

The Proclamation of the Kingdom

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Gospel of the Kingdom is the good news of the royal reign of Jesus Christ, which is committed to the Church and to the heralds to take into all the nations, and is to be embodied in something that constitutes its very evidence and proof.

Scripture: Psalm 2:6, Matthew 24:14, Matthew 28:18, John 12:31, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 1:21, Philippians 2:9, Colossians 1:20, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 1:2

Topics: "Proclamation of the Kingdom", "Cosmic Conflict"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, which is fundamentally about the royal reign of Jesus Christ. He explains that this proclamation is not merely an announcement but a call to establish evidence of Christ's lordship in the world. The sermon highlights the cosmic conflict between the Kingdom of God and the usurper, Satan, and the necessity for Christians to embody the truth of the Gospel in their lives. Sparks challenges both believers and non-believers to recognize their allegiance to either Christ or the Devil, urging a response to the call of the Kingdom. Ultimately, he stresses the urgency of this mission as the fulfillment of God's plan awaits the testimony of His Church.

Transcript

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

Let us first analyse this verse, noticing its particular words.

"This Gospel [literally, 'good news'] of the Kingdom [literally, 'the royal reign'] shall be preached [this particular word means 'proclaimed', 'announced', 'heralded'] in the whole world [=the whole inhabited or habitable earth] for a testimony [=for a witness: Dr. Weymouth in his version translates that phrase - 'to set the evidence']".

Now with that analysis, let us build it all up into its full literal statement:

'This good news of the royal reign shall be heralded in the whole inhabited earth, to set the evidence before all the nations; and then shall the end come.'

That is a remarkable verse, for it comprehends nothing less than the whole mission, work, meaning and purpose of the person, incarnation, life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ, and it carries that through as the very meaning and business of His Church. It is a very comprehensive verse indeed.

But we must get behind this tremendous statement, try to get inside it. It is then to be noticed that what is called the Gospel, the good news - everything that Christianity has to say and to give - is defined in terms of a Kingdom, a sovereign rule, the outworking of a Kingship. Of course, we are so familiar with the language and with the idea that perhaps we have never really stopped to think what that means. Why is Christianity not spoken of as something else - 'this gospel of the communal state', 'this gospel of the social state', or some other designation? It is called 'the gospel of the sovereign rule, the royal reign'; in other words, the gospel of the Kingship of Jesus Christ. It is that, and nothing less and nothing other than that.

CHRIST'S KINGSHIP OF HEAVENLY ORIGIN

And that leads us to a further enquiry and investigation. Where did that idea originate and come from? Now it is very difficult for us to trace back the idea of kingship so far as man is concerned. We do not know who was the first person to hold the title of king. We can see the idea in its primitive form evolving, developing, until it reached the full status of monarchy; we will return to that in a moment. But what we do know from the Bible is that this did not begin with man at all. It began in Heaven with God. The idea of royal reign, sovereign rule, was with God, and was transmitted to His Son Jesus Christ before ever this world was created, and before there ever was such a thing as kingship on this earth, either in principle or in actuality. The Bible tells us that God appointed His Son Jesus Christ as the Heir of all things (Heb. 1:2), and that God speaks of His Son as His King. It comes out in one of the psalms, where God is speaking: "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6). That is a prophetic utterance concerning the Lord Jesus, as you well know. The idea of kingship originated with God and was centred in His Son Jesus Christ.

ANOTHER KING

The next thing that the Bible makes known to us is that someone was jealous of that. The highest created being among the angelic hosts found in his heart jealousy of God's Son and allowed that jealousy to take such a hold upon him that he projected a device and a scheme and a movement to supplant God's Son and to secure that rule in himself and for himself. That revolt against God's determination concerning His Son took place somewhere outside of this world, before the present order of creation was brought into being; but God proceeded according to plan and according to purpose, and through the instrumentality of His Son created this world to be the realm of His Son's dominion; and in it He placed man.

The next thing was that that being who had by his revolt, his rebellion, been cast out of Heaven, made his way forthwith to the realm of God's appointed and pre-destined King. The story is known how, for the time being, he gained his point through a subtle, deeply laid plan of deception - his appeal to man's soul-life. He gained his point by winning man over to his side; and thus he became, for the time being - as even Jesus recognised and acknowledged him to be - "the prince of this world" (John 12:31, etc.) although illegitimately so. There you have the root of the whole matter, the background of our passage of Scripture.

THE VICTORY OF GOD'S KING

Of course, God is not going to tolerate that for ever. God is not going to be spoiled of His intention, neither is His Son going to be deprived of His inheritance. The story of the incarnation finds its explanation there:

it was the coming of God's Son into this world in the flesh to take up this whole matter of God's intention, and of His own (the Son's) inheritance, and of man's place in that inheritance, and to fight it out to a final, glorious triumphant issue. And seeing that it was not something official, but a spiritual and moral matter, it went right to the depths of things - of the very nature of sin and wickedness, out of which it all came. It focused upon and dealt with all that evil, as personified in the Evil One himself. Jesus met it, He took up the battle of the eternal rule, the royal reign, and fought out all its implicates to a victorious issue. 'By His Cross He triumphed', and in His Cross He 'stripped off the principalities and the powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' (Col. 2:15). He plucked the sceptre from the hand of the usurper, and cast out, as He said, the prince of this world (John 12:31); and, rising triumphant from death and the grave, received at the hands of His Father the Kingdom, together with 'all authority in Heaven and in earth' (Matt. 28:18), 'the Name which is above every name' (Phil. 2:9), and the place 'far above all rule and authority, every name that is named' (Eph. 1:21). That is the great drama that the Bible contains and sets forth; and out of that issues what is called the Gospel, the good news - the good news of His royal reign in virtue of all that He has done.

THE NEED FOR HUMAN KINGSHIP

Now we come back to the human side, the history of kingship, rulership. It is quite clear that it commenced in a very simple way. First of all the principle was found in expression in a family. Trouble in the family has a very long and remote history. It seems that almost immediately the family existed there was trouble, and somebody in the family had to take authority. The first kings, although they were not called that, were heads over families. Thence their authority extended to the tribe, and from the tribe to the tribes, and from the tribes to the nation. And then, as far as they could, they tried to get kingship over a number of nations, and finally over all the nations.

But our point is this. This situation was brought about by reason of circumstances and man's need. A ruler or governor - a king in principle or in name - was a necessity, for somebody had to adjudicate in man's troubles and decide in matters of strife, whether in families or tribes or nations; somebody had to give the verdict of right or wrong. Because of the further circumstances of conflict in the world, antagonism setting people against people, tribe against tribe, nation against nation, somebody must take up the cause and lead out in warfare to victory. Because peace was not the normal state of things, but 'dispeace' - anything but peace - somebody must assume the responsibility of trying to provide man with peace, of trying to secure peace and establish peace.

Thus kingship has as its components these ideas of adjudicating, of judging, of determining the right and the wrong, of leading against that which threatens man's well-being, and the very integration of man, and of establishing peace. These are the constituents of kingship, as we find it in its development. The kingship exists because of the existent conditions, as something set over against them. This gives us the background and the principle of the matter.

KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In a far, far greater realm than the temporal and the earthly, the Lord Jesus, as God's King, has taken up those very issues. These are components of His Kingship. In this world everything has gone wrong; a state of anarchy and iniquity - of 'inequity', unfairness, wrong from man to man - prevails. It is what the Bible sums up in one word: unrighteousness. It affects all man's dealings with man, all human relationships and transactions. The whole system of human relationships just is not right; it is not straight,

it is not 'fair and square' - it is unrighteous. The whole question of unrighteousness is bound up with this matter of Kingship; and it is therefore very significant that, in a day when, in that marked-out nation of Israel, the Kingship, the sovereign rule, the royal rule of God was intended to be displayed, the worst state of unrighteousness existed.

But in the midst of it all - all this unrighteousness, yes, even of the kings themselves - a prophet rises up and shouts: "A king shall reign in righteousness"! (Isa. 22:1). A beam of light is thrown right forward to this One who was coming. We know that the Lord Jesus, in His life and death, took up this whole question of righteousness - in the first place as relating to the rights of God. His first aim, His first task, was to bring God His rights, His due, to put things straight with God where man is concerned. How much Gospel is contained in that! Paul's whole wonderful letter to the Romans is really gathered into that idea of God requiring righteousness, of man being unable to provide Him with it, and Jesus Christ stepping into the breach and satisfying God in this matter on man's behalf. And having done that Godward, he proceeds to do it amongst men, and where this royal reign of Jesus Christ is found in men's hearts you have justice and truth and equity, 'fairness and squareness' and rightness - all that is meant by righteousness. He 'reigns in righteousness.'

KING OF PEACE

Then, as to this matter of conflict. It goes far beyond the wars amongst men. Whence come all these wars? They emanate from that Evil One who has struck this universe through with conflict, contention, strife, hatred, malice. This great warfare in the universe is first of all spiritual before it becomes temporal, and it was from Satan that it came. We know quite well that it is here. We know that in our hearts; before Christ takes them as His throne, there is no peace, and there is no peace there apart from Him. We know all about contention and strife within ourselves; we know, too, that it is the most difficult thing to live with other people for long without finding some contention, some strife, some antagonism. In the realm where Christ is not Lord, it is there. Perhaps Christians, more than anyone else, sense the antagonisms that are abroad. Satan has concentrated his forces and attention especially upon Christians, to destroy the testimony of what Jesus has done; to spoil this royal rule by undercutting and undermining its meaning of oneness, fellowship, unity. Fellowship and unity is a real battle in any realm, but perhaps more among Christians than anywhere.

But there is a King to lead out to that battle. This royal rule means that there need not be this state of things, that there can be victory over human strife and contentions and divisions and antagonisms and malice and all this. He has gained the victory over Satan's terrible work of rending this universe asunder and making it one mighty realm of conflict. Christ, we are told, has "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). The idea of a King was, as far as possible, to keep and establish peace. No king has ever done that for very long, or within more than a limited realm, but Christ has entered that hostile kingdom, led forth into battle, and secured peace.

Here, too, while we know naturally, in our own hearts, the elements of strife and contention and warfare, in Christ we know the other side. We know that He has brought His reign of peace into our hearts. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1), and the peace of God passing all understanding garrisons our hearts (Phil. 4:7), but while there is so much more needed, and we have always to be on our guard and always to be standing into His victory in this matter, nevertheless there is the glorious fact that we do know something of a fellowship, a blessed and wonderful fellowship amongst ourselves as God's people, which is unique, which is not known after its kind anywhere else in all the

universe. The most precious and blessed thing that Christians have inherited through the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ in their hearts is their fellowship with one another. How much is bound up with that! How much we owe to one another in Christ, how necessary we are to one another, how impossible it is to get on without one another simply because God is against our getting on without one another. We find that to try and get on without one another simply brings the Lord into controversy with us.

Righteousness and peace - these are the elements of His reign. The enemy is overthrown, his captives and victims are released, peace is established; whilst the guardian within attends to the question of the establishment of righteousness. All this is our need, as it ever was man's need, and He has met it completely, fully. Now, that is all framed by this wonderful word 'Gospel' - good news. But there are multitudes - perhaps there is even one reading these lines - who do not know this wonderful work that Jesus Christ has done, who are not in the good and enjoyment of the peace with God, and peace in their own hearts, that we know. This all seems to them so strange, although perhaps they look on us wistfully and enviously. This fellowship among Christians is an impressive thing; it is not something feigned, put on or made up. We have known of unsaved people coming into Christian gatherings, and going away, if not actually saved, yet saying to one another, 'There is a wonderful atmosphere there. You feel that these people have got something that others have not got.' They speak of the impression made upon them by the wonderful fellowship of God's people, and that constitutes a testimony. It is, in fact THE testimony; it is the evidence.

SETTING THE EVIDENCE

So I follow on at once. This good news of the royal rule or reign, in these terms of spiritual values - inward life, blessed fellowship, strife overcome, righteousness established - this good news is committed to the Church and to the heralds to take into all the nations. But note that it is not just somebody going out and announcing it as a theory. We need to get hold of this quite strongly. There would be a very, very different situation in the world today, as the result of Christianity and evangelization, if this one point had been more firmly and clearly grasped. While it is the work of the herald to make the announcement, the passage we have been considering does not just stop there, with 'This good news of the royal reign shall be proclaimed in the whole inhabited earth'. It does not stop there, and that is just where the failure and weakness lies. It continues: 'shall be proclaimed... FOR A WITNESS'. Weymouth's translation, which I quoted earlier, gives us the very heart of the matter. He says: 'to set the evidence'. The herald is not just announcing some abstract theory, or even fact, objectively. He is there actually to set or provide the evidence that it is so.

Go back to your New Testament, and what do you have? You have the heralds going into the inhabited earth, right enough: but what are they doing? Are they just walking into some city and getting up onto a platform and making an announcement, and then going off? Do they make the announcement, and then go on to the next place and the next place and the next place, till they cover the whole inhabited earth with the announcement? Did they do that? They certainly did not. They had a better apprehension of their business, and of what the Lord meant, than that. The meaning that was in their hearts and minds of being in any place was this: 'Something has got to be established in this place which will be concrete evidence that Jesus is on the throne!' Whereas the announcement of some teaching, some objective truth, might never have bothered anybody, when they went in on that ground and with that idea and motive, all Hell rose up to say, 'We will quench that thing here if we can!'

So you have an apostle going into a city and making the proclamation, and Hell rising up and stirring up men to stone him, drag him out of the city, and leave him for dead. When they have withdrawn, he rises; and what does he say? 'I have made my announcement in this city - I will go to the next one'? He goes back again into the city, right back there. Why? He says, 'We have not got the concrete evidence here yet. We have not got that which is the embodiment of this testimony; until we have, we hold on. The Devil is not going to have his way about this matter.'

And so in every place they left behind something that was concrete. It was not just a word thrown out into the air. There was something there which was the embodiment of the truth that Jesus is Lord, and that Satan's kingdom is not universal. It has been broken into here and here, and in that which is left behind is the evidence. Read about those churches again, those vessels of the evidence; read about them. There they were in that place, persecuted, assailed, going through a terrible time, and yet - and yet - holding the ground: because they knew that if they did not, Satan would have it, and they were not allowing that. They were committed to this royal rule. And so the proclamation was more than a proclamation. It had in view a setting of the evidence, the establishment of a witness there. It is good to hear local companies of the Lord's people speaking of themselves like this: 'We are here to have a witness in this place.'

Now, THAT is the purpose of the heralds, THAT is the function of the churches. That is why we are here on this earth, as Christians - namely, that wherever we are, at home, in business, or anywhere, we may provide the evidence that Jesus is Lord. That will be the explanation of the suffering and the opposition, and all the efforts of the Devil to quench us and drive us out. We are there as evidence of something. As I said a little while back, if only this had been grasped and held and understood from the beginning, what a different situation there would be. The preaching of the Gospel seems to have so largely resolved itself into giving out the truths, the doctrines, of Christianity; but there has to be something far more than that. There is need that everyone who felt themselves so called should say: 'Yes, but there has to be concrete evidence that this is true. There must be proof positive about this matter, embodied in something here that declares that Jesus is Lord.'

Have you set the evidence? Are you standing for that? That is the challenge in the proclamation of the Gospel. It is good news, but that good news has to be embodied in something that constitutes its very evidence and proof.

A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANS

It is a challenge to us as Christians, it is also a blessed, helpful explanation of very much. It does explain why the Devil hates us so intensely. It explains all the pressure that is brought to bear upon us by him. It explains that stirring up, that terrible stirring up, which is always the prelude to some activity of the enemy, 'If only we can prevent that, spoil that, in some way upset that - !' So it is an explanation and a help to know that. And it is a challenge to us Christians that we are not going to be moved until the Lord moves us. Yes, the Lord may move us, the Lord may take us up, the Lord may lead us away, but by the grace of God the Devil never shall. We are not standing where we are just for our own interests, to get something that we want. We are standing in far more serious issues than that - in nothing less than this great cosmic conflict between the two princes, the two kings. We are there to set the evidence. It is a very great challenge to us.

A CHALLENGE TO THE UNSAVED

But it is also a challenge to anyone reading these lines who is not the Lord's. The challenge is this: There are only two kings in this universe. There is no neutral zone in this matter, there is no 'no man's land' here. There are only two rules, two kingdoms; Christ, God's eternally appointed King, and the Devil, the usurper from of old. We make the declaration, the announcement to you that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11). God has appointed Him Lord, and He is Lord by right of His own conquest of the Devil. It is for you to decide in which of the two kingdoms, realms and governments you are. That is the challenge which has to go into the whole inhabited earth, and you cannot get out of it.

If you do not believe that you are in the kingdom and rule of Satan, if you are not definitely committed and given to Jesus Christ, I can give you the most perfect and complete proof of it, if you will accept it. Try to get out of Satan's kingdom! Try to become a Christian! You will find that it does not happen and go through automatically. You will at once discover that spiritual forces rise up, and the thing becomes full of complications and difficulties. They rise up from within you - either revolt or antagonism at the idea, or questions and doubts about it, or fears concerning it. Immediately you move in this matter you find that other things begin to move - not that you have moved them, but that they begin to move of themselves.

The Old Testament illustration of this is Israel, God's people, in Egypt. They were in bondage, but things were fairly quiet until the idea of their going out of Egypt was mooted. But immediately this thought of an exodus from Egypt began to take shape, then things began to happen. It seemed that the whole kingdom was in a ferment, working itself up to the final furore to prevent this. Now, you go on quietly without thinking of coming to the Lord Jesus, and, while you may have questions and may not be having an altogether lovely time, nevertheless your life may be comparatively easy. But when you begin to contemplate coming to the Lord Jesus and entering into His reign and kingdom, then you discover, without your doing anything at all, that things begin to work, things are happening to stop that. They come up from within, and they come from without. No one is born into the Kingdom of Heaven without conflict, without a fight; and what a fight it is for some souls - a long-drawn-out fight until they are through. As I said, you can put this to the test. You make a gesture toward Jesus Christ, and you will find that you are in a bondage that you did not know of before. It is there, it is a fact. But, blessed be God, there is victory for you with the Lord Jesus Christ, to get you out of that bondage, right through into His victory.

But my immediate point is this. We are declaring that Jesus Christ is God's King, and that the final rule of this universe is vested in Him. By nature we are born into the other kingdom, the kingdom of the Evil One, to whom we belong. The Bible says that we are 'children of darkness' and 'children of wrath'. We are children of the Devil by birth, for Adam put us all into his power and into his hand. Jesus came to rescue us, to get us out, to bring us into His own reign. Where are you? That is the issue presented. It is announced, declared. It is a tremendous thing, for eternal destiny hangs upon your response to this.

And it is a solemn thing - oh, that men realised it - to have in any neighbourhood a testimony, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The whole of such an area is going to be judged one day because that company was there with this testimony. Yes, it will mean judgment. The indictment will be: 'But you knew it was there: Your house was visited, you were told, you were invited; Jesus Christ was right there in the midst of that people. You would not have it. You either ignored it or rebelled against it or repudiated it. But it was there in evidence. You cannot say that you did not know.' It is a tremendous thing for God to plant in a district a living testimony to the Lordship of His Son. All in that district are going to be judged by their attitude to that.

Do not misunderstand or misinterpret this. It is a spiritual matter. This is God's method, to put down in the nations something which is a set evidence to the great fact of the Lordship of His Son, and to judge everything by it. It sounds stern, but we must be faithful, and we must warn as well as entreat. In love for your soul we would say, Do not abide under the flag of the usurper. Here is God's King, and we proclaim to you this good news of His sovereign rule.

And when the evidence for it has been set, says this word in Matthew, "in the whole inhabited earth", God's time will come for winding up the dispensation. I will not go further into that, but there is very much bound up with it. The dispensation waits for that, and therefore there is an urgency about things, because we never know, in a day like this, when the testimony will have found its last declaration in this world. Whereas the kingdom of Satan is ousting the personal messengers, they cannot close down the air. This Gospel of the sovereignty, is getting through, for it is, in truth, sovereign.

May the Lord help us as His people to meet the challenge as to the real meaning and purpose of our being here on this earth. And if you do not belong to the Lord Jesus, if you are not in His Kingdom, may He help you to meet the other challenge - to forsake the false usurper's flag and dominion, and seek citizenship in the Kingdom of our Lord.

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