

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XXXVII

by Andy Woods

We began scrutinizing New Testament texts that "kingdom now" theologians employ in an attempt to argue that the kingdom is a present reality in order to show that none of these passages teach a present form of the kingdom. We have examined the typical texts from the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, the general epistles, and Revelation that are typically used by "kingdom now" theologians. At this point, we largely find ourselves in agreement with the following statement by Craven. Concerning a present, spiritual establishment of the kingdom, Craven notes, "There is no critically undisputed passage in the Scriptures which declares, or necessarily implies, even a *partial* establishment in New Testament times."¹ We then began to take a look at some other miscellaneous arguments used by "kingdom now" theologians. In the last two installments, we noted how "kingdom now" theologians often appeal to alleged New Testament silence regarding a future earthly reign of Christ. There, we exposed the logical and biblical fallacies associated with such inadequate argumentation. We now move on to examining yet another miscellaneous argument commonly emanating from the "kingdom now" camp.

JESUS' PRESENT INACTIVITY?

Typical of "kingdom now" theologians is the idea that if Christ is not ruling now in regal fashion from David's Throne in heaven over a present, spiritual form of the Davidic Kingdom, then this means that Jesus is inactive at the present time. In other words, a lack of a present enthronement of Christ translates into the conclusion that Jesus is presently doing nothing. Progressive Dispensationalist and "kingdom now" theologian David Anderson exhibits this very mindset when he says:

¹ E.R. Craven, "Excursus on the Basileia," in *Revelation of John* (New York: Scribner, 1874), 95.

But clearly Jesus did not set up a natural theocratic kingdom with Himself as the king ruling from Jerusalem on earth before His resurrection. So, what happened to the kingdom He promised? It was postponed, many NT interpreters suggest... But if the premillennial view just espoused is true, that leaves the question concerning the present ministry of Christ. What is He doing right now?...But classical or revised dispensationalists should also recognize the *already* eschatology of Hebrews. Christ is not passive on the throne. He is reigning. He has subjects. And because He is the forerunner, there are many present blessings which belong to the eschatological age which can be enjoyed now because the Davidic Covenant with some of its blessings has been inaugurated.²

Is the mindset valid that says if Jesus is not reigning now as king then He is presently doing nothing? Just because traditional Dispensationalists resist the idea that the present age should be characterized as the Davidic Kingdom, this does not mean they also believe that Jesus is somehow inactive or doing nothing at the present time. This mischaracterization represents a "straw man" argument since traditional Dispensationalists have long categorized the present, active ministry of Christ as His "Present Session" rather than His Davidic reign. While not corresponding to what the Old Testament predicts concerning the Davidic reign, traditional Dispensationalism has long recognized Christ's "Present Session" as an active session in which Christ, while at the right hand of the Father, is involved in numerous activities.³ As Waterhouse well states, "The Bible teaches that Christ is now at the right hand of God in glory (Acts 7:56; Col 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). He is not in the least inactive."⁴

Chafer explains the reasons for widespread ignorance concerning Christ's present, heavenly ministry:

² David Anderson, *The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews* (New York: Lang, 2001), 2, 296.

³ L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 5:273-79.

⁴ Steven Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone* (Amarillo, TX: Westcliff, 2007), 97.

The present ministry of Christ in heaven, known as His session, is far-reaching both in consequence and import. It, too, has not been treated even with a passing consideration by Covenant theologians, doubtless due to their inability – because of being confronted with their one covenant theory – to introduce features and ministries which indicate a new divine purpose in the Church and by so much tend to disrupt the unity of a supposed immutable purpose and covenant of God's. Since, as will be seen, certain vital ministries of Christ in heaven provide completely for the believer's security, the present session of Christ has been eschewed by Arminians in a manner equally unpardonable. This neglect accounts very well for the emphasis of their pulpit ministrations. The Christian public, because deprived of the knowledge of Christ's present ministry, are unaware of its vast realities, though they are able from childhood itself to relate the mere historical facts and activities of Christ during His three and one-half years of service on earth. That Christ is doing anything now is not recognized by Christians generally and for this part-truth kind of preaching is wholly responsible. It yet remains true, whether neglected by one or the other kind of theologian, that Christ is now engaged in ministry which determines the service and destiny of all those who have put their trust in Him.⁵

CHRIST'S PRESENT SESSION

Here is just a small sampling of some of the present activities in which Christ is now engaged. Just as Christ created all things (John 1:3), He currently sustains the very universe that He created (Col. 1:16-17). In His current position of glory (John 17:5), He has also been appointed by the Father as head over all things relative to His body the Church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). In this position, He functions as husband of His bride the Church (Eph. 5:22-33), and occupies the position as the Church's builder (Matt. 16:18). The Book of Acts, which documents both the birth and growth of the early Church, demonstrates His effectiveness as the Church's architect. "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41); "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47); "But many of those who had heard the message

⁵ Chafer, 5:273-74.

believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4); "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*" (Acts 5:14); "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). Acts abounds in both clear (Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31) and sometimes less clear (Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4, 31; 5:14, 42; 8:25, 40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6) progress reports evidencing Christ's vigorous present activity as the Church's builder.

Beyond this, Christ is the present bestower of spiritual gifts to all members of His body the Church. According to Ephesian 4:7-12, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN'...And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." These spiritual gifts, which are sovereignly bestowed by God (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4), are Spirit-empowered abilities for the express purpose of serving Christ primarily within the context of His local Church (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). In addition, Christ is active in His present position as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20) in continually interceding for the saints. The ministry of intercession that He began during His earthly ministry (John 17:9, 20), He now continues at the Father's right hand (Rom. 8:34). Thus, Hebrews 7:25 explains, "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Moreover, when the Christian sins (1 John 1:8), Christ as High Priest is also active in forgiving such sin as the believer confesses it to Him (1 John 1:9). Christ does so not for the purpose of restoring the believer's position or standing before God, which is

inalterable, but rather for the purpose of restoring the believer's fellowship with God. Chafer explains, "The effect of the Christian's sin upon himself is that he loses his fellowship with God, his joy, his peace, and his power. On the other hand, these experiences are restored in infinite grace on the sole ground that he confesses his sin (1 John 1:9)."⁶ It is in this sense that Christ also presently functions as our advocate (Heb. 9:24; 1 John 2:1) or defense attorney. Thanks to the righteousness provided by His shed blood as applied to us, He is active in pleading our righteous cause to the Father in the midst of Satan's perpetual accusations hurled against the saints (Rev. 12:10). In sum, Christ presently pursues an active session through His ongoing roles as the sustainer of the universe as well and the church's head, husband, bestower of spiritual gifts, and builder. His present activity is also evidenced in that He continually intercedes for and advocates on behalf of the believer.

CHRIST'S PRESENT SESSION IS NOT THE KINGDOM

Despite the many activities associated with Christ's current ministry in His present session, these should not be confused with His Davidic rule and future kingdom. As noted in prior installments, the activity of God in and through the Church bears little resemblance to the conditions that the Scripture anticipates regarding His future terrestrial rule.⁷ Even the key event that began the Church Age, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), fails to precisely harmonize with predictions regarding the Davidic Covenant. Charles Ryrie asks, "If Christ inaugurated His Davidic reign at His ascension, does it not seem

⁶ Ibid., 5:277.

⁷ See parts 9 and 10 of this series.

incongruous that His first act as reigning Davidic king was the sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), something not included in the promises of the Davidic Covenant?"⁸

(To Be Continued...)

⁸ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 169.