

A New People for a New Politic:
The Social Outworking of the Kingdom of God

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April, 12 2006

Outline

Thesis: Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God inaugurated a new social reality in which God's people live in radical obedience to YHWH.

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Introduction

The commencement of Jesus' ministry began with a simple message. "The time has come," he declared. "The kingdom of God is near."¹ Yet the simplicity of this message has not kept it from being a heavily discussed and sharply disputed topic among biblical scholars. Scholars from every theological camp and line of tradition at least agree that the central theme of Jesus' public preaching concerned the kingdom of God.² But as much press as the kingdom of God has received from modern scholarship, the question that begs for an answer remains: how is one to live within this kingdom? Would Jesus' hearers even understand the social and ethical implications of His message? Did Jesus even intend for this kingdom to be lived out presently, or were his intentions to point to a future Kingdom that his followers would live in light of? The intention of this paper is not to propose a new or unique understanding of the kingdom of God; rather, this paper will explore the social and ethical implications of being a citizen of this kingdom. It will show that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated a new social reality in which the God's people live in radical obedience to YHWH.

Biblical Perspective on the Kingdom of God

Popularized by names such as Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, the kingdom of God has been a hot topic in the past century among scholars. The early debates regarding the kingdom concerning realized and unrealized eschatology have for the most part been settled, and most scholars also agree that the kingdom of God is a reference to God's reign on earth.³ But

¹ Mark 1:15. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture will be taken from the New International Version.

² Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*. (New York: Scribner's, 1971) 96.

more recently, scholars have been exploring the ethical and social implications Jesus had in mind when he inaugurated his kingdom. Yet before coming to the implications of the kingdom of God, one must understand what is actually taught about the kingdom of God. An examination of the Old Testament will demonstrate that Israel's understanding of YHWH as the sovereign king had profound implications for living. It will also show Israel's expectation of an eschatological kingdom and the implications for the remnants therein. An examination of Jesus' preaching and interaction with the low in social status will demonstrate the in breaking of God's new social order called the kingdom of God.

1. The Old Testament and the Kingdom of God

As previously mentioned, the kingdom of God is the central theme that Jesus preached. But the theme of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament is more difficult to find. Curiously, the phrase "kingdom of God" is absent in all of the Old Testament.⁴ One must wonder then if Jesus' hearers were even expecting their messiah to establish a kingdom. And if they were, did the disciples share a common understanding of what it would entail? Despite the fact that the expression "kingdom of God" is not to be found, the idea of YHWH as king both over Israel and the earth as a whole is clear. There is also a clear teaching in the Old Testament of a coming kingdom that YHWH will establish. Both of these teachings must be unpacked to understand Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and the socio-political outworking implicit in that.⁵

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³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1958) 3.3.156 summarizes well what many have said concerning the dichotomy between the realized and unrealized kingdom of God. He states, "the *basileia* is here, and yet it is not here; it is revealed, yet it is also hidden; it is present, but always future; it is at hand, indeed in the very midst, yet it is constantly expected, being still, and this time seriously, the object of the petition; Thy Kingdom come."³

⁴ The phrase is present in the apocryphal book Wisdom of Solomon 10:10.

⁵ It is an impossible task within the scope of this paper to give a thorough exegesis of every OT text associated with the Kingdom of God. Rather than an exegetical approach, I will simply survey the

i. Yahweh's as King

The psalmist declares:

The Lord Reigns,

let the nations tremble;

He sits enthroned between the cherubim,

let the earth shake. . . .

The King is mighty.

Indeed the Old Testament reader cannot get away from the theme of YHWH as king.⁶ From the first books of the law, through the poetic books, and continuing through the prophets, YHWH is declared as the sovereign king, and as king he has dominion and rules over his people. After Gideon's defeat of Midian, the Israelites asked him to rule over them, and he declared, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). When Israel desires to be like other nations and be ruled by a king YHWH's kingship is made explicit. The LORD said to Samuel, "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). Zephaniah 3:15 clearly affirms that YHWH is "the King of Israel." The Psalms and the Prophets also paint the picture of God as the ruling King. Not only

OT themes of God as sovereign king and the prophecies of the coming eschatological kingdom. I understand what you're saying and I do agree. But you do need to justify why you have chosen these texts and themes as opposed to others. Of course, doing that would require a full paper on this first point alone.

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *The Kingdom of God in New Testament Theology: The Battle, The Christ, The Spirit-Bearer, and Returning Son of Man* (The Biblical Studies Foundation. www.bible.org Winter, 2001) 5 provides the following study of the kingdom theme in the OT. Yahweh is King (1 Sam 12:12; Ps. 24:10; Is. 33:22; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:16-17). He rules over Israel (Exod. 15:18; Num. 23:21; Deut. 33:5; Is. 43:15). He rules over the earth or the creation (2 Kings 19:15; Is. 6:5; Jer. 46:18; Ps. 29:10; 47:2; 93; 96:10; 145:11, 13). He possesses a royal throne (Ps. 9:4; 45:6; 47:8; Is. 6:1; 66:1; Ezek 1:26). His reign is ongoing (Ps. 10:16; 146:10; Is. 24:23). Rule or kingship is His (Ps. 22:28). It is primarily God's special relationship to Israel that is in view here as the Son of David is said to sit on Yahweh's throne (1 Chron 17:14; 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chron 9:8; 13:8). If you are following him, this could be your justification.

are the ample examples of YHWH having the title of “king,” he is also many times the subject of the verb *malak*, meaning to reign.⁷

The relationship that YHWH has with Israel in the Old Testament implicitly shows a kingdom theme. When God powerfully redeems his people from Egypt and both nature and Pharaoh are subject to him display his rule. His establishment of his covenant on Sinai was a kingly action. All this and “his defeat of the nations that stood between his people and the promised land, are all indicative of God’s sovereign rule over Israel.”⁸ Selman even suggests that the Old Testament covenant was “almost the equivalent of the New Testament kingdom of God.”⁹ The establishment of a human king sitting on the Davidic throne was also a clear implication of God’s kingship. It was through these earthly kings in which YHWH’s kingdom was manifested.

The significance of YHWH’s rule over Israel is that his kingship over them separated them from all other nations. While the Old Testament does teach that God rules over the whole earth in a generic sense, specifically, he is King over Israel. The very fact that Israel is ruled by King YHWH, means that they do not live under another rule. As God’s chosen race, Israel must faithfully live under God’s kingship. The Old Testament is clear about this. Israel does not live like the Philistines or the Midianites, or the Ammorites, because they are ruled not by a human king but by YHWH himself, and as such, he demands that they represent him well. To be Israel is to be faithful to King YHWH.

ii. *Expectations of a Coming Rule*

⁷ Martin J. Selman, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40.2 (1989): 177, For Yahweh as king, Ps 5:3; 10:16; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:5; 47:3-8; 48:3.

⁸ Brian J. Vickers, "Mark's Good News of the Kingdom of God," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8.3 (Fall 2004): 13.

⁹ Selman 161.

While YHWH's present rule in the OT was evident to Israel, they expected a future manifestation of this kingdom to come at a later time. Daniel prophesies,

“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)

The idea of a coming king who would reign with complete authority over a kingdom was certainly not a foreign idea.

Perhaps the most significant text where a coming kingdom is prophesied is in 1 Chronicles 17. Here God is concluding his promises to David through the prophet Nathan, and Nathan says, “When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever” (1 Chron. 17:11-12).¹⁰ Thus, not only would this kingdom be established by YHWH himself, but the kingdom he establishes will be an eternal kingdom. The readers surely did not know exactly what this looked like, but they knew it would not be like all the other kingdoms of their past.

They certainly had the idea that this new kingdom would rule over the people of God, specifically Israel. “The kingdom of God in the Old Testament is certainly depicted as a kingdom for the nation Israel, in the land of Palestine, with a descendant from the Davidic line ruling over it.”¹¹ Just as YHWH was the sovereign king over Israel (Zeph 3:15), so He will be the king of prophesied kingdom. Carl Henry notes that this king would reign over:

¹⁰ In the parallel text in Samuel 7:16 there is a difference in the wording. While in the 2 Chron. text it reads “my house and my kingdom” in Sam 7 it reads “you’re your house and your kingdom.” Selman 165 notes that this is probably because that the difference is a single letter in Hebrew – a *yodh* replacing a *kaph* – and he concludes that the Chronicler’s reading is to be preferred.

not humanity only but a renewed cosmos also, conquering sin and inaugurating perpetual peace and justice. Although kingship is not the only motif for OT eschatology, all prophecy seems nonetheless to culminate in the expectation of the King who steps into history from above and in the good news that to penitent moral rebels God grants life in his perfect kingdom.¹²

One thing that was clear about the prophecies of the coming kingdom was that in it God would restore his people as his vicegerents. This remnant of kingdom citizens would be, as it were, God's earthly representatives in the world. While not explicitly stated in the Old Testament, the coming kingdom of God was certainly expected and involved "a reinstatement of humanity to the proper position of vicegerent, exercising the reign of God on earth."¹³ Just as the king sitting on David's throne "was understood to reign as Yahweh's representative," all citizens of prophesied kingdom would exercise delegated power in behalf of its king.¹⁴ Consequently, it is imperative that these vicegerents depict the character of God. This new humanity would be, as it were, God's representatives on earth who would exercise His way of life. Their old ways of living would change, and their allegiance would no longer be to worldly kingdoms. As Selman asserts, "The kingdom of God is often in direct opposition to all earthly

¹¹ John A. McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151: 602 (These numbers can't be right; double check the volume and issue) (1994): 221. Change this form on all journals

¹² Carl F. H. Henry, "Reflections On The Kingdom Of God," (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35.1, 1992): 41.

¹³ Dan G. McCartney, "*Ecce Homo*: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," (*Westminster Theological Journal* 56.1 1994): 21.

¹⁴ C.C. Caragunis, "Kingdom of God/Heaven," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992) 418.

kingdoms, and will ultimately replace all other kingdoms.”¹⁵ This new humanity functions in a different way. Indeed, a whole new kingdom way of living would be available.

In this eschatological kingdom “God must transform the human person; give a new heart and a new spirit. . . . God must transform human society; restore Israel to the promised land, rebuild cities, and make Israel’s new status a witness to the nations.”¹⁶ The necessary consequence of this transformed society was a transformation of the political nature of Israel. This fact is elucidated upon examining Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God. His hearers undoubtedly understood this message to have political and social implications.¹⁷ They simply misunderstood these implications.¹⁸ To understand the implications that he *did* have, we now turn to Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom.

1. Jesus Inaugurates the Kingdom

¹⁵ Selman 182.

¹⁶ Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 2 quoted in Saucy 178.

¹⁷ Mark E. Moore, *Gospel Themes Indicating Political Dimensions of Jesus*. (Unpublished and Unfinished Ph.D. Dissertation. 2006) shows that while many scholars have interpreted Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God as merely spiritual, his intentions were clearly political. He states that a “Jewish person living in Jesus day, influenced by the OT and intertestamental literature and history, would naturally hear ‘kingdom of God’ (quote within a quote) as a theocratic political concept.” In Jesus’ milieu, a first century Jew could have thought of nothing less. He also states that the word *euaggelion* would have primarily implied a political announcement of victory. When Jesus made this announcement his hearers would have understood that “God would actually reign over Israel.” He lists three political implications that his hearers would have understood in the announcement of the kingdom of God: 1) the return from exile, 2) the defeat of evil, 3) the return of YHWH to Zion. For these and other reasons, Moore summarizes, “the kingdom of God in the Jewish milieu of first-century Palestine would have naturally encompassed temporal political systems and that is, in fact, what we see reflected in the gospel texts on the kingdom.”

¹⁸ Bock 6 rightly asserts that there was no unified view of the coming kingdom; save that it would God would vindicate his people. Judaism understood that it would be powerful and effect politics. This is probably why the disciples understood that by inaugurating this kingdom Jesus would overthrow the Roman rule.

From the very beginning of Jesus life the kingdom of God is being announced. The birth narratives in the Gospel of Luke begins by the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would, “give birth to a son . . . and he will reign (*basileusei*) over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom (*basileias*) will never end.”¹⁹ John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus by announcing the same message that Jesus did. “Repent. The kingdom of heaven has drawn near” (Matt. 3:2).²⁰

When Jesus arrives on the scene and begins proclaiming the same message, he did not define what exactly what he was talking about. Thus, he assumed some level of familiarity of the concept of the kingdom from his hearers. Surely they were familiar with the Davidic kingdom and the coming reign of God. Yet the kingdom he would reign over was not quite the kingdom his hearers had in mind. Surely they thought that the messianic kingdom would entail changes in their social and political lives, but not in the way Jesus proclaimed. Indeed, Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God was antithetical to their own presuppositions. The kingdom that Jesus was inaugurating had a different agenda, an agenda in which God would call to himself a new people who by becoming nothing enter into the rule of God.

i. In Words

As mentioned before, no scholar denies that Jesus proclaimed the incoming kingdom of God. The crucial question is what Jesus had in mind when proclaiming the kingdom. Rather

¹⁹ Luke 1:31-33

²⁰ Chrys C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God, Son of Man and Jesus' Self-Understanding, Part 1," (*Tyndale Bulletin* 40.1 1989): 12-13 notes that most scholars are in agreement that there is no significant difference between the synoptic uses of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν and ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This previous text did not come through as Greek and there were no spaces in it. I would suggest you download the free Bible Works fonts and use them. I think you will be glad you spent the 30 minutes downloading it and learning the accents.

than making this examination an abstract exercise in theology, this section will examine some of the social and political implications of Jesus' kingdom teaching.

One thing that was clear in Jesus' teaching was that if one was to live according to the kingdom of God s/he must be willing to give up everything else. Being a citizen of the kingdom means absolute obedience and commitment to God. In Luke 9, Jesus teaches perspective followers what it means to be a devoted disciple, and in this there is obvious kingdom language. When Jesus tells one man, "Follow me," the man replies, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus' response to this man makes clear that entering the kingdom of God means leaving other commitments. Jesus responds, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Similarly, in the same section another man tells Jesus he will follow him but first wanted to go back and say good-bye to his family. Jesus, almost harshly, responds, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Thus, for Jesus the kingdom of God was not merely something that required little commitment from his followers. It requires a commitment and obedience that supersedes everything else. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that those who practice and teach the commands that he gives would be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Because of these texts and more, Recker states:

To enter or receive the kingdom of heaven is thus to submit to the authority of the King, and to seek the kingdom is to honor the will of the King by submitting to it and thus doing righteousness. To enter the kingdom therefore is not to enter a realm but to submit to and to recognize a relationship in which God and Christ have an authoritative claim

over us. . . . Those who do thus are the *great* in the kingdom of heaven; such are the responsive subjects of the king.²¹

This is exactly the point of the parables of the hidden treasure and merchant looking for fine pearls. In this text Matthew records two parables that Jesus gave. In the first, the kingdom of heaven is likened to a treasure that is hidden in a field. A man went out and he found it, so he hid it again. This man was so joyful that he went and sold everything he had for the purpose of purchasing this field. In the second, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a merchant who was looking for fine pearls. He found one that was very valuable, and he as well went away, sold everything he had so that he could buy the pearl. These parables teach that, whether one realizes it or not, the kingdom of God is worth more than anything else in this world. As Bailey states, “those who are disciples of Jesus and His kingdom must be prepared to give up everything that would stand in the way of wholehearted commitment to the priority of the kingdom of God.”²² The kingdom is greater than all other possessions and worldly obligations and worth giving up everything for it. A disciple of Christ must have an unconditional dedication the God’s kingdom and its purposes.

Also, Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God seems to suggest that the way he rules differs from the way the world rules. This is evident not only in the parables, but in the Sermon on the Mount as well. Moreover, this is painfully obvious in his verbal responses to those who opposed him. Indeed, it seems as though in his teaching Jesus fervently fought against the idea that God rules in the same way that earthly rulers rule. As Richard Bauckham states, “much of Jesus’ teaching seems designed precisely to show how God’s rule differs from earthly rule. . . .

²¹ Robert Recker, "The Redemptive Focus of the Kingdom of God," (*Calvin Theological Journal* 14 1979): 168.

²² Mark L. Bailey, "The Doctrine of the Kingdom in Matthew 13," (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 156: 624 1999): 447.

The issue is not just that God's rule should replace the rule of the pagan empires . . . Jesus wishes to portray God's rule as an alternative to earthly rule which is quite unlike all earthly rule."²³

Jesus does this by teaching that the kingdom way of life is by taking what was known to be good and was recognized as something worthy of being praised, and he flips it upside down.

Particularly, this concept can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount. All throughout this sermon Jesus takes that which has been taught, not only in the Torah but in the Mishnah and Talmud as well, and he says that the kingdom of heaven/God differs completely. The sermon opens with eight beatitudes, and the first and the last beatitude form a frame or *inclusio* around the other six. Each one of these beatitudes is structured with a group of persons that is blessed and a reason for their blessing by attributing a privilege to them. The blessing of the first and the eight is the inheritance of the kingdom of God. While it is not stated explicitly that the privilege of living by each one of these beatitudes is the kingdom of heaven, it is implied implicitly by the *inclusio*. Kvalbein summarizes

The *inclusio*-function of the *basileia*-clause indicates that all of the eight beatitudes have an identical basic reference: The first part of each of them refers to the people of the kingdom, the second to the gift of the kingdom. In other words, the second clauses of the six middle beatitudes explain in different ways what the kingdom of God means and can be seen as a series of synonyms to the kingdom . . . All these phrases can be seen as expositions of the promise of the *basileia tou theou* to the poor.²⁴

²³ Richard Bauckham, "Kingdom and Church According to Jesus and Paul," (*Horizons in Biblical Theology* 18.1 1996): 5.

²⁴ Hans Kvalbein, "The Kingdom of God in the Ethics of Jesus," (*Studia Theologica* 51.1 1997): 67. However, Kvalbein suggests that these beatitudes do not represent the reign of God as king, but that these are simply "expressions [that] refer to the concrete, eschatological gift of salvation." I suggest that he is right in saying that these beatitudes are expositions of the promise of the kingdom of God to the

And this idea continues throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, it is this sermon in which Jesus describes the entrance requirements for the kingdom, and the requirements that were given were contrasted with the righteous requirements of the Pharisees and Scribes. These men were professional religious men who made it their utmost duty to obey not only the law, but also the oral traditions about the law. They were recognized by most people to be the most righteous people, of the day, and yet Jesus says that if you want to enter the kingdom of God your righteousness must surpass theirs (Matt. 5:20). While this would have been an impossible statement under their present standard for righteousness, Jesus provides a new kind of righteousness for the kingdom of God. This new standard is explained by the illustrations Jesus gives throughout the rest of the sermon. He explains that the Scribal and Pharisaical righteousness focused solely on the outward action, but the righteousness of the kingdom demands a heart that has righteous intentions.²⁵ The kingdom of God is not simply about having right actions, but lining up the innermost person with the character of God. This “righteousness of the kingdom of a manifestation of the life of the kingdom of God . . . The righteousness of the kingdom belongs to the Age to Come.”²⁶ The reason Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount seemed so foreign to those who heard it was because the requirements did

poor but wrong in saying that they do not refer to the reign of God as king. Indeed, it is precisely when God promises the poor the kingdom of God where he is reigning as king. It sounds strange and antithetical to the typical picture of a powerful reigning king, but the message of the kingdom was that by becoming less we actually become more.

²⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an in-depth look at each of the examples that Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount, and much has already been written on this topic. For a more in-depth look at each of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and how they relate to living within the kingdom of God see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1998). The focus of this section of the paper is simply to show that what Jesus was doing was juxtaposing the nature of the old law and the nature of kingdom righteousness.

²⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959): 94.

indeed come from another sphere. And when kingdom citizens begin living out Jesus teaching on the kingdom of God they begin living as though they come from a place where YHWH is their king.

ii. In Deeds

Jesus did not only teach *about* the kingdom of God, but his actions demonstrated the kingdom of God. Once Jesus started his ministry, his interaction with people was indicative of this new social reality that he was inaugurating.²⁷ Particularly, it was Jesus' interaction with the poor, sick, demonized, lame, blind, children, etc. that showed Jesus' invitation of the kingdom of God was not for those with a prominent social status, but for those who *are* the subjugated in society. There is no clearer picture of the contrast between the earthly rule and God's rule than in Jesus' social relationships with those of low social status.

Crossan notes that in the andocentric society of 1st century Palestine Jesus' teaching on divorce demonstrated the kingdom of God by abolishing any privileged status men had over women. In this time divorce was by definition committed by the women, but Jesus states that if a *man* divorces his wife *he* commits adultery. When it comes to entering into the kingdom of God, men and women have an equal opportunity, and there is no partiality to one gender.²⁸

Another place this can be seen clearly is Jesus' teaching and interaction with children. In Matthew eighteen Jesus called a little child to stand along him and his disciples. He states in verses three through four, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children,

²⁷ Jesus' miracles and exorcisms primarily also serve to show Jesus' inauguration of the Kingdom of God. The limited focus of this paper will only highlight some of Jesus interaction with the socially unimportant rather than exegete the biblical accounts of his miraculous deeds. In short, these actions served to say that a new order was arriving. The rule of God on earth is taking place, and it is taking place now. The evidence of this was Jesus' miraculous work.

²⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991.) 301.

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” This is a particular theme in the book of Mark. In 9:36-37 Jesus takes a child and encourages disciples to welcome the children. In 9:42 Jesus warns his disciples about causing little ones [children] to sin. And in 10:13-16 Jesus welcomes and blesses the children around him. Jesus is not emphasizing that his followers should be *like* children and have *childlike* faith, but he is reversing the value scale by giving importance to those who are unimportant.²⁹ He is drawing out examples to model from those who were considered to be nobodies in the current social structure.

Bauckham notes, “the reason why one must become like a child or receive the kingdom like a child in order to enter it is not because childlike trust is required or even because humility in the sense merely of a humble attitude is required, but because children had no social status at all.”³⁰ What Jesus is doing in these texts is calling for his followers to abandon worldly perspectives of greatness and align themselves with the new perspective of the kingdom of God.

Much more could be said in regards to Jesus’ interaction with the low in status, but one thing is clear. The reason Jesus decided to associate with the socially destitute was to show that the kingdom of God belonged to such as these. Through these actions the kingdom of God “becomes a symbol of hope for the downtrodden in society. It expresses the attitude of God to such people and declares that his concern is for them. Jesus’ teaching is that God is at work to establish a new community.”³¹ Jesus reconstitutes the society of the kingdom of God by making

²⁹ Vickers 26.

³⁰ Bauckham 12.

³¹ I.H. Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age, the Kingdom of God in the New Testament," (*Themelios* 11.1 1985): 11.

those who have no social states and the outcasts the paradigm to which those who wish to enter this kingdom must conform.

Praxis

If what has been said hitherto is true, those who live in the kingdom of God must live differently than those who do not. Contra Hans Kvalbein, living with the rule and reign of God *does* entail adhering to a new social reality and a new ethic.³² Christian ethics cannot be separated from Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom of God. As Ladd asserts,

Jesus' ethical teaching and his view of the Kingdom must be studied together. We would content that Jesus' ethics can be best interpreted in terms of the dynamic concept of God's rule which has already manifested itself in his person but will come to consummation only in the eschatological hour.³³

It must then be the goal of the kingdom citizen to model the ethical teaching and example that Jesus initiated. This section will now examine how those today can continue living out the socio-political reality of the kingdom of God.

1. Radical Obedience/Discipleship

The kingdom of God is a demanding kingdom. Particularly in the field of academia, there is a danger in believing that by knowing and understanding *about* the kingdom of God we somehow enter the kingdom of God. Yet, how sad a thing would it be if we understood clearly

³² Kvalbein 70-71 states that the kingdom of God "in the gospels does not refer to God's rule or position as a king, but means *the time of salvation, the gift of salvation and the place of salvation*. . . . It is impossible to deduce an ethical teaching directly from Jesus' message of the *basileia tou theou*. . . . The moral demands belong to human life *before* they enter the kingdom. Between us and the kingdom of God is God's judgment. The ethical demands can function as entrance requirements for the kingdom of God. In this way the kingdom of God is a motivation for moral responsibility and for living according to the will of God. But to do the will of God is no realization of the kingdom of God."

³³ George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Waco: Word Books, 1964): 279.

what the kingdom of God is and what it entails, and yet we never began to actually live the life that it demands. The kingdom of God is not about arriving at the correct answers. It is about modeling the same kind of life that Jesus had with God. Both Jesus' hometown and the religious rulers that opposed him saw and believed the miracles that he performed. Yet neither of them embraced him. Judas was chosen *by* Jesus to be his follower, he saw the miracles, he himself went out and preached *about* the kingdom of God, and yet he still missed it. "The kind of faith required in the Kingdom, is faith that manifests itself in a willingness to abandon everything (including one's expectations), and suffer everything in order to follow Jesus."³⁴

The texts observed in Luke 9 must give pause to one who wishes to follow Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed. It sounds like an attractive thing to desire to the kingdom of God and follow Jesus, but many times we want to do this alongside all of our other commitments we wish to hold on to. But if anyone wishes to become a citizen of this divine kingdom he or she must make a choice. We must decide must like the farmer who found a treasure in the field, that we are willing to sell everything we have and give up everything and commit to this new socio-political reality. By inaugurating the kingdom of god Jesus is "laying his rightful holy claims upon our lives, demanding of us the only legitimate response of unconditional obedience."³⁵ If living the kingdom life is something that we say we want to be a part of we must make our pursuit of the kingdom of God greater than anything else that we previously have made important.

2. Social Implications

³⁴ Vickers 22.

³⁵ Recker 186.

When Jesus declared the Kingdom of God was near, he was not merely providing nice moral teachings that are for all people. On the contrary, the ways of the kingdom are particularly for those who belong to the reign of God. This is similar to God's rule in the Old Testament. He ruled generally over all the earth, but he has a special rule over his people, Israel. And it was this group of people that had a special relationship with God. These were the people who lived differently than all other societies because they knew that YHWH was their king. This is what separated them from all other kingdoms, and this is the same way God deals with his new people, his new Israel. This is well summarized by I. Howard Marshall:

[the kingdom of God] would be composed of people who loved and served God and who lived together in righteousness and peace under the rule of god and . . . the Jews believed that they themselves would compose this people. . . . [but] since Jesus warned the people of Israel that as a nation they were in danger of being rejected by God, he must have envisaged the creation of a new people, incorporating elements of the old people but also open more widely and constituted by a new allegiance.³⁶

This new society is made up of those who become great by become nothing. Jesus' interaction with the poor, the children, the women, and his table fellowship show that the ones Jesus wished to bring into his society are those who in the world's eye count for nothing. John Dominic Crossan gets it right when he states, "the kingdom is a kingdom of nobodies."³⁷ We must resolve to begin living the kind of live that is not resistant of becoming nothing in this world. We must become a society that is purposeful about not only seeking to become poor in

³⁶ Marshall 11.

³⁷ Crossan 266.

spirit and abolishing worldly status, but we must also begin surrounding ourselves with the same kind of people.

3. Political Allegiance

Enough has been said up to this point to know that Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom of God had profound social implications for its citizens. Thus, when Jesus stated in John 18:36 "my kingdom is not of this world" he was not merely saying my kingdom is spiritual. While there is a very spiritual aspect to the kingdom of God it cannot be segregated from life today. Those who are apart of the kingdom live according to a different politic than that of this world. This is made obvious as Jesus continues his response to Pilate. He states, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." He did not say my kingdom is *in* another place. Rather, he says that because it comes *from* somewhere else, it does not operate in the same way this worldly kingdom does. N.T. Wright expounds,

Kingdoms of the world fight; physical power, strategic, revolutionary or military power is the rule of the game. Jesus' kingdom has a different *modus operandi*. [Jesus'] sentence should not be read as referring to an other-worldly, Platonic, non-physical kingdom. It designates Jesus' kingdom as the breaking into the worldly order of a rule which comes from elsewhere, from Israel's God, the creator God.³⁸

This does not mean that Christians abandon the created order and dive into a private or spiritual sphere. Rather, as Wright suggests, it is precisely on the sphere of the created order and worldly power where this new socio-political order of the kingdom of God takes shape. The kingdom of God, wins its victories by a new method. As Marshall notes "we must be guided by the example

³⁸ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the 'State.'* (Themelios 16.1 1990): 14.

of Jesus who forbade his followers to use violence, but who did things, like associating with tax collectors and sinners, which outraged his opponents and made them even plot to kill him.”³⁹

The citizens of the socio-political reality of the kingdom of God also live within a smaller socio-political reality on earth. They are resident of two different realms. If one wishes to be a part of this new kingdom politic he or she must know that it does not function in the way that other politics do. We must be careful of politicizing the church wherein it becomes our way of Christianizing legislation. Bock explains,

Kingdom claims are best witnessed to when they are visibly operative within his community rather than imposed on unredeemed believers. This means that our moral and political battles must be undertaken with an appreciation that God calls us to challenge people through inviting them to share in his changing of them, not by the mere passing of laws.⁴⁰

This does not necessarily imply that Christians should withdraw from all worldly political structures. Henry argues that the kingdom society should fight more vigorously than anyone else within the worldly political system. By not doing this, he states, we run the risk of “being ruled over by authorities whose convictions are more alien than necessary to the outlook of the new society.”⁴¹ Kingdom citizens should use any means possible to advance the kingdom, even if

³⁹ Marshall, *Hope of a New Age* 14. While it is a worthwhile discussion, it is far beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the implications the kingdom of God has upon pacifistic ideologies. For a strong pacifistic defense of the kingdom of God see John Howard Yoder. *The Politics of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. For a non-pacifistic view of the kingdom of God see George Eldon Ladd. *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959. What is clear is that Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God does not operate in the way other kingdoms do. He teaches that its citizens should fight for God through loving and serving its enemies. I will postpone the answer to the question “is it ever right to fight?” until I have come to a conclusion.

⁴⁰ Bock 23.

this includes participating in their earthly political structure, “yet if the price of such freedom is a pledge of uncritical loyalty to political democracy and its governing assumptions, that price is too high. Not even political democracy is to be viewed as the political extension of the kingdom of God.”⁴²

Conclusion

What was once but a distant expectation has now become a reality. The kingdom of YHWH which was first depicted as a reign in which the God of Israel would reign in sovereignty over his people was actualized just over two thousand years ago when God emerged on the scene as a Galilean carpenter. His message, “repent for the kingdom of God is near” was not simply an emblematic aphorism or a spiritualistic maxim. It was and it is a political campaign. It was and is a social order. By inaugurating this kingdom Jesus was in a very real way establishing God’s way of doing life. God would now be the king, and those who would be citizens in this kingdom would live in obedience to YHWH. In short, citizens of the kingdom must do life like the king. They must become nothing so that they can be something. And they must commit their unconditional fidelity to the king who will reign forever. Long live the king.

⁴¹ Henry 47.

⁴² Henry 48.

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