

The Kingdom Now

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the spiritual nature of Jesus' Kingdom and warns against the dangers of misunderstanding His mission for material and political gain.

Scripture: Matthew 1:21, Matthew 21:9, Luke 19:10, John 6:14, John 18:36, Acts 1:8, Acts 9:5, Romans 8:29, Romans 11:36

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Spiritual Kingdom"

Description

Anton Bosch discusses the people's desire for material provision and political reform during Jesus' time, highlighting the danger of appealing to people's felt needs and imposing our agenda on God. He emphasizes that God's timing and intentions are sovereign, and any attempt to rush His plan is rebellion. Jesus' Kingdom is not physical but spiritual, and salvation is from sins, not political or material. Bosch urges the church to align with God's purposes and stop trying to manipulate God for selfish gain.

Transcript

Food and material blessings are some of the felt needs, as I discussed last week, and political empowerment is another. The people living in Israel in Jesus' time had two priorities. The first was for material provision and the second was for political reform and to be liberated from the Roman overlords. Economics and politics are very closely related and they both impact each other.

Jesus did meet people's needs and on several occasions fed large crowds miraculously. But in John's account of the feeding of the five thousand, John mentions men, who as a result of the feeding of the multitude, wanted to take Jesus by force to anoint Him as their king (John 6:14-15). This was a natural response to Jesus meeting their need and shows the danger of appealing to people's felt needs. Today, many argue that it is good and right for people to want to make Jesus king because He meets their felt needs. But let's examine this a little closer.

There were two problems with the people's desire to crown Jesus. Both remain problems today. The first is that it was not God's timing. The second was their intention: they did not want Jesus to be their King in order to come under His authority but, rather, that they may use Him as a source of free food or to gain political power. Jesus will one day be crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but God has determined a very specific time when that is to happen. We cannot impose our agenda on God. God is sovereign and has predetermined a method and a time when Jesus' kingship will become a physical reality. It is vain for people to think they can manipulate God into doing what they desire.

Some have suggested that the reason Judas betrayed Jesus was in an effort to force Jesus' hand to establish a material Kingdom. Any attempt to rush God's plan is rebellion against His sovereign rule. At the heart of the prosperity message is the notion that God is there for us to use when we need Him or need something from Him. This is diametrically opposed to the truth. He is not there for us, we are here for Him. Almighty God is not our servant, He is the King and we are His servants. "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).

Throughout the 3-year ministry of Jesus, his disciples and the multitudes who followed Him, expected Him to establish a material, political Kingdom. It is likely that a number of the Twelve followed Jesus because of this expectation. Several of them were of the party called the "Zealots". Simon is specifically named a Zealot (Luke 6:15). And in addition there is evidence that Simon Peter, John, James and Judas (Ischariot) were all Zealots. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, the Zealots were one of the political parties of the day. (The others were the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Essenes - the Zealots had broken away from the Pharisees.) The Zealots were on the extreme right of the political spectrum, and they were called Zealots because of their zeal for national Israel and their hatred of Roman domination.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus there is evidence that the twelve expected Him to establish a material Kingdom immediately: "they thought the Kingdom of God would appear immediately" (Luke 19:11). In response, Jesus tells the parable about a nobleman who went away to receive a Kingdom, thus indicating that he had to go away, receive His kingdom, and then return (Luke 19:12-27). The request by James and John, through their mother, for the second and third positions of political power in the Kingdom (Matthew 20:21) was also based on the anticipation of an immediate, literal Kingdom.

Jesus frequently tried to discourage the Twelve, and others, from thinking about the Kingdom as a literal and material Kingdom. Sometimes He did so by inference, teaching that the Kingdom was made up of the meek and that the greatest in the Kingdom were little children. But He also demonstrated unequivocally that he had not come to remove the Romans. This He did by paying taxes and teaching obedience to the Romans (Matthew 5:41), even allowing them to crucify Him. But Jesus also taught very specifically that the Kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to others (Matthew 21:43), thus removing all doubt about a revival of the state of Israel.

In response to questions by the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom would come Jesus replied: "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21). In other words, the Kingdom is not visible or material, but is spiritual and in the hearts of its citizens; and it is not immediate.

When Pilate questioned Jesus about His Kingdom, He very explicitly stated that His Kingdom was not physical: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). There cannot be a clearer statement that the Kingdom is not political or earthly. Those who teach a material Kingdom outside of the Millennium do so in direct contradiction of the Scriptures.

After the cross and the resurrection, the most important question on the minds of the disciples was still "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). In fact, this is the last question they asked Him before His ascension. Jesus did not seem to bother to answer the question but simply told them that they would receive power to be witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8).

So, in spite of Jesus' very clear teaching that the Kingdom was not now and was not material, the expectation of His followers did not change. It is against this background that He rode into Jerusalem four days before His crucifixion.

A huge crowd had assembled and they began to remove their outer garments and cut palm branches in order to lay them on the dusty street so Jesus could ride into Jerusalem in royal style. This was the equivalent of the modern custom of laying out a red carpet to welcome a dignitary. Everyone knew that this was the King and that they were welcoming Him as their King. The problem however was that they were looking for the wrong kind of king at the wrong time.

This was evident as they shouted the words of the messianic Psalm: "Hosanna to the Son of David! `Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9; Psalm 118:24-26).

The word "Hosanna" is a composite of two words meaning "save" and "now". They were literally saying "save (us) now". If you look at the reference in Psalm 118:24-26, you will notice that the Psalmist said: "Save now, I pray, O Lord." In the light of the political climate of the time, it becomes clear that they saw Jesus as the King who would save them from the Romans, and that they saw salvation as material and political. This is identical to Liberation Theology and Dominionism of today, that sees salvation in political and material terms.

Jesus had indeed come to save His people. His name - "Jesus" means "Jehovah is salvation" or "God saves". But when the angel announced to Joseph that His name would be Jesus, he was very specific that "you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Yes, Jesus had come to save His people (and us), but not from the Romans or poverty, but from their SINS. Salvation is spiritual and not political.

Because Jesus refused to be their political savior the crowd turned against Him. A few days later the same people who wanted to make Him King cried "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15). It is amazing how quickly people turned against Him when He did not do what they wanted.

Nothing has changed

Nothing has changed. God's plan for man is still the same and sinful man's agenda for God is still the same.

God's plan is to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to conform the saved into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). Everything else is subject to these two purposes of God. He will bless or withhold blessing in order to achieve these purposes in the lives of people. Our material and political situation is of little or no consequence in the light of God's higher purposes - saving us and perfecting us. He does not deviate from that.

God's plan for the world has been spelt out: At the predetermined time Jesus will come and setup his Millennial Kingdom. For the first time the Kingdom of God will be literal, material and political. He will rule the world from the throne of David in Jerusalem. Until then His kingdom will be spiritual and in the hearts of His people. We cannot bring this about through political action, and we cannot manipulate God to change His timing.

Sinful man has not changed. Man still wants to use God for his own selfish purposes. Man still thinks he can force, manipulate and blackmail God to do his will and to pander to his greed and lust. And just like the Zealots, man still thinks he can bring about a material Kingdom of God through political action.

It is time for the church to line up with God's purposes and to stop trying to force God in line with man.

"And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:5-6).

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