

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by Geerhardus Vos

Geerhardus Vos' theological examination of God's kingdom in Jesus' teaching, distinguishing between its present spiritual reality and its future eschatological manifestation.

2 Chapters

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The Kingdom of God

by Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

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Chapter I

Introduction In the body of our Lord's teaching as recorded in the Gospels the references to the kingdom of God occupy a prominent place. According to the common testimony of the Synoptical Gospels Jesus opened his public ministry in Galilee with the announcement, that the kingdom was at hand, Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43. In the last mentioned passage he even declares that the main purpose of his mission consists in the preaching of the good tidings of the kingdom of God. And not only does the conception thus stand significantly at the beginning of our Lord's work, it reappears at the culminating points of his teaching, as in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount and in the kingdom-parables. Its importance will best be felt by considering that the coming of the kingdom is the great event which Jesus connects with his appearance and activity, and that consequently in his teaching, which was so closely dependent on his working, this event must also have a corresponding prominence.

If this be true from Jesus' own standpoint, it is no less true from the standpoint of his disciples. In their life likewise the kingdom of God forms the supreme object of pursuit, and therefore of necessity the theme about which before all other things they need careful instruction. Again, the work of those whom Jesus trained as his special helpers in preaching related chiefly to this same subject, for he speaks of them as scribes made disciples to the kingdom of heaven, Matthew

13:52. Better than by mere statistics showing the explicit references to the kingdom in our Lord's discourses can we along the above lines be led to appreciate how large a place the subject of our investigation must have had in his thought.

It might be objected to all this, that in the version which the Fourth Gospel gives of Jesus' teaching, the idea of the kingdom plays a very subordinate role, indeed occurs only twice altogether, viz., John 3:3, John 3:5; John 18:36. But this is a feature explainable from the peculiarity of John's Gospel in general. Here the person of Jesus as the Son of God stands in the foreground, and the whole compass of his work is represented as given in and resulting from his person. Salvation according to the discourses preserved in this Gospel is made up of those primal elements into which the being of Christ can be resolved, such as light, life, grace, truth. What the Saviour does is the outcome of what he is. In the Synoptists on the other hand the work of Jesus is made central and all-important, and especially during the earlier stages of his ministry his person and personal relation to this work are only so much referred to as the circumstances of the discourse make absolutely necessary.

After all, however, this amounts only to a different mode of viewing the same things: there is no contradiction involved, as to their inner essence. In a significant saying uttered even before the beginning of his great Galilean ministry our Lord himself has affirmed the identity of the kingdom with at least one of the conceptions that dominate his teaching according to John, viz., that of life. To Nicodemus he speaks of the mysterious birth of water and the Spirit as the only entrance into the kingdom of God. Now, inasmuch as birth is that process by which one enters into life, and since in the immediately following context life is silently substituted for the kingdom, it is plain that these two are practically equivalent, just as the sphere of truth and the kingdom are equivalent in the other passage., xviii. 36. With this accords the fact that in the Synoptical teaching the reverse may occasionally be observed, viz., that life is used interchangeably with the kingdom, cf. Mark 10:17, with Mark 10:23.

While thus recognizing that the kingdom of God has an importance in our Lord's teaching second to that of no other subject, we should not go to the extreme into which some writers have fallen, of finding in it the only theme on which Jesus actually taught, which would imply that all other topics dealt with in his discourses were to his mind but so many corollaries or subdivisions of this one great truth. The modern attempts to make the kingdom of God the organizing center of a theological system have here exerted a misleading influence upon the interpretation of Jesus' teaching; From the fact that the proximate object of his saving work was the realization of the kingdom, the wrong inference has been drawn, that this must have been also the highest category under which he viewed the truth. It is plain that the one does not follow from the other. Salvation with all it contains flows from the nature and subserves the glory of God, and we can clearly perceive that Jesus was accustomed consciously to refer it to this divine source and to subordinate it to this God-centered purpose, cf. John xvii. 4. He usually spoke not of "the kingdom" absolutely, but of "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven," and these names themselves indicate that the place of God in the order of things which they describe is the all-important thing to his mind.

It is only with great artificiality that the various component elements of our Lord's teaching can be subsumed under the one head of the kingdom. If any deduction and systematizing are to be

attempted, logic and the indications which we have of our Lord's habit of thought on this point alike require, that not his teaching on the kingdom but that on God shall be given the highest place. The relation observable in the discourses of the Fourth Gospel between the person of Christ and salvation, is also the relation which we may conceive to exist between God and the kingdom. Because God is what he is, the kingdom bears the character and embodies the principles which as a matter of fact belong to it. Even so, however, we should avoid the modern mistake of endeavoring to derive the idea of the kingdom from the conception of the divine fatherhood alone. This derivation expresses an important truth recognized by Jesus himself, when he calls the kingdom a fatherly gift to the disciples, Luke 12:32. But it represents only one side of the truth, for in the kingdom other attributes of God besides his fatherhood find expression. The doctrine of God in its entire fulness alone is capable of furnishing that broader basis on which the structure of his teaching on the kingdom can be built in agreement with Jesus' own mind. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that in many respects the idea of the kingdom acted in our Lord's thought and teaching as a crystallizing point around which several other elements of truth naturally gathered and grouped themselves in harmonious combination. That the idea of the church, where it emerges in his teaching, is a direct outgrowth of the development of his doctrine of the kingdom, will appear in the sequel. But not only this, also the consummation of the world and the final state of glory were evidently viewed by him in no other light than as the crowning fulfilment of the kingdom-idea. Still further what he taught about righteousness was most closely interlinked in his mind with the truth about the nature of the kingdom. The same may safely be affirmed with reference to the love and grace of God. The great categories of subjective religion, faith and repentance and regeneration, obviously had their place in his thought as answering to certain aspects of the kingdom. Even a subject apparently so remote from the kingdom-idea, in our usual understanding of it, as that of miracles in reality derived for Jesus from the latter the larger part of its meaning. Finally, the kingdom stood in our Lord's mind for a very definite conception concerning the historical relation of his own work and the new order of things introduced by it to the Old Testament. All this can here be stated in general only; our task in the sequel will be to work it out in detail. But what has been said is sufficient to show that there is scarcely an important subject in the rich repertoire of our Lord's teaching with which our study of his disclosures concerning the kingdom of God will not bring us into contact.

Chapter II The Kingdom and the Old Testament The first thing to be noticed in Jesus' utterances on our theme is that they clearly presuppose a consciousness on his part of standing with his work on the basis of the revelation of God in the Old Testament. Our Lord occupies historic ground from the outset. From first to last he refers to "the kingdom of God" as a fixed conception with which he takes for granted, his hearers are familiar. In affirming that it is "at hand" he moreover ascribes to it the character of something forming part of that world of prophecy, which moves onward through the ages to its divinely appointed goal of fulfilment. It were utterly out of harmony with this fundamental principle of our Lord's kingdom-gospel to represent him as the founder of a new religion. His work was the realization of what in the ideal form of prophecy had been known and expected ages before. We simply here observe at a peculiarly vital point what underlies as a broad uniform basis his official consciousness everywhere. No array of explicit statements in which he acknowledges his acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures as the word of God can equal in force this implied subordination of himself and of his work to the one great scheme of which the ancient revelation given to Israel formed the preparatory stage. Indeed in appropriating for himself

the function of bringing the kingdom, in laying claim to the Messianic dignity, Jesus seized upon that in the Old Testament which enabled him at one stroke to make its whole historic movement converge upon and terminate in himself. There is in this a unique combination of the most sublime self-consciousness and the most humble submission to the revelation of God in former ages. Jesus knew himself as at once the goal of history and the servant of history. The Old Testament knows of a kingdom of God as already existing at that time. Apart from the universal reign exercised by God as Creator of all things, Jehovah has his special kingdom in Israel. The classical passage relating to the latter is Exodus xix. 4-6, from which it appears, that the making of the covenant at Sinai established this relationship. In virtue of it, Jehovah, besides being Israel's God, also acted as Israel's national King. By direct revelation he gave them laws and by his subsequent guidance of their history he made his rule a living reality.

Even later, when human kings arose, these had no other rights from the point of view of the legitimate religion than those of the vicegerents of Jehovah. The meaning of this order of things was that in Israel's life all other interests, both public and private, were subordinated to and made a part of religion. Whilst elsewhere religion was a function of the state, here the state became a function of religion. In itself this idea of a kingship exercised by the deity over the entire range of life was not confined to the sphere of special revelation. Melekh, king, was a common name for the godhead among the Semitic tribes, so that to some extent, the principle of what we call "the theocracy" was known to them. But the relation which they imagined to exist between themselves and their gods was in Israel alone a matter of actual experience. A most vivid consciousness of this fact pervades the entire Old Testament. In view of this it creates some surprise at first sight, that Jesus never speaks of the kingdom of God as previously existing. To him the kingdom is throughout something new, now first to be realized. Even of John the Baptist he speaks as not being in the kingdom, because his whole manner of work identified him with the preceding dispensation. The law and the prophets are until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, Luke 16:16; Matthew 11:13. There are only two passages in which the old theocratic order of things might seem to be referred to under the name of the kingdom. In Matthew 8:12, Jesus calls the Jews "the sons of the kingdom." But this is probably meant in the sense, that in virtue of the promises they are heirs of the kingdom, not in the sense of their having had the kingdom in actual possession before the coming of Christ. On the same principle we must probably interpret Matthew 21:43, where Jesus predicts that the kingdom of God shall be taken away from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, the kingdom being used for the title to the kingdom. Or, if the literal meaning of the words be pressed, it should be remembered, that our Lord spoke them during the later stage of his ministry, at a time when through his labors the kingdom of God in its new and highest sense had been at least incipiently realized. The only indirect recognition of God's kingship under the Old Testament is found in Matt. v. 35, where Jerusalem is called "the city of the great King." When the question is put, how must we explain this restriction of the term by Jesus to the new order of things, the answer cannot of course be sought in any lack of appreciation on his part of the reasons which underlie the opposite usage prevailing in the Old Testament. Nor can the reason have lain in a desire to accommodate himself to the contemporary Jewish conception, for, although the Jews at that time expected the kingdom from the future, they also knew it in another sense as already present with them through the reign of God in the law. The true explanation is undoubtedly to be found in the absolute, ideal character our Lord ascribed to the order of things associated with the name of the kingdom. To his

mind it involved such altogether new forces and such unparalleled blessings, that all relative and provisional forms previously assumed by the work of God on earth seemed by comparison unworthy of the name. Thus, while he would not have denied that the Old Testament institutions represented a real kingdom of God, the high sense with which he had invested the term made it unnatural for him to apply it to these. And after all the Old Testament itself had pointed the way to this restricted usage followed by our Lord. Side by side with the kingdom that is we meet in the Old Testament a kingdom yet to come. This is due to three causes. In the first place, among the Semitic tribes the kingship very often originated by some powerful personality performing great acts of deliverance and obtaining in result of this a position of pre-eminence, as we see it happen in the case of Saul. Thus, though Jehovah was King, he nevertheless could perform acts in the future, work deliverances for his people, such as would render him King in a new sense, cf. Isaiah 24:21; Isaiah 63:15; Isaiah 52:7; Micah 2:12; Micah 4:6; Obadiah 1:21; Psalms 97:1 Psalms 117:1; Psalms 119:1. Secondly, the suspension of the visibly exercised rule of Jehovah during the exile naturally led to the representation, that he would in the future become King by resuming his reign. It is especially in the Book of Daniel that the idea of the future kingdom of Jehovah is developed in contrast with the world-monarchies through which his kingdom appeared in abeyance for the present. Thirdly, the rise of Messianic prophecy had the natural result of projecting the true kingdom of God into the future. If not the present king was the ideal representative of Jehovah, but the future ruler as the prophets depict him, then, as a correlate of this, the thought would suggest itself that with this new ideal instrument the rule of God in its full ideal sense will first be realized. The expectation of the kingdom of God became equivalent to the Messianic hope of Israel. Now, inasmuch as our Lord knew himself to be the promised Messiah and knew that the Messianic King had had his typical predecessors under the Old Testament, we can indirectly show that the conception of the theocracy as a typical kingdom of God cannot have been unfamiliar to him. In the Gospels both the thing and the name of the kingdom appear familiar to the people among whom Jesus taught, cf. Matthew 3:2; Mark 15:43; Luke 14:15; Luke 17:20. It would be rash, however, to infer from this, that Jesus simply accommodated himself in his mode of speech about the kingdom to the prevailing usage of his time. The way in which he handled the conception in general not only, but the very prominence to which he raised it, bore the marks of great originality and were productive of the most momentous changes from a religious point of view. This can be best apprehended if we place our Lord's usage by the side of that found in the contemporary Jewish literature. Here, as in the Old Testament, besides the divine kingship over the world both the present reign of Jehovah over Israel and his future kingdom are referred to. In these references we notice two peculiarities. The first is that the kingdom itself is not strictly speaking represented as future, but only the enforcement or manifestation of the kingdom. God's rule is ever existing, only at present it is not recognized. In the future the world will be made to submit to it, thus the kingdom is manifested. This peculiarity is the result of the one-sided manner in which the relation of God to his people and the world appeared to be bound up in the law. Hence the Jewish phrase, "to take up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven," meaning to vow obedience to the law. The second peculiarity consists in the rareness with which even in this qualified sense the Jewish sources speak of God's kingdom as a future thing. In comparatively few cases, where the new order of things expected in the Messianic age is referred to, does the name kingdom of God appear in connection with it. This cannot be accidental. Probably the reason is as follows: the conception which the average Jewish mind had framed of the new order of things and the interest

which in its view attached to UP were not sufficiently God-centered to favor the use of the phrase "kingdom of God." The emphasis was placed largely on what the expected state would bring for Israel in a national and temporal sense. Hence it was preferably thought of as the kingdom of Israel over the other nations. Or the place of the kingdom idea was taken by different conceptions, such as that of "the coming age," which were indefinite enough to leave room for the cherishing of the same self-centered hope.

Now it is from a comparison with these two peculiarities that our Lord's preference for the name "kingdom of God" receives its proper light. While to the mind of Judaism the divine rule is equivalent to the sovereignty of the law, Jesus., though not excluding this, knew of a much larger sphere in which God would through saving acts exercise his glorious prerogatives of kingship on a scale and in a manner unknown before. In his teaching the kingdom once more becomes a kingdom of grace as well as of law, and thus the balance so beautifully preserved in the Old Testament is restored. The consequence of this was, of course, that great emphasis had to be thrown upon the newness of the kingdom, upon the fact of its being and bringing something more than the reign of law in which the Jews found their ideal. Thus the Lord's method of not calling even the Old Testament legal organization the kingdom may have been partly due to a revolt in his mind from the Jewish perversion of the same. Further, by making the idea as prominent as he did in his teaching and at the same time speaking of it exclusively as the kingdom of God, our Lord protested against the popular misconception of it as a national kingdom intended to bring Israel supremacy and glory. Finally, through the enlargement which the idea of God's reign had undergone, so that it stood for a reign of saving grace as well as of law, it became possible for our Lord to subsume under the notion of the kingdom the entire complex of blessing and glory which the coming order of things would involve for the people of God, and yet to keep before men's minds the thought that this new world of enjoyment was to be enjoyed as a world of God. Thus by bringing the name of "God's kingdom" and the whole content of the Messianic hopes of Israel together, he imparted to the latter the highest ideal character, a supreme religious consecration.

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Chapter III Kingdom and Kingship. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven The Greek word *Basileia* used in the Gospels for "kingdom" and the corresponding Hebrew and Aramaic words, such as *Malkuth* and *Memlakhah*, can, like many words in the English language, designate the same conception from two distinct points of view. They may stand for the kingdom as something abstract, the kingship or rule exercised by the king. Or they may describe the kingdom as something concrete, the territory, the sum total of the subjects and possessions ruled over, including whatever of rights, privileges and advantages are enjoyed in this sphere. Now the question arises, in which sense did our Lord mean the phrase when he spoke of the "kingdom of God." In the Old Testament where a kingdom is ascribed to Jehovah, with the exception of Ex. xix. 6, where the Israelites are called "a kingdom of priests," and therefore the meaning is concrete, that of a body of subjects ruled over, the abstract sense is the prevailing one. God's kingdom is always his reign, his rule, never his domain. When Obadiah predicts "the kingdom shall be the Lord's," his meaning is that in the future to Jehovah will belong the supremacy. That such was also the common Jewish usage in our Lord's time appears from the manner in which the supremacy of Israel over the nations is associated with the idea of the kingdom.

We have already seen that the relative absence of the phrase "the kingdom of God" from the Jewish sources points to the same conclusion, for it was a lack of interest in the truth that Jehovah would be supreme that prevented this phrase from becoming popular. On the other hand, to Jesus the thought that God would rule was a glorious thought which filled his soul with the most sacred joy. In so far it is undoubtedly correct when modern writers insist that in interpreting our Lord's sayings the meaning "reign," "kingship," shall be our point of departure, and warn against the misleading associations of the English word "kingdom," which in modern usage practically always means the territory or realm. Still it is advisable to proceed slowly here. Attention has already been called to the significant enlargement which Jesus introduced into the current use of the phrase, if to him it covered all the privileges and blessings which flow from the coming reign of God, then it is plain how inevitably it would tend in his mouth to become a concrete designation. From meaning at first "a rule" it would begin to mean, if not a territory or body of subjects, at least a realm, a sphere of life, a state of things, all of these more or less locally conceived. To be sure, even so the connotation would always remain, that the kingdom thus understood is possessed and therefore pervaded by God, but after all the rendering "reign of God" would no longer apply. In point of fact a single glance at the Gospel-discourses shows how utterly impossible it is to carry through the abstract rendering in each single instance where our Lord speaks of the kingdom of God.

Briefly stated the matter stands as follows: In a few instances the translation "reign" is required by the connection, as when it is said "the Son of man shall come in his kingdom." In some other cases, less rare than the foregoing, it is possible, perhaps slightly more plausible, to adopt the abstract rendering, as when we read of the kingdom "coming," "appearing," "being at hand," "being seen," although in these and other instances no one can maintain that the substitution of the concrete would make the sense unnatural. While neither meaning is unsuitable, one may in such cases for general reasons be inclined to believe, that the thought of a revelation of God's royal power lay uppermost in our Lord's mind. Then there are a great number, perhaps the majority, of passages in which the note of the concrete plainly predominates. When the figure is that of "calling" to the kingdom of God, of "entering" into it, of its being "shut" or of people being cast out from it, of its being "sought," given," possessed," "received," "inherited," everybody feels, that in such modes of speech not the exercise of the divine rule itself, but the resulting order of things, the complex of blessings produced by it, the sphere in which it works, stand before the speaker's mind. Taking this into consideration we may say that, if *basileia* is everywhere to be rendered by the same word, that word ought to be "kingdom." To introduce a distinction and translate in some cases "reign," in other cases "kingdom," is obviously impracticable, because, as above stated, in a number of cases we have no data for choosing between the two.

Even less satisfactory is the recent proposal to translate everywhere "the sovereignty of God," for not only is this unsuitable for all sayings in which the concrete usage of the term is undoubtedly followed, it also fails to express with fulness and accuracy the abstract sense where this may be recognized. Sovereignty denotes a relation existing by right, even where it is not actually enforced. In the case of God, therefore, it can be scarcely said to come. The divine includes, as we have seen, besides a right to rule, the actual energetic forth-putting of God's royal power in acts of salvation.

Besides "the kingdom of Gods" we find "the kingdom of heaven." The Evangelist Matthew uses this well-nigh exclusively; only in Matthew 6:33; Matthew 12:28; Matthew 13:43; Matthew 21:31,

Matthew 21:43; Matthew 26:29, does he write "the kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of my" or "their Father," whereas "the kingdom of heaven" occurs more than thirty times in his Gospel. In Chap. xii. 28 the use of "God" instead of "heaven" is explained by the preceding "Spirit of God;" in the two other instances in Chap. xxi, no reason for the substitution is apparent. In Mark and Luke "the kingdom of heaven" is not found. This raises the question, which of these two versions more literally reproduces the usage of Jesus himself. In all probability Matthew's does, since no good reason can be assigned, why he should have substituted "the kingdom of heaven," whilst a sufficiently plausible reason for the opposite procedure on the part of Mark and Luke can be found, in the fact, that, writing for Gentile readers, they might think such a typically Jewish phrase, as "the kingdom of heaven" less intelligible than the plain "kingdom of God." Of course, in holding this, we need not imply that in each individual case, where the first Evangelist has "kingdom of heaven," this phrase was actually employed by Jesus. All we mean to affirm is the general proposition that Jesus used both phrases, and that in so far Matthew has preserved for us an item of information no longer obtainable from the other two Synoptical Gospels. But what were the origin and meaning of this phrase "the kingdom of heaven," and what light does it throw on our Lord's conception of the kingdom? Among the later Jews a tendency existed to forego employing the name of God.

Various substitutes were current and "heaven" was one of these. Apart from the phrase under discussion, traces of this mode of speech are found in Matthew 16:19; Mark 11:30; Luke 15:18, Luke 15:21. It was a mode of speech which had arisen from the Jewish habit of emphasizing in the nature of God more than anything else his exaltation above the world and unapproachable majesty, to such an extent even as to endanger what must ever be the essence of religion, a true communion between God and man. But this custom, though exponential of a characteristic fault of Judaism, had also its good side, else our Lord would not have adopted it. In his human nature Jesus had a profound sense of the infinite distance between God and the creature. Whatever there was of genuine religious fear and reverence of God in the Jewish consciousness awakened an echo in his heart and found in him its ideal expression, from which all the one-sidedness that belonged to it in Judaism had disappeared. If, therefore, Jesus spoke of God as heaven, this did not spring from a superstitious fear of naming God, but rather from a desire to name him in such a way as to call up at once the most exalted conception of his being and character. To do this the word "heaven" was eminently fitted since it draws man's thought upwards to the place where God reveals his glory in perfection. This can best be felt in another phrase which likewise among the Evangelists Matthew alone has preserved for us, and which likewise our Lord had in common with the Jewish teachers of that age, the phrase "the Father in heaven" or "the heavenly Father." If in this the name "Father" expresses the condescending love and grace of God, his infinite nearness to us, the qualification "in heaven" adds the reminder of his infinite majesty above us, by which the former ought always to be held in balance lest we injure the true spirit of religion. It may be affirmed, therefore, that, when Jesus referred to "the kingdom of heaven," he meant this in no other sense than "the kingdom of God," except in so far as there was an added note of emphasis on the exalted nature of him whose kingdom this is. The word "heaven," however, although it primarily qualifies God and describes his greatness, not that of the kingdom, must also have been intended by our Lord to color the conception of the latter. If the king be one who concentrates in himself all the glory of heaven, what must his kingdom be? We shall not go far amiss in saying that Jesus desired to awaken in his disciples a sense of the mysterious supernatural character, of the absolute perfection and grandeur, of the supreme value pertaining to this new order of things, and

desired them to view and approach it in a spirit appreciative of these holy qualities. Although the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is not found in the Old Testament, the word "heaven" appears there already in significant association with the idea of the future kingdom. In Daniel it is said that "the God of heaven" will set up a kingdom, and this means that the new reign will take its origin in a supernatural manner from the higher world. To Jesus also "heaven" and the supernatural were cognate ideas, cf. Matthew 16:17; Mark 11:30. That the thought of the absolute perfection of the heavenly world as determinative of the character of the kingdom may well have been associated with the name "kingdom of heaven" in Jesus' mind, appears from the close connection between the second and third petitions in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come-Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth," cf. also Matthew 5:48. For heaven as the sphere of supreme unchangeable values and the goal of aspiration we may refer to such words as Matthew 5:12; Matthew 6:20. In view of the profound significance which Jesus throughout ascribed to the contrast between the heavenly and the earthly world, it is hardly likely that heaven was to him a mere formal circumlocution for God. It meant not God in general, but God as known and revealed in those celestial regions which had been our Lord's eternal home. Only with this in mind can we hope to understand something of the profound sense in which he called the kingdom "a kingdom of heaven."

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CHAPTER IV The Present and the Future Kingdom

WE have already seen that our Lord makes a sharp distinction between the Old Testament order of things and the kingdom of God, and in doing this conforms to that side of the Old Testament representation which itself looks upon the kingdom as future. Now the very important question arises: how did he conceive of the coming of this kingdom both as to time and manner? Until not long ago the view quite generally prevailed and was thought to be in harmony with Jesus' own teaching, that the coming referred to might be conceived of as a lengthy process covering ages and reaching its consummation by a sudden crisis at the end coinciding with the second coming of Christ and the end of the present world. And this prolonged process, in distinction from the final crisis, was supposed to consist in our Lord's view of essentially inward, spiritual, invisible changes. The kingdom, it was believed, comes when the gospel is spread, hearts are changed, sin and error overcome, righteousness cultivated, a living communion with God established. In this sense the kingdom began its coming when Jesus entered upon his public ministry, his work upon earth, including his death, was part of its realization, the disciples were in it, the whole subsequent history of the church is the history of its gradual extension, we ourselves can act our part in its onward movement and are members of it as a present organization. In recent years, however, this view has been subjected to severe criticism by a certain group of writers and rejected as unhistorical. It is claimed, that Jesus took an entirely different view of the matter than that outlined above. Jesus did not for a moment think that by his prophetic activity or by any spiritual changes thus wrought among Israel, the kingdom would come. All that he meant to accomplish by his labors was merely preparatory to its coming: the people had to be made ready for its appearance. To introduce the kingdom was God's work, not his. No man could do anything towards either hastening or delaying it. And when it came it would come at one single stroke, by a sudden supernatural interposition of God, in a great world-crisis, consequently not for a part but with its whole content all at once, fulfilling all the promises, giving the signal by its arrival for the end of

present world. And this stupendous event Jesus expected to happen in his lifetime, or, after he had attained to the certainty of his intervening death, at least within the time of the then living generation.

Before endeavoring to test which of these two opposing views is in accord with our Lord's teaching, we must carefully note the real point of divergence between them and must also make clear to ourselves what issues are at stake in our decision in favor of the one or the other. The two views have this in common that they both recognize the coming of the kingdom in its final absolute sense to have been associated by Jesus with the end of the world. The older view therefore is inclusive of the more recent one, and the difference arises from the fact that the former affirms something more which the latter denies. The sole point in dispute concerns our right to ascribe to Jesus such a conception of the kingdom that he could also find the beginning of its arrival in the purely spiritual results of his labors and accordingly extend this gradual coming of it over an indefinite period of time. But this sole point at issue is fraught with the gravest consequences as it is decided one way or the other. For, first of all, it involves the question of the infallibility of our Lord as a religious teacher. If he expected and announced only one coming of the kingdom and that to happen shortly within his lifetime or the lifetime of that generation- then there is no escape from the conclusion that the outcome has proved him mistaken. Secondly, the distribution of emphasis in our Lord's teaching becomes essentially different if we adopt the most modern view on this matter. By common consent the center of gravity in his preaching, that to which he attaches supreme importance, is the kingdom. Now, if we may believe that this kingdom was to him in part identical with the existence of certain spiritual states, such as righteousness and communion with God, then these receive with the kingdom the highest place in our Lord's estimation of values. If, on the other hand, these lie outside of the kingdom and are mere preparatory states, then they lose their central position and become means to an ulterior end consisting in the kingdom. In the third place, the controversy affects the character of our Lord's ethics. The advocates of the recent view believe that Jesus' conviction with reference to the rapidly approaching end of the world largely colored his ethical views, in that it prevented him from developing a positive interest for the duties which pertain to this present life. Finally, the conception of our Lord's character itself may be said to be involved. Some at least who ascribe to him such high-strung expectations seek to explain this on the theory, that he was an ecstatic visionary person, rather than a man of calm, equable spiritual temper. It thus appears that the aspect of our Lord's kingdom- doctrine now under discussion is interlinked with the gravest problems touching the value and authority of his character and work in general.

It must be admitted that the Old Testament does not distinguish between several stages or phases in the fulfilment of the promises regarding the kingdom, but looks upon its coming as an undivided whole. John the Baptist also seems to have still occupied this Old Testament standpoint. This, however, was due to the peculiar character of prophecy in general, in which there is a certain lack of perspective, a vision of things separated in time on one plane. We may not argue from this, that Jesus, who was more than a prophet and stood face to face with the reality, must have been subject to the same limitations. Nor are we justified in saying, that, because contemporary Judaism took such a view of the matter, Jesus likewise must have held this. For, on the one hand, Judaism was no norm for him; on the other hand, within Judaism itself a distinction between successive stages in the fulfilment of the Messianic promises had already arisen.

We have seen that the Jews were accustomed to look forward not so much to an entirely new and first arrival of the kingdom, but rather to a manifestation of God's rule in a higher form. And even within the limits of this future manifestation of the kingdom stages had begun to be distinguished. The idea of a preliminary Messianic kingdom on earth lasting for a definite number of years, to be followed by the consummation of the world and an eternal kingdom under totally new conditions may possibly have been developed as early as our Lord's day. In the later teaching of the New Testament a somewhat similar distinction certainly exists, as when Paul distinguishes between the present reign of Christ, dating from the resurrection, and the final state after he shall have delivered the kingdom to the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. The view, therefore, that the kingdom might be present in one sense, and yet have to come in another, did not lie beyond the doctrinal horizon of Judaism even, and we must a priori reckon with the possibility that in some form or other this view may appear also in the teaching of Jesus. In point of fact certain statements of Jesus concerning the kingdom as an inward spiritual state strongly resemble the Jewish representation, e. g. the words in Mark 10:15 about "receiving the kingdom of God" sound like an adaptation of the Jewish figure which speaks of "taking up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven," cf. also Matthew 13:52. The difference between this Jewish representation and Jesus' idea of the preliminary kingdom lies in this., that according to the Jewish view the kingdom is always there, it being only a question whether man will take it upon himself, whereas according to Jesus, who thought less of human efforts, but had a deeper insight into the sinfulness of man and a higher conception of what the true reign of God involves, even this partial kingdom must first come through an act of God before man can be invited to receive it. As to the other point of contact in the Jewish expectation, it should be remembered that the intermediate kingdom was to begin with the appearance of the Messiah. If then Jesus regarded himself even while on earth as the Messiah and as engaged in Messianic work, which we have no reason to doubt, he must also have looked upon the stage of this earthly Messianic labor as a provisional stage of realization of the kingdom. Of course here again he transformed the Jewish conception by his spiritualizing touch into something entirely different and infinitely higher than what it was before.

Coming to the facts themselves we observe that no one denies the presence of the idea of a spiritual provisional kingdom in the gospel record of Jesus' teaching as it lies before us. The view that Jesus did not entertain this idea, of necessity involves ascribing to the Evangelists an unhistorical representation of what our Lord actually taught. It is alleged that the gospel-tradition on this point was colored by the later development of things, which showed that a long time had to intervene between the first and second coming of the Lord and therefore compelled the assuming of a provisional kingdom of protracted duration. Upon this critical phase of the question our present limits and purposes forbid us to enter. We only note it to remark that for those who hold to the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels no doubt can here exist. The present spiritual kingdom is by common consent plainly recognized in such sayings as Matthew 11:11; Matthew 13:41; Matthew 16:19.

Apart, however, from critical attempts to eliminate this element from Jesus' teaching efforts have been made to attain the same object by means of exegesis, and into these we must briefly look while examining the available evidence. Clearest of all seem the words spoken by our Lord in answer to the Pharisees who had accused him of being in league with Beelzebub: "If I by the Spirit (Lk. finger) of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The

underlying supposition of this argument is, that, where the kingdom of Satan is destroyed, there of necessity the kingdom of God begins. If the former already took place at that time, then the latter also had become a present reality. Now it has been urged, that this saying proves nothing in favor of the usual conception of a spiritual kingdom to be gradually realized, because 'our Lord might look upon the casting out of demons and other miracles as signals of the rapidly approaching final coming of the kingdom, the beginning as it were of the end. In answer to this we observe that, even if this were a correct interpretation, the presence of a certain element of gradualness in our Lord's conception of the matter would thereby be in principle admitted. The coming would not be entirely abrupt, there would be not only premonitions but actual anticipations. But it is impossible to interpret the words in the above sense, because at an early point of his career our Lord looked forward to his death as something that had to intervene before all things could be fulfilled, so that he could not have regarded his conquest over the demons as immediately preceding and heralding the end. His meaning must be, that when Satan's power ceases, a new order of things begins, which in itself is equivalent to the rule of God. In one respect only it will have to be conceded that the saying under discussion does not embody the full idea of the spiritual kingdom of God. It proves the actual presence of the kingdom at the time of our Lord's ministry, but does not directly affirm that this kingdom has its reality in inward, invisible states. The casting out of demons like other miracles belongs rather to the outward, visible sphere. The same qualification will have to apply to another passage at least in one of the two renderings of which it is capable. According to Luke 17:21 Jesus answered the question of the Pharisees as to the time of the appearance of the kingdom of God by declaring "behold the kingdom of God is entos humoan." This may mean: "within you," or it may mean "in your midst." In the former case both the spiritual nature and the present reality are affirmed, in the latter case only the presence of the kingdom in some form at the time of speaking is implied. Recently it has been asserted that on the rendering "in your midst" even the last-mentioned inference is not warranted, because our Lord speaks of the future, and means to say -- at its final appearance the kingdom of God does not come so as to be subject to observation or calculation; people will not be able to say, "Here or there," lo, all at once it will be in your midst. But this is untenable because from other sayings we know, that the final coming of the kingdom is preceded by certain signs and in so far is actually subject to observation and calculation. We must choose between the two renderings given above, and of these the second, "in your midst," deserves the preference for two reasons: first, because it suits best the purpose of the question of the Pharisees, which was as to the time of the coming of the kingdom, not as to its sphere, and because of the unbelieving Pharisees it could scarcely be said that the kingdom was "within" them. Our Lord means to teach the enquirers that, instead of a future thing to be fixed by apocalyptic speculation, the coming of the kingdom is a present thing, present in the very midst of those who are curious about the day and the hour of its sometime' appearance. Now this does not directly explain how the kingdom is present. The view remains possible that Jesus referred to miraculous works as one form of the manifestation of God's royal power, in which case this saying would not carry us beyond the foregoing about the casting out of demons. But the view is equally plausible, that he referred to the establishment of God's rule in the midst of Israel through the spiritual results of his labors.

Another statement which clearly teaches both the actual presence of the kingdom and its spiritual form of existence is Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16. Here "the law and the prophets" are said to extend until John, that is to say, the prophetic looking-forward dispensation of the old covenant

reaches its close in John: from there onward begins a dispensation in which the kingdom of God is the theme no longer of prophecy, but of gospel-preaching, therefore is no longer future but present. John himself is not in this kingdom while others are. This, of course, cannot apply to the final kingdom, for from this Jesus certainly could not have excluded the Baptist. It can only mean, that John does not share in the privileges made available in the new order of things introduced by Jesus' work, because he virtually continued to stand on the basis' of the law and the prophets, on the basis of the old covenant. And these privileges to which John had no access certainly consisted not in the mere opportunity to witness the miracles of Jesus, as external acts; a participation of inward spiritual blessings must be referred to, for on account of this our Lord pronounces the smallest or smaller in the kingdom greater than John, and we know from other sayings that Jesus measured true greatness in a different way than by contact with his miracles. The well known saying from the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things (i. e. food and raiment) shall be added unto you," Matt. vi. 33, may also be quoted in this connection. Even though the view that righteousness is here present righteousness and as such, a closer specification of the kingdom, should be subject to dispute, the fact remains that the kingdom itself appears as a possession obtainable in this life. For food and clothing are here represented as something to be added not to the seeking of the kingdom but to the kingdom itself, and it goes without saying, that this is applicable only to the kingdom in its present state of existence.

Most clearly, however, both the present reality and the internal nature of the kingdom are taught in some of the great parables, Matt. 13, Mk. 4. Lk. 8 In the parable of the wheat and the tare; the kingdom appears as a state of things in which the good and the bad still intermingle. The same is true of the parable of the fish-net. Here, then, obviously our Lord speaks of the kingdom in a form different from its final form, which is represented as beginning with the separation between the two kinds. Now these two parables, and especially the interpretation of the first in Matthew 13:36-43, are said to betray the influence of late conceptions. But what shall we say about the one of the mustard seed and the leaven? It cannot be denied that Jesus here conceives of the kingdom as a growing organism, a leavening power, conceptions which will scarcely apply to anything else than to a spiritual order of things. To interpret these as describing the immense contrast between the small beginning of things in Jesus' miracles and the great world-renewing conclusion of his work soon to be witnessed is, it seems to us, a forced exegesis, which unnecessarily charges Jesus with an artificial use of these figures so exquisitely chosen and so strikingly applied on the common view. Finally, it should be noted that in connection with these parables Jesus spoke significantly of "the mysteries" or "the mystery" (Mk.) of the kingdom of heaven. The most plausible explanation of this statement is, that it refers not so much to the parabolic form of teaching as to the principal idea embodied in some of these parables. What else could so suitably have been designated by Jesus it a "a mystery" in comparison with the Jewish expectations than the truth that the kingdom comes gradually, imperceptibly, spiritually?

It appears from the foregoing that it is impossible to deny to our Lord the conception of an internal kingdom which as such comes not at once but in a lengthy process. Some writers, recognizing the necessity of this, are yet unwilling to admit that it was a conception held by Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. In their opinion his mind underwent a development on the subject; beginning with the expectation of a kingdom to appear suddenly by an immediate act of God, he

afterwards became convinced that the opposition offered to his person and work rendered this impossible, that the kingdom of glory could not immediately be realized, and thus was led to believe, that only on its internal, invisible side the rule of God could even now be established. The opposition encountered would lead to his death^P but death would be a transition to an exalted state, which would in turn be followed by his coming with the clouds of heaven and the establishment of the kingdom in its full final form. A single glance at the Gospels, however, will show how impossible it is to distribute the sayings relating to the present and final form of the kingdom in such a way as to make out a period at the beginning of which Jesus knew only the latter. Some of the clearest utterances regarding the spiritual coming of the kingdom belong to a comparatively early stage of his teaching, cf. Matthew 11:11; Mark 2:18-22. Nor do the general arguments adduced in favor of this hypothesis have sufficient force to commend it. It is true Jesus began with representing the kingdom as future, but this applied at the beginning equally to its spiritual, and to its visible, final realization. He urged the disciples continually to seek after the kingdom, but this only implies that within them it has to come ever increasingly. He speaks of the eschatological kingdom as "the kingdom " absolutely, but this mode of speech is not confined to the early period of his teaching: it occurs also later at a time when he is admitted to have been familiar with the idea of an immanent kingdom. He could thus speak because only at the end of time will the kingdom in its ideal completeness appear. This does not exclude that he recognized less complete embodiments of the kingdom-idea as present long before. Again it is true that he does not at first announce himself as Messiah, and from this the inference might be drawn that with his Messiahship he put also the coming of the kingdom into the future. This inference would be correct, if restraint in the announcement of himself as Messiah had proceeded from the conviction that he was not as yet the Messiah, nor his present work Messianic work in the strict sense of the term. In point of fact Jesus kept his Messianic claims in the background for pedagogical reasons, while perfectly conscious that he was exercising Messianic functions. The correct view on this point is that he distinguished two forms of Messianic activity, one on earth in humility, one from the throne of glory, and corresponding to this two forms of the kingdom, one invisible now, one visible at the end, and, thus understood, the two-sidedness of his Messianic consciousness affords a striking parallel to the two-sidedness of his kingdom-conception. On the whole, therefore, we have no reason to believe that in our Lord's subjective apprehension of the truth there was any appreciable progress on this important subject within the limits of his public ministry. In Jesus' objective teaching, on the other hand, as distinguished from his subjective consciousness, a certain development in the presentation of truth concerning the kingdom cannot be denied. We are able to affirm this, not so much from a comparison of the utterances belonging to the earlier or later periods. This would be difficult since the material in our Gospels is not all arranged on the chronological plan. The fact appears rather in this way, that at two points in our Lord's ministry a certain phase of the doctrine of the kingdom is introduced with such emphasis as to mark it relatively new. These two points are the occasion on which our Lord uttered the great kingdom-parables and the announcement of his passion near Caesarea Philippi. From the manner in which the great parables draw the distinction between the immanent and eschatological coming of the kingdom, and from the elaborateness with which Jesus here describes the gradual, invisible character of the former as resembling the process of organic growth, we are led to infer that previously this principle had not been accentuated in his teaching. This does not mean that he had hitherto abstained from referring to the spiritual side of the subject. We have seen above that the

opposite is true. It simply means, that up to this point, while sometimes predicating of the kingdom things true of it in its purely spiritual stage, sometimes predicating of it things of eschatological character, he did not on purpose formulate the difference and the relation between the two, but treated the kingdom as a unit of which both classes of statements could be equally affirmed. The historical explanation of this peculiarity is probably to be sought in our Lord's desire to keep in close touch during the first period of his ministry with the Old Testament type of teaching, which, as we have seen, did not as yet distinguish between periods and stages in the realization of the kingdom. Thus in condescension to Israel he took up the thread of revelation where the Old Testament had left it, to give a new and richer development to it soon after in his epoch-making parabolic deliverances. The new element introduced at the second critical juncture, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, concerns the relation of the church to the kingdom and will be discussed afterwards in a separate chapter.

It should be observed that our Lord's teaching relates to two aspects of the same kingdom, not to two separate kingdoms. The ancient theological distinction between a kingdom of grace and a kingdom of glory is infelicitous for this reason. In the parable the growing of the grain and the harvest belong together as connected parts of the same process. There is one continuous kingdom-forming movement which first lays hold upon the inward spiritual center of life by itself, and then once more seizes the same in connection with its external visible embodiment. In the second stage the essence of the first is re-included and remains of supreme importance. The immanent kingdom as at first realized continues to partake of imperfections. Hence the eschatological crisis will not merely supply this soul of the kingdom with its fitting body, but will also bring the ideal perfection of the inner spirit itself. Our Lord's doctrine of the two-sided kingdom thus understood is an eloquent witness to the unique energy with which he subordinated the physical to the spiritual, as well as to the sobriety with which he upheld the principle, that the physical is not to be despised, but appreciated in its regenerated form, as the natural and necessary instrument of revelation for the spiritual. This article was made available on the internet via REFORMATION INK (www.markers.com/ink). Refer any correspondence to Shane Rosenthal: Rosenthal2000@aol.com ÿÿÿ

The Kingdom of God cont'd

Chapter V Current Misconceptions regarding the Present and Future Kingdom

Having found that both the immanent and the eschatological conceptions of the coming of the kingdom are clearly represented in Jesus' teaching and having in general defined the relation of the one to the other, we may now proceed to look at each separately in order to guard against certain misconceptions to which both may easily become subject. A tendency exists with some writers, especially of the class who insist that Jesus had no other than the eschatological conception of the kingdom, to identify the view ascribed to him with the current Jewish expectations. This would involve, that he was not only mistaken in regard to the time of the kingdom's appearance, but also held an inherently false idea regarding its nature, not having entirely outgrown the limitations of his age and environment on this point. It has in all seriousness been asserted by a recent writer of this class, that the notion of the kingdom in the historic form in which our Lord embraced it, is that element of his teaching to which we cannot ascribe abiding value, that in the experience of Jesus himself it proved a delusion, that to his teaching on the fatherhood of God rather than to it is due the enrichment which our Lord wrought in the religious consciousness of humanity. This error results from the failure to recognize the immanent, spiritual aspect of the kingdom-idea as actually present in Jesus' teaching and the thorough reconstruction which in result of it the idea as a whole underwent. It was little more than the name that Jesus borrowed from the kingdom-expectation of Judaism; whatever of the content of his own kingdom-teaching he had in common with the eschatological belief of his time belonged to the purer and nobler type of Jewish eschatology, that built up around the idea of "the coming age." And even the latter he lifted to an infinitely higher plane by subsuming it under the principle of the supremacy of God. So far as connected with the kingdom the Jewish hope was intensely political and national, considerably tainted also by sensuality. From all political bearings our Lord's teaching on the kingdom was wholly dissociated, cf. Mark 12:13; John 18:36. There is no trace in the Gospels of the so-called chiliastic expectation of a provisional political kingdom, that strange compromise whereby Judaism endeavored to reconcile the two heterogeneous elements that struggled for the supremacy in its eschatological consciousness. What formally corresponds in our Lord's teaching to this notion is the idea of the invisible, spiritual kingdom, and how totally different it is!

Equally broad and free is Jesus' kingdom-doctrine in its attitude towards the problem of Israel's national prerogative. Sayings like Matthew 8:11, Matthew 21:43; Matthew 28:19; Mark 13:10; Mark 14:9, Luke 4:26-27, prove that he distinctly anticipated the rejection of many in Israel and the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles on a large scale. It is true these are all prophetic words. In his own pastoral activity he confined himself deliberately to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and kept his helpers within the same limits. But even so there is in his whole attitude as a teacher of Israel that which has been strikingly characterized as "intensive universalism." In the Jew it is the man he seeks and endeavors to save. The problems raised, the duties required, the blessings conferred are such as to be applicable to all without distinction of race, caste, or sex.

Luke 22:30 is sometimes quoted to prove that Jesus had not freed himself from the Jewish particularism. Though possibly the "judging" may have to be understood in the sense of "reigning," yet the words by no means imply the salvation of all Israel, nor do they exclude the calling of the Gentiles. They were spoken at a time when Jesus could no longer doubt that the masses of Israel would reject him. Besides the words are figurative, to judge from the context with its reference to "eating" and "drinking." All we can legitimately infer from them is that the apostles will have a position of pre-eminence in the kingdom. The third feature in which our Lord's kingdom-message differs from the Jewish expectation consists in the absence of the sensualistic element so prominent in the latter. True he speaks in connection with the kingdom of eating, drinking, reclining at table, inheriting the earth, etc., and it is said we have no right to spiritualize all this. But the Old Testament already used such forms of speech with the clear consciousness of their metaphorical character. Even in the apocalyptic literature this sense is not entirely wanting, as the statement of Enoch xv. 11, "They will not partake of any food, nor will they thirst," shows. With reference to one point at least, Jesus positively affirmed that the sensual enjoyments of the present life will cease in the world to come, Mark 12:25. On the other hand, we must remember that it is possible to go too far in the spiritualizing interpretation of this class of utterances. We may not dissolve everything into purely inward processes and mental states, as modern theologians do when they say that heaven and hell are in the hearts of men. The eschatological kingdom has certainly in our Lord's conception its own outward forms of life. These figures stand for objective, external realities in which the body will have its own part and function. When our Lord speaks of earthly enjoyments, he means something that will be truly analogous to these and yet move on an altogether higher plane. Our difficulty lies in this, that we cannot frame a concrete conception of outward forms of life without having recourse to the senses. But our difficulty does not prove the impossibility, nor does it prove that the same difficulty existed for Jesus, who was familiar with the heavenly world by experience.

We believe, however, that there is greater need at the present day to guard Against a misunderstanding of the other side of our Lord's kingdom-teaching, that which relates to the spiritual, invisible form of the kingdom. Modern writers do not always sufficiently emphasize that, notwithstanding its internal character, the kingdom remains to all intents a supernatural kingdom. It is easy to speak disparagingly of the gross realistic expectations of the Jews, but those who do so often attack under the pretense of a refined spiritualism the very essence of Biblical supernaturalism. After all deductions are made, it must be maintained that the Jews could not have cherished this vigorous realism, had they not been supernaturalists at heart, trained in that great school of supernaturalism, the Old Testament. In this matter Jesus was in full agreement with their position. The circumstance that some of the parables which deal with this aspect of the kingdom have been taken from the sphere of organic life has sometimes led to misconceptions here. The point of comparison in these parables is not the naturalness of the process but only its gradualness and invisible character. In the parable of the imperceptibly growing seed, Mark 4:26-29, rather the opposite is implied, viz., that God gives the increase without human intervention. Jesus performs all his work, even that pertaining to the immanent kingdom, in the Spirit, and the Spirit stands for the supernatural. That we must not identify the processes whereby this side of the kingdom is realized with purely natural processes can be best seen from the Fourth Gospel. Here the present life is equivalent to the immanent kingdom. But this present life appears to be thoroughly supernatural in its origin and character. Regeneration introduces into it. At a

subsequent point of our enquiry, when discussing the relation of the church to the kingdom, it will appear still more clearly, that by its translation into the sphere of the internal and invisible the kingdom-idea has lost nothing of the supernaturalistic associations which belonged to it from its very origin. The difference between the two stages of its coming does not lie in that the one is brought about by forces already present in the human world, whereas the other has to be accomplished by the introduction of new miraculous forces from above. It is a difference merely in the mode of operation and revelation of the supernatural common to both stages. The same omnipotent power at work through the ages will also effect the consummation at the end. But it will assume a new form when the end has come, so as to work instantaneously, and will draw within the sphere of its operation the entire physical universe. It would not be in harmony with Jesus' view so to conceive of it, as if by the gradual extension of the divine power operating internally, by the growth of the church, by the everwidening influence of the truth, the kingdom which now is will become all-comprehensive and universal and so of itself pass over into the final kingdom. This would eliminate all true eschatology and obliterate the distinction between the two aspects of Jesus' teaching on the subject. The parables of the wheat and the tares and of the fish-net, while on the one hand they do imply, as we have seen, the higher unity of the entire movement, also imply on the other hand that its consummation does not spontaneously result from the preceding process, supernatural though this be. The harvest is conditioned by the ripeness of the grain, and yet the ripeness of the grain can never of itself set in operation the harvest. The harvest comes when the man puts forth the sickle, because the fruit is ripe. So when the immanent kingdom has run its course to maturity, God will intervene in the miracle of all miracles. It would also plainly be impossible for the final kingdom to come in any other way than this, For this final state of the kingdom presupposes great physical, cosmical changes, which no force working in the spiritual sphere can produce. It would be difficult to overestimate the vividness with which our Lord realized and the emphasis with which he describes the new and marvelous conditions under which the life of the blessed in the future kingdom will be lived. It is an order of things lying altogether above this earthly life, in which the righteous shall shine as the sun, in which all the prophets will be seen, in which the pure in heart shall enjoy the beatific vision of God, in which those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be completely filled. Surely to effect this there must take place a great crisis, a great catastrophe at the end which will be the very opposite of all evolution. Our Lord himself has marked its unique character by calling it the palingenesis, the regeneration, Matt. xix. 28.

Still further we must guard against confining the internal, spiritual kingdom to the sphere of the ethical. This is an error which has had considerable vogue in recent times, owing to the fact that certain systems of theology constructed from a one-sided ethical point of view have adopted the kingdom-idea as their organizing center. The kingdom has been defined as an ethical community realized by the interaction of men on the principle of love. This is erroneous in two respects. In the first place, according to our Lord the whole content of religion is to be subsumed under the kingdom. While it is true that the kingdom consists in righteousness, it is by no means coextensive with the same, but consists in many other things besides. Such blessings as life, forgiveness of sin, communion with God, belong to it just as much and have just as vital a connection with the kingdom-idea, as the cultivation of love, as will subsequently appear. And secondly, all that belongs to the kingdom, the ethical and religious alike, is represented in Jesus' kingdom-teaching, not as the product of human activity, but as the work of God. He nowhere says that men make the

kingdom. In our Lord's Prayer the words: "Thy will be done" explain the preceding words "Thy Kingdom come," but both are petitions, in uttering which we are taught to look to God that he may set up in us his reign even in that form which will be revealed through our actions.

End of Chapter V

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