relation to God. "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him" (Eph 1:9-10).

As a just reward for His obedience, Christ is exalted to God's right hand, and He receives the Church which He has purchased. And, from this position of exaltation, glory, and power—He rules the universe. "*These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about 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 every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection 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" (Eph 1:19b-23).

What He accomplished at the cross, He will consummate at the Second Advent when He formally and militantly takes back the title deed to the earth. Through Christ, all intelligent beings— both obedient and disobedient, and both human and angelic will acknowledge the sovereignty of God manifest in the lordship of Christ who is over all. "I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*" (Is 45:23). The vastness of Christ's Person is seen in His cosmic Kingship (He is Head of the Church; all things are under His feet; He is Lord of all creation). Thus, His cross ultimately affects not only mankind, but the entire cosmos.

All the redeemed and unredeemed will acknowledge His sovereignty, AND in that sense there will be reconciliation. But this does NOT mean the unredeemed will be given salvation. Christ's vicarious death on the cross paid the price necessary to make possible this peace. As cosmic Lord, when God (in reconciling all things) prepares to put creation itself under His authority and rule, through the administrative reign of Jesus Christ—then, when Christ is inaugurated as the cosmic Potentate at the beginning of the eternal state, the earth will have its day of reckoning and redemption, and will be transformed (2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1).

Present spiritual warfare in this life takes place between the believer and satanic powers (Eph 6:10-18). But Christ at the right hand of the Father possesses authority over the angelic realm, though at the present time that realm has not come under final judgment. In spite of their present limited power, the angelic realm will be subject to God's work of reconciliation. Christ will be exalted and every knee (human and angelic) will bow (Phil 2:10). Paul highlights all the aspects of the believer's former alienation in the bulk of Ephesians chapter two. Now the believer's present condition as *reconciled* (Col 1:22) emphasizes life and blamelessness free of reproach. The purpose of the reconciliation is to present each believer before Him holy, blameless, and beyond reproach (Col 1:22). The intended goal of reconciliation is reached BECAUSE Christ's incarnation allowed Him to die a real death in the place of His people. "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).

FOR DISCUSSION: How would it alter and improve our loyalty and devotion to Christ if we saw Him more and more as He truly is—as *Cosmic King, Reconciler of all things, Head of the Church, Judge of all the earth*?

V. The church today tends to neglect the message of the Kingdom. And, as a consequence, Christ is often depicted merely as friend, a 'mascot' in one's spiritual journey, rather than majestic Lord and King who inspires reverential fear and awe. A. If a professing believer has but a 'cultural concept' of Jesus, then he won't 'see' the expansive, all-consuming theme of the Kingdom of God in its fullness. One cannot 'see' the Kingdom unless he really knows Christ as Logos, Lamb-Lord, and Lion. Christ as Creator, Sustainer, goal and Lord of the cosmos does not fit a cultural concept of Jesus. During Christ's earthly ministry, it was clear that His authority was not derived from earthly authority, but from God and His divine purpose (a thing never seen before in human history). Therefore, men must receive the Kingdom with childlike simplicity and faith (Mk 10:15; Mt 19:14; Lu 18:17).^{ix} During His passion, His enemies imagine that they have gained ultimate authority over Him and have defeated Him. *But, this suffering is the 'Lamb plan'—Christ comes as meek and lowly (Is 53)—but God has made Him Lord (Acts 2:34-36; Heb 1:3-8).* In the present age, the saint is called to suffer with Christ, bearing His reproach and rejection by the world (Heb 13:13; Rom 8:16-18; Jn 15:18-20). "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24). Believers are called to walk in the footsteps of Christ in terms of imitating His willingness to suffer (1 Pet 2:19-25)—they are called to heroism as His disciples.

B. There can be no neutrality in this matter of following Christ versus loving the world (1 Jn 2:3-6, 15-17). Only those who are mortifying sin are "friends of the cross" (Phil 3:17-19). Christians are called to humble and lowly walk with Christ, as His servants, slaves, and disciples BEFORE Christ is publicly manifested in His global triumph. At the end of the age, the tribulation period and the glorious return will remove all imagined middle ground. All those who are not disciples of Christ will be exposed and condemned—their actual loyalty to Satan, the imposter king will be revealed.

Variations of this theme of the return of the rightful King have been seen in literature: those who follow the evil imposter king (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2) will be judged once the rightful King returns for His Kingdom after a period of 'exile' (note the slaying of the suitors of Penelope in *The Odyssey*) (see in Scripture: Ps 2; Ps 45; Mt 22:1-14). Today, Bible-believing Christians who are loyal to Christ the King, are accused of being on the 'wrong side of history', but this is not the case. The true Christian follows Christ the rightful King in this present age—while it is not popular—while it is derided by the world.

Why is the theme of ultimate restoration to accompany the gospel of redemption? In Jesus' mission, His announcement of the Good News and the Kingdom of God is the central theme. The Good News is that God is acting to defeat all opposition to His peace (His *Shalom*), so that He might reassert His rightful rule over the whole of creation. Christ's life, deeds, and words make known the coming Kingdom. In His earthly ministry, He launches an all-out attack on evil in all its forms—pain, sickness, death, demon possession, immorality, self-righteousness, hunger, poverty, false religion, and oppression. By Jesus' acts, He demonstrates that in the Kingdom He inaugurates, evil will be eradicated and God's good creation will be completely restored and reclaimed.^x "In truth the long-awaited Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy had come so near to men of that generation that they had actually seen the face of the King and also had witnessed the supernatural works, which were the predicted harbingers of His Kingdom."^{xi}

The Church is made up of believers who have been taken up into God's Kingdom purposes and placed on the side of Christ in the great cosmic battle for the creation. The Church is *the first fruits* of the Kingdom. "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of **first fruits** among His creatures" (Jas 1:18). The Church is an instrument of the Kingdom in making it known in the preaching of the Good News. The Church is a sign and outpost of the Kingdom by virtue of its members embodying God's rule in their lives.^{xii} Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Thus, the mission of Christ followers is to make known the Kingdom of God—the end and goal of history—throughout the world—as Jesus made it known in Israel.^{xiii}

As devoted Christ followers, our whole lives lived under God's rule are to erect 'signs' of God's *future Kingdom*. Believers are heralds of a future Kingdom in knowing God, in living together in love, and in challenging forces that oppose God's caring rule over all of life. Jesus announced the Good News that the Kingdom of God had arrived, that people could now repent, accept God's offer of redemption, and begin to experience the blessings of His reign.^{xiv}

To this we would add this crucial exhortation: beware of privatized Christianity where the whole work of grace and the cosmic drama of salvation culminates only in a mindset of "for me." We must not lose sight of the fact that in the crucifixion, God defeats the powers that enslave cultural and social as well as individual life. Christ's death affects every part of human life and the whole non-human creation. The cross is an event whereby the course of cosmic history is settled.^{xv}

If these realities leave you cold, yawning—then it is very likely that you are not an heir of heaven. For, Kingdom consciousness is the mark of a true disciple of Christ. Those who have seen the infinite value of the Kingdom willingly take up their cross daily, denying themselves (Lu 9:23; Jn 12:24-26). The true children of the King are always *entering into the Kingdom daily*. Regenerated individuals have the *mind of Christ* (1 Cor 2:16). They consistently *think the things suggested by the Spirit of God* (Rom 8:5).^{xvi} They are *born again to a living hope*, and this *hope purifies* and controls them (1 Pet 1:3).

At the heart of the universe is love and order. By contrast, the history of this fallen world is one of wholesale idolatry, and thus, enslavement.^{xvii} Idols identify some part of creation with the divine. There is a great danger in our culture of radical anthropocentricity (idolatrous man-centered-ness).^{xviii} It creeps into religion as spiritual consumerism and becomes accepted as 'normal' Christianity. An essential part of the cure is a pervading Kingdom consciousness. For, God's glory in His commitment to mankind is the true center—it is a covenant commitment and it is entirely purposeful. For, in the incarnation (the hypostatic union) the Father has brought a human being, Jesus of Nazareth into the heart of the Holy Trinity (1 Tim 3:16) in order that through Christ, the perfect image of God, believers might be made like their covenant Head (Rom 8:28-29). It is to this conformity to Christ that believers have been predestined.

If you have repented of your sins; that is if you've forsaken them and turned away from them, and then placed your trust in Christ alone, you will be in the New Jerusalem and have a part in Mount Zion's Kingdom of God, but if not, know this, "nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21:27).

G. Practical applications ('takeaways') that flow from 'Kingdom consciousness'.

- Christ in us is the hope of glory (Col 1:27)—we ought to stimulate one another to love and good deeds based upon that blessed hope, "as you see the day drawing near" (see Hebrews 10:23-25 for the connection between resurrection hope, or 'Kingdom hope' and Body life in the church).
- According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, beholding Christ as our King has transforming power, but there is spiritual combat for the present. The flesh and the Spirit are locked in battle. The call of Scripture is to live out the practical implications of our sanctification by pursuing holiness as a lifestyle (Heb 12:14). We are to do this by looking back to the cross as our source of power to break with sin, and forward to the resurrection as our purifying hope, for when we see Him, by God's grace we will share His character and life completely (1 Jn 3:1-3).^{xix}

- Christ is cosmic King. He has authority over all things. No part of creation is finally or fully meaningful until it is understood in relation to Christ who is Creator and Redeemer. This must radically affect how a Christian thinks about life. All creation is made by God, belongs to Him, derives its meaning from Him—and must only be used in accordance with God's will. Thus, the purpose of God's redemptive work toward us is that we might take our proper place in His created order, and that we might own Christ as our Creator and Redeemer. The glorious news of the gospel of the Kingdom is that through Christ, we have been fitted by God to do His will, and to live as Christ's subjects (1 Tim 1:17; Rev 7:15-17).
- All things have been delivered to Christ by His Father (Matt 11:27; Jn 3:35; Eph 1:22; Heb 1:8). Christ is Lord of all (Phil 3:21; Acts 10:36)—but His reign is currently contested by many enemies of the glory of God (Col 2:15). God through Christ will make a public object lesson of rebellion and evil. Wickedness will be taken to the scaffold and held up to public ridicule (Rom 9:22-24). God will demonstrate His wrath—the subjugation of all rule, authority, and power will be witnessed by the holy rational universe (men and angels) (1 Cor 15:24-25). Error is headed for the gallows. It will be displayed there in all its horror and repugnancy as God demonstrates His wrath. This demonstration of God's wrath also is accompanied by the demonstration of God's mercy. As a "vessel of mercy" the believer is part of God's comprehensive object lesson! Therefore, your life as a 'trophy of His grace' ought to demonstrate by faith and conduct that you believe with all your heart God has chosen you to make known the riches of His glory (Rom 9:23).
- The saint animated by 'Kingdom consciousness' will excel in 'spiritual seeing'—he will live between the cross and the resurrection. He will connect the cost of discipleship (self-denial, taking up his cross daily) as the expression of his loyalty and devotion to Christ. As a result, he understands that as a faithful follower of Christ, the cost of discipleship is a small price to pay for usefulness in the Kingdom (2 Tim 2:19-22). For, the dictates of true discipleship (self-denial, and taking up one's cross daily) are part and parcel of being radically identified with Christ. Those who follow Christ as His disciples are controlled by Kingdom consciousness—for the Kingdom is about the beauty, treasure, glory, and worthiness of knowing and serving the King!
- *God's Word is integral to His Kingdom and must be seen in the context of His purposes and as the agent to bring those purposes to pass.*^{xx} God is not bringing a renewed creation to pass by union with new raw material or by chaotic explosions—but by the Word of His command and the demonstration of His effortless ordering might (2 Pet 3:7-13).^{xxi} God is one with His Word. The Adamic rebellion was a 'mutiny' of disastrous proportions against the rule of God in His Word. Jesus preached the Word as that which we should believe and obey in order to submit again to God's rule through His Word.^{xxii} Our likeness to God (Gen 1:26) will be especially reflected in our coming Kingdom rule over the earth. In other words, the redeemed of Adam's race will reflect the moral majesty of God as they rule, and as they are comprehensively ruled by the Word of God.^{xxiii}
- *Christ the Logos is the ruling principle of the universe (Jn 1:3).* God's whole work of creation, redemption, and Kingdom restoration is bound together in Christ, who is Maker and Sustainer,

goal and end of all things. Submission to Christ as Lord brings submission to a covenantal book—the Word of God. Our loving submission to Christ involves the acceptance of the ruling authority of God's covenantal Word. For, the Word of God is the imperial instrument by which God governs. He and His Word are one in revelation, purpose, and authority. The Word of God is the medium (mediating agency) of the most important relation that we could ever have.^{xxiv}

Those who love the Lord Jesus Christ yearn to see His glory; to see Him publicly vindicated in His glorious return. For, the last view the unbelieving world had of Christ was of a man more marred than any man. A human being dying in inconceivable ignominy and shame, covered with blood and dust and spittle. But, at His second advent He shall return in glorious might and in wrath. And the world will know that the reproach He experienced at His first coming was solely on behalf of His people as their Substitute. "The nations of the world have seen the King coming in humiliation, the lowly carpenter of Nazareth; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; despised and rejected of men. They have seen Him thorn-crowned at Pilate's bar of judgment. Now they must see Him coming in regal glory; and they must stand before His throne of judgment" (Alva McClain).^{xxv}

Endnotes:

ⁱⁱⁱ Living at the Crossroads, p. 54

ⁱ Michael W. Goheen, Graig G. Bartholomew, Living at the Crossroads, p. 2

ⁱⁱ Jay Wegter, "Apologetics, Worldview, and Evangelism," course syllabus, The Master's University

^{iv} Hymn, "Joy to the World," third stanza

v Living at the Crossroads, p. 65 (See also the book, Heaven, by Randy Alcorn on the error of Christo-platonism)

vi R. B. Gaffin Jr., "The Kingdom of God," New Dictionary of Theology, IVP, 1988, p. 369

vii H. Wayne House, "The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians," Bibliotheca Sacra 149 (Apr 1992), pp. 185-186

viii Ibid.

ix Alva McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, p. 286

^x Living at the Crossroads, p. 55

^{xi} A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1930), Vol. I, p. 24. Cited in Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 273

^{xii} Ibid, p. 59

^{xiii} Ibid, p. 5

xiv Ibid, p. 58

^{xv} Ibid, p. 56

xvi Charles Williams, Williams New Testament, Holman Bible Publishers, 1986, p. 342

xvii Peter Jensen, At the Heart of the Universe, pp. 63-64

xviii At the Heart of the Universe, p. 47

xix David Peterson, Possessed by God, pp. 136-137

^{xx} At the Heart of the Universe, pp. 76-77

^{xxi} Ibid, pp. 83, 85

^{xxii} Ibid, pp. 87-88

^{xxiii} Ibid, pp. 90-91

^{xxiv} Ibid, pp. 100-102

xxv The Greatness of the Kingdom, p. 203