

The New Kingdom has Come

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Date: 22 September 2019

Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 00] He gave them many convincing proofs, and it's not just that he gives them proofs that he's alive, but he gives them convincing proofs, and not just convincing proofs, but many, many convincing proofs. Did you pick that up as you heard the reading, I wonder? And then we have the time period. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days, long enough to determine that Jesus's resurrection is the real deal. It wasn't just flash in the pan that Jesus was gone. They had it long enough to be with Jesus, to see him, and to wonder and ponder and figure out that he was actually resurrected. And Luke does this because he wants Theophilus and his readers, us today, to have certainty about Jesus, that he is alive, and to encourage us in believing and trusting in Jesus.

And it's not just that Jesus is alive, but that he reigns in heaven. And this is where Luke wants us, our hearts, to land this morning, to realize that Jesus is living and reigning and ruling in heaven. See, look where he starts in verse 2. What does he say in verse 2 about Jesus? Until the day he was taken up. And then look how he brackets the end of the passage in verse 9. What does he say? After he said this, he was taken up. So this whole passage and the whole, the rest of the book of Acts is lived and held together by Jesus living and reigning and ruling in heaven. Now, I don't know what you've got on at work tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow is going to be a tough day for you at work. But one thing I can be absolutely assured of, and that I can assure you of, is that Jesus is alive and resurrected and ascended tomorrow when you're at work. God's king is in his heaven. And it's not only that he's ruling, but Jesus is alive and active, actually active and involved in this world. He knows everyone's name. He knows everyone's job. I wonder if you'd look back to verse 1.

What does he say? In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all the things that Jesus, and what's the word there, began to do and teach. It's not that Jesus had done stuff and then went, but that he had began and he was continuing to do stuff in this world. So sometimes we call Acts the book of the Acts of the Apostles, but it's perhaps correctly better named, the book of Acts of Jesus by his Holy Spirit through his unstoppable word in the world. The Acts of Jesus. And Luke tells us this because he wants us to be confident and rejoice in our king and encourage us in gospel living and gospel telling.

[3 : 03] You see, if we're honest, if you're anything like me, there's lots of reasons to be discouraged, aren't there? Our friends might stop going to church. They might think, well, don't not go to church anymore. The world might be putting pressure on us to conform to their standards, get in the mix, come out, have another beer, do whatever. The church might seem divided. We might think, oh, Christians are all split. There's no hope there. We might have pressure to conform at work, cut the corners, you know, just crook the book slightly. Families, our families might be looking at how we raise our children as Christians and say, you don't teach them that Bible nonsense, do you? See, the BBC might be silent on Jesus. The BBC might malign Jesus. But Jesus is the living, resurrected, and ascended king. So to misquote one of Glasgow's favorite sons, misquote him terribly badly, Thomas

Carlyle, the truth will rise again no matter what you do. And the truth is Jesus is resurrected and ascended. And Luke wants us to know that the king of the universe is still on his throne. So Jesus, he gives, so Luke gives us this assurance that Jesus is resurrected. He then tells of the job that Jesus gives them to do. And that's our second point. The apostles are corrected on a new purpose, an empowered commission. So the disciples, did you notice there the anticipation in verse six? They gather together. They come together. And what do they do in verse six? They ask, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel? And the key verse for the entire book of Acts comes in Jesus' reply to this question in verse eight. What does he say in verse eight? But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem

and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And the struggle that I had in preparing this, and I wonder what you thought of that, is what do you make of the disciples' question in verse six? Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? You can see why they asked it, can't you? It seems entirely reasonable. There they are in Jerusalem, the place of God's anointed kings. They have God's resurrected king with them, Jesus.

Jesus himself, in verse three, has been teaching them about the kingdom of God. They're there at the Passover. Just after the Passover. The whole world seems to have come in to Jerusalem. And then what do we remember from the end of Luke's gospel? Jesus himself had opened their minds that they might understand the scriptures. So the disciples were thinking, this is it. No longer would they be under the Roman jackboot. No longer would the temple be a pale shadow of its former glory. No longer would they be second-class citizens in their own country, scared and downtrodden. And the disciples were entirely correct in this. History had reached its fulfillment in Jesus' coming. And so Jesus affirms them in this in verse seven. Look what he says in verse seven. He said to them, it is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority. So he's saying only God knows when that will happen. I don't even know that. You're right in expecting that and wanting that. But then look at what he goes on to say in verse eight and how he goes on to correct their understanding of the kingdom and of what the restored kingdom is going to look like. And he corrects it because what is it they haven't had yet?

Even though they've had their minds open to the scriptures, they haven't received the Holy Spirit yet. So what I mean, I mean that God's new kingdom and God's new king would not be a place of about sacrifice in the temple, of worshiping God in a place, but it will be about repentance and forgiveness of sins that Jesus is suffering one for us. And that the spirit empowers us to believe and witness to.

[7 : 56] It's not about a place. It's about believing in Jesus. And so what is the kingdom? It is the saving reign of King Jesus in our hearts. Wherever Jesus is believed and received in repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And it is this that the disciples were empowered to believe and empowered to witness to. You see, the kingdom they were looking for was a physical kingdom. But the kingdom that Jesus brings is a spiritual kingdom of faith and repentance in our hearts. It's not about the show. It's not about the building. It's not about the robes. It's about believing and trusting Jesus in our hearts. You see, one of the great temptations for us as Christians, as Christians who sincerely follow and believe in Jesus and being well-intentioned, is that we want Jesus to come now. We want Jesus to be with us now. We want him to rule physically on earth with us now. And so what do we do? We bring the physically resurrected Jesus down from heaven and down to earth. And how do we see this? Well, we see this in perhaps Roman Catholics, how they celebrate communion. The bread becomes the physical body of Jesus. We also see this in how we speak of Jesus. So we speak of the language that we use. So we say we're building God's kingdom here on earth.

And we speak about our social endeavors as good and as commendable they are and however much they are to be encouraged in gospel living. We use the language of wanting heaven, the place where Jesus reigns physically as being here on earth. And this sounds very spiritual. It sounds very spirit-empowered, but it is actually the opposite of what the Spirit has come to do. So there are a number of things that we need to be careful of in the light of this. The one is that if we make Jesus' kingdom here physically, then we limit the reach of the kingdom. On a good day, I could probably just about see Aaron if I was standing on top of a big tower here. But I wouldn't be able to see Edinburgh. And I certainly wouldn't be able to see London.

And I wouldn't be able to see China, all those physical places. I can't see them. And the second problem, another problem that we need to be careful of, is cultural. Is that if we want Jesus to come down, what Jesus is it that I bring down? Which, is it an African Jesus? Is it a Glaswegian Jesus? Is it a Chinese Jesus? Is it an English Jesus? And so the old kingdom was of people coming into the temple in a physically limited place. You had to be Jewish. You had to have the right accent. You had to have come from the right family. You had to go to Jerusalem, to the temple, to make a sacrifice. But what does Jesus do? He ushers in a new kingdom, a spirit-empowered kingdom of the Word going out to every and all corners of the earth, calling all people to turn and trust in Jesus. And it's this that Jesus wants his disciples to understand. Why is this? Because God does not want to limit his glory.

[11 : 30] He wants his glory to go out and fill the earth. You see, in the old kingdom, in the old testament, God's glory was only in the temple. But in the new kingdom, God wants his glory to fill

the earth.

And he wants the whole earth to glorify his son, Jesus. He wants people to come into his kingdom as they turn to Jesus in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins through the spirit-empowered word. Can you see how big that vision is? Can you see how awesome and wonderful that vision is, that we can all go and become disciples of the Lord Jesus?

Jesus. So how do you know that the spirit of God has been work on Sunday? It's not through the eloquence of the speaker. It's not through the well-thought-outness of the service. It's not through the building crescendo of the music. How do I know that the spirit is at work in church on Sunday? It's if I turn to Jesus in my heart in repentance and faith and turn to my neighbor on Monday morning to tell them of Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection, and of the repentance and forgiveness of sins. And it's this job that Jesus gives his disciples to do as the fulfillment of the old testament. Here is Isaiah 49, verse 6. And that's the background for this verse. I'll read it.

Is it too small a thing for you? It's not enough to be my service. God says to his servant, his promised servant, that's Jesus. To restore the tribes of Jacob, that's the Jewish people there. And to bring those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light to the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. It's a big vision that God has for his glory. And that's the point. of verse 8. It's not about the physical places of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. What it's saying is there's a new king in Jerusalem, Jesus. The kingdom of God has been restored far beyond Judea into a new kingdom marked by the Spirit. And those who are outside, far of Samaria, are now called into God's kingdom by faith and repentance. It's no wonder that throughout Luke's gospel, what are we seeing the most unlikely being saved in? And immediately after Jesus gives them this new job and this commission to do, he is taken up in verse 9. And it's there that we see our third point. The apostles are challenged with a wonderful promise, a promise return. So here's the key verse, verse 11.

[14 : 25] Why do you stand there looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. And it's the angels there presumably give the apostles a wonderful promise that Jesus is going to return. You're not alone. He is coming back. You never know when the brigadier is coming, but he is coming. And the obvious unstated question to the apostles is, what will you do while he is gone? And it's a question that remains practical for us today. And it reminds me of an experience I had whilst an S4 in South Africa at school.

The teacher, Miss Lyons, had walked out. She had stepped out of the room for a second. And my friends, we took the opportunity to grab one of our friends and hang him out the window of our third story floor.

And we just kind of dangled him there for a bit. And at the worst, most awkward moment, Miss Lyons walked back in. I'll never forget what she said. She said, Ox, Lapo, and whoever's getting hung out the window to the principal's office now. You never know when the king is going to return. And what will we do while we wait for Jesus to come back? Will we run out, run riots? Will we hang our friends out the window and think he's not coming back and that we'll get away with it? Will we live as if Jesus is a nice-to-have, as someone who makes my life more comfortable here, but not as someone who is the soon-to-return coming-back king? You see, the old kingdom was marked by a temple that was glorious. And the people came into you and they saw and they looked at it and they marveled at it and they said, wow, your God is massive and big. But the new kingdom is marked by a bivouac that you sleep under as you speak the word in hard places on your way to heaven.

[16 : 28] And the question for us is, are we still living in the old kingdom, looking to build heaven here on earth when the new kingdom has come?

So in conclusion, Luke writes to encourage us to gospel living and gospel telling. And he gives us many convincing proofs of Jesus's physical resurrection. He tells us of the job that Jesus gives us to be witnesses of his spirit-empowered word, taking his spirit-empowered word to the ends of the earth, telling others of Jesus's sufferings and of the repentance of forgiveness of sins that Jesus calls us to. And Luke challenges and encourages us by reminding us that Jesus is coming back. And the question that Luke is asking us here is that the fulfillment of history has come. Jesus has come. He's gone, but he's coming back. Are we on board with his plan for the world? So in my study, I have the ashes of a friend. He was 76 when he passed. Was he on board?

I'm 41 now. My father was 53 when he passed, 12 years time. Was he on board with Jesus's plan? I think of a Christian camp many years ago when my friend Tembi, he was 13 at the time, a beautiful sunshine day, hearing the gospel, drowned and passed. Was he on board? Are we on board with Jesus's job for us in the world? Let me pray for us as we close. So Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the spirit that allows us to believe it. We pray that we would live in step with that spirit, taking that word to the ends of the earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.