



# THE KINGDOM

## THE KINGDOM AFTER THE CROSS

**Sunday 12 April 2021**

*EXTENDED SERMON TRANSCRIPT*

We have been journeying through the big story of scripture for several months now, trying to get our bearings on this thing called 'the gospel of the Kingdom' that Jesus continually taught and demonstrated. In simple terms, the 'Kingdom' is wherever the will and way of God is done in partnership with people for the blessing of all creation. Our job is to partner with God in all things that express His will and way. We've taken big leaps through creation, sin, Abraham, the Law, Israel's kings, and the prophetic hope of a Messiah. Then we came last week to Easter, as we remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - whom Christians believe to be the fulfilment of the whole Old Testament.

So, on the other side of the resurrection, I want us to consider what has now permanently changed about the kingdom, and what has not - and what that means for us? Let's try and think this through today with the help of the 4 major covenants in the Bible. Remember, a 'covenant' is an agreement about how people will relate and, in the Bible, there are 4 primary covenants: the Adamic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant (some might also add the Noahic and Davidic covenants to this list).

### **What has not changed?**

**(1) The Adamic covenant remains** - this is the original commission of God on humanity around their role of stewarding life on God's behalf. Genesis 1:28 says, "*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*"

This is still our mandate: subdue and rule - which better translated means 'harness and make

fruitful'. Our work life matters, our consumption matters, our care of creation matters. Somehow Christianity gave away one of its most compelling attributes - championing the cause of creation!

**(2) The Abrahamic covenant** - God's promise of nation, land and blessing, and this is ratified in Genesis 15. This was a covenant, a specific promise, an oath to a specific person where God makes the oath on behalf of Himself and Abraham (remember Abraham was asleep). This covenant remains foundational, on both sides of the cross. Read about the promise and the oath in Hebrews 6:13-20 - this is an anchor for the soul.

But 2 ongoing implications of this are:

- **The way of being right with God is the same** - that is, faith and belief: "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*" (Genesis 15:6)
- **The people of God are not defined by ethnicity but faith:**

*"Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."* (Galatians 3:7-8)

*"For if the inheritance depends on the Law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise."* (Galatians 3:18)

*"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:28-29)

The Old Testament is full of ugly tribalism, fuelled in part because Israel was to be a distinct prototype of the people of God - but God's covenant with Abraham predates Israel's tribes and reminds us that God is indeed not tribal; He is working for the blessing of all nations through His people. That's not changed. God loves the distinction of nations and cultures whilst also forming a unified kingdom where we are one under Christ who defines us - above our particular race or nationality.

### **So what has changed?**

Ok so the covenant with Adam and Abraham stands, but the third covenant with Moses looks very different. Remember this covenant was established during that one-year boot camp at Mount Sinai I spoke of a few weeks back - you read this in Exodus 19-24. And if you read carefully, you will note it is specifically based on obedience to God.

We read in Exodus 19:5-6:

*"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

But what's the problem we have been witnessing for months? They could not perfectly obey - and God knows this - so a function of the Law (not just the 10 Commandments) is to accommodate our inability. But Paul, in Galatians 3, says it was a temporary measure - the Law was a guardian or custodian or tutor until Christ. The Law shows a covenant-people what God requires of them and what to do when they fail. The Law was for our benefit: it was designed to allow us to do something with our sin and guilt (via a priesthood and a sacrificial system); but it was a band-aid. It was never designed to permanently deal with sin; it could never impart life. It could only show you how dead you were, how far short you fall, and how to atone for your failure. It's the Traffic Cop that is not going to encourage you for driving well, instead they'll just give you a ticket to penalise you the moment you break the rules.

It was clear right through the Old Testament that Israel is hopelessly incapable of keeping this Mosaic covenant, and this is where the revolution would have to happen. A new, permanent covenant is needed that will replace the old. Now, this is not just a New Testament idea - prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel living around the time of exile saw this day coming. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is a key text:

*"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my Law in their minds and write it on their hearts. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Jeremiah is already looking ahead to a new covenant with God's people. Imagine how big of a deal this would have been as the nation is being invaded and the temple destroyed - the revolution is coming. Now let's break down 3 key aspects of the New Covenant:

**(1) God's will and way will be revealed in such a way that it becomes internal and delight rather than a duty:** *"I will put my Law in their minds and write it on their hearts."* (Jeremiah 31:33) The Law is God's will and way. Where is the Law at this point? On tablets, on scrolls, locked up, guarded by priests and teachers. But in this new covenant a knowledge of

God's will and way will not be outside us, on tablets or scrolls - it's going to be inside, it's going deep inside us. People will know the will and way of God, 'mind and heart', not simply knowing 'right' - that's often not the problem. The problem is desire - the battle is of desires that come from the heart vs. new desire not grounded in fear or guilt but in delight. The Law could never do it. It could tell you what to do and then make you feel condemned for not doing it. In this new covenant, God is going to remove the burden of failure. And to live by it is not so much a duty, but delight. Where, because of God's love and faithfulness to His promise, it's a delight to resist sin and obey; but also to no longer default to guilt and shame and condemnation when you fail. So, God's will and way will be revealed in such a way that it becomes internal and delight rather than a duty.

**(2) God and His people will have a new kind of relationship:** In this new covenant they will not only know what God wants, they will know God personally from the greatest to least: "*they will be my people and I will be their God*" (Jeremiah 32:38). Jeremiah was living in a time of deep personal and national alienation from God, and racing toward exile as the Babylonians press in. He is aching for a time when people would truly return to God, not simply in geography but in intimacy. The fundamental problem of humanity is that we do not know the father. But that will change in the new covenant. *How is this going to happen?* Spoiler alert for future weeks but Ezekiel, Jeremiah's contemporary, provides a clue: "*And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart*" (Ezekiel 36:26). God is going to do heart surgery and God is going to send the Holy Spirit. But that's for next time...

And lastly:

**(3) Forgiveness of Sin will be an everlasting reality:** "*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*" (Jeremiah 31:34). This new covenant will usher in a time where all the unending cycle of sin and rebellion will be completely and permanently forgiven for the person who has become a child of the covenant. Which, as a result, should mean that fear, guilt, shame and condemnation no longer dominate or drive how one thinks or behaves. It's like Jeremiah is prophesying the end of the whole religious enterprise (of the temple and animal sacrifice) which was based on dealing with sin (read Romans 8:1-2).

### **How will that last one happen?**

Jeremiah could hope for it, but not conceive the manner of its fulfilment. However, Jeremiah 31 is repeated word for word in Hebrews 8. Why? Because on the other side of the cross, Jeremiah's vision of lasting forgiveness is displayed in the risen Christ. Forgiveness of sin becomes an everlasting reality through Jesus who the writer of Hebrews basically spends 10 chapters outlining why Jesus is supreme in every respect: He is the

perfect priest who ultimately brings the perfect sacrifice, the perfect atonement once, for all. (This week, read Hebrews chapters 6-10 to gain a fuller picture of this line of reasoning). Hebrews chapter 8 concludes by saying that if God calls this a new covenant, then *"by calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear"* (Hebrews 8:13).

So, if the Mosaic Covenant is obsolete, outdated and soon to disappear, what will change is the place of the Law, the need of animal sacrifice, the need of the temple, the need of the priesthood, what it means to be the people of God... This is a revolutionary moment because Jesus is the risen King and Priest over His kingdom!

When you realise this, you can see why Paul, in places like Galatians 5, was so adamant that to go back to the Mosaic Law once you have received Jesus was to not only return to something becoming obsolete, but to put yourself back under condemnation, back under yoke of slavery, and separation from God.

So, we've seen that on this side of the resurrection we remain children under the mandate of creation to steward life, we are children under the unfailing promise of God, sons and daughters under God's promise again to partner with Him for the blessing of all creation - but we are not under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Covenant and its rules. Instead, we enter into a New Covenant.

Even Jeremiah could see that with the New Covenant, the kingdom will look like:

- An unforced desire to know and live in God's will and way;
- The delight of a deep abiding relationship with God;
- Freedom from guilt and shame knowing God's grace and forgiveness.

That's still the vision of the kingdom is it not? That still is our privilege to have and our responsibility to steward. Who wouldn't want that!?! It begins with placing your will and way into the hands of Jesus, because it is Jesus who makes it reality.

- How is the will and way of God now perfectly revealed? **Jesus**
- How do we see the pure delight of abiding and knowing the Father? **Jesus**
- How do we find everlasting forgiveness and peace with God? **Jesus**
- How do we also experience what it means to delight and abide in God, not filled with fear but security as beloved sons and daughters and to know his will and power to obey? **The Spirit of Jesus** - and that is where we are heading next time...

## **REFLECT:**

In this sermon, we reviewed the 4 major covenants – Adamic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Covenant. We explored how the first two remain and the fourth has superseded the third. And yet, often people forget about the first two, don't appreciate or experience the fourth and default to third... **Discuss?**

Scott said the kingdom invitation is to:

1. An unforced desire to know and live in God's will and way.
2. The delight of a deep abiding relationship with God
3. Freedom from guilt and shame knowing God's grace and forgiveness.

**Where are you at with each of these?**

## **READ:**

Try reading the book of Hebrews over the next fortnight. It gives a wonderful summary of why Jesus is the answer to all that we have discovered so far in our 'Kingdom' series.