

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 47 – EVIL IN THE NEW CREATION]

Last time we looked at how Jesus' resurrection was more than His being resurrected to immortality. It also heralded the arrival of the new creation and the kingdom of God being established on earth.

- ◆ We also started to address the question as to why this period between Jesus' resurrection and His second return is also the prophesied millennium.
- ◆ As we have seen, the course of humanity has been set on a whole trajectory as a result of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.
- ◆ It is the age of the New Creation. There is no going back to the old, decaying structure of the fallen creation.
- ◆ Viewed purely from an earthly perspective of time and space it may appear as though the kingdom has not yet arrived, but viewed spiritually, it came into being at Jesus' victory over sin and death.
- ◆ At this present time, this knowledge can only be discerned spiritually through faith by the people of the new creation.
- ◆ But at His second coming, Jesus and His saving work will be unveiled (revelation) for all to see. This is when the visible and the invisible merge as one in the new heavens and the new earth.
- ◆ Until that time, the kingdom remains veiled behind chronos time.
- ◆ But make no mistake, there is no going back to the old decaying structures of this present evil world.

The second point that needs to be made about the kingdom of God is that it is a kingdom that grows over time.

- ◆ When we look around our troubled world today, it's obvious to any rational person that sin, evil and death still exist.
- ◆ We will look at the question of this evil is allowed to continue shortly, but for now we need to understand the kingdom of God is designed to expand over time.
- ◆ ***Luke 13:18-21 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."***
- ◆ We see Jesus comparing the kingdom of God to the growth of a tree. We don't plant a seed and gather the fruit the next day.
- ◆ The kingdom of God began with Jesus' resurrection, then expanded to 3000 at Pentecost, and has since spread around the world.
- ◆ But it has not as yet reached its fullness, and won't until Jesus' second coming.
- ◆ ***V.20 Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."***
- ◆ Again we see the element of time introduced into the process. Yeast has to be mixed with the dough and then given time to rise before it is baked.
- ◆ This example also reinforces our first point about learning to view events from a spiritual perspective.
- ◆ In the same way we cannot see the chemical process of the yeast at work in the dough, we don't always see God's hand in how the kingdom of God is expanding behind the scenes of world events.
- ◆ So we live in a period that theologians call, "between the times," a reference to the beginning of the new creation at Jesus' resurrection and when the kingdom of God reaches its fullness at Christ's return.
- ◆ Although this is frustrating to those of us wishing the fullness of the kingdom now, we have to be patient and recognize God has designed it this way for a purpose - so the greatest number of people can be saved.

A third principle addresses the question of evil.

- ◆ Even though the kingdom of God has arrived on earth, it's obvious to any rational person that sin, evil and death still exist.
- ◆ From our earlier discussion on evil, we know that right from the beginning, the devil has been allowed to exert his evil influence on mankind.
- ◆ He was allowed into the Garden of Eden at the original creation. We read in the book of Job how Satan was allowed to test the patriarch's faith. He tested Jesus in the desert and now we see him still at work in the new creation.
- ◆ But now a new contradiction is introduced because we are told Jesus defeated the devil at the cross.

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- ◆ So how is it possible that on the one hand the New Testament tells us the devil was comprehensibly defeated at the cross by Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 2:15, Revelation 17:14), then on the other it tells us he still goes about like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8) exerting his powerful influence over humanity?
- ◆ Scripture reveals this evil influence will continue until his final and complete defeat at Christ's second coming when he is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

How does one resolve this seeming contradiction?

- ◆ The answer as to why evil exists has to be viewed in the larger context of God's purpose of creating mankind in His image.
- ◆ If Jesus was in all points tempted as we are (Hebrews 4:15), and we are called to follow His example (Philippians 2:5-8), and God's goal for us is to be "overcomers" (Revelation 3:12) and to be His holy people (Leviticus 26:12), then why do we Christians feel we will not be expected to walk the same path Jesus walked?
- ◆ **Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.**
- ◆ First thing we notice is God's ultimate plan for mankind is to conform us to the image of His Son.
- ◆ We will go into more detail about this aspect when we get to the subject of the church.
- ◆ But what Paul is referring to here is a process whereby humans will be molded and shaped into the image of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ And he follows this statement by calling those who willingly submit to this process as brothers and sisters.
- ◆ Sometimes I think we Christians underestimate what a privilege and honor it is to be given this opportunity to become sons and daughters of the living God in this age (Hebrews 2).
- ◆ The point is we do not become like Jesus Christ without going through a process that has been designed by God to reach that objective.
- ◆ Key to that process as we have learned is Jesus Christ. All that is needed for salvation has been provided for us, but Christians in this age are also asked to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- ◆ Jesus Christ has already walked that path we are asked to walk.
- ◆ **Hebrews 4:14-15 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**
- ◆ It goes back to this subject of spiritual maturity we talked about earlier.
- ◆ In the same way we Christians find ourselves still battling the pulls of the flesh in this present age, and death remains a part of our existence, the devil too retains a role in God's purpose of developing Christ-like brothers and sisters.
- ◆ This principle is explained in Jesus' parable of the weeds in Matthew 13.
- ◆ **Matthew 13:36-39 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.**
- ◆ Again we see the two overlapping dimensions, one, the advancing kingdom of God with "the people of the kingdom" ruled by Jesus Christ, and the corrupt decaying kingdom ruled by the devil.
- ◆ However, when asked by his servants if they should uproot the evil weeds, the master told them to leave them alone.
- ◆ **Matthew 13:29-30 "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."**
- ◆ As Jesus is the one telling the parable, there had to be a good reason for His refusing this legitimate agricultural request.
- ◆ One of those reasons is the devil, although defeated, still has a role to play in God preparing a holy people for His name.

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- ◆ In order to be an overcomer and to grow into the fullness of Christ there has to be things to overcome so we can develop Christian maturity.
- ◆ This is why we find ourselves in a world that still includes sin, the flesh, death and the devil.
- ◆ So it is within this environment of the competing kingdoms that a Christian is asked to be an overcomer (1 John 2:13-14, 1 John 5:4-5) and to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- ◆ Notice the qualities the Thessalonians were developing as a result of the persecutions and suffering they are experiencing.
- ◆ ***2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;***
- ◆ The difficulties of life in this old corrupt world are there to serve God's purpose of developing a holy people who reflect the righteousness of their elder brother, Jesus Christ.

But don't think for a moment that God is not in charge of the process.

- ◆ As we learned from the example of Job, there are restrictions on how far Satan can go.
- ◆ God, not Satan, is the all-powerful one, and although the devil has been given a certain amount of latitude to perform his evil work, God is powerful enough to turn what the devil means for evil into good.
- ◆ We see this ability demonstrated in powerful ways in the story of Joseph, the case of Job, and of course, in the crucifixion of Jesus.
- ◆ Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, not knowing that in the future, he would be God's instrument in not only saving them, but the people of Egypt as well.
- ◆ Joseph's comment in forgiving his brothers shows the power of God to make good come out of evil.
- ◆ ***Genesis 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.***
- ◆ The same can be said in Job's case. The devil's intention of destroying Job's faith only made it stronger.
- ◆ ***Job 42:5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."***
- ◆ Job's trial ended with him having a stronger faith and a closer spiritual relationship with God than he had prior to his trial.
- ◆ This is a powerful lesson for all Christians to remember when we are facing our own personal trials.
- ◆ We need to remember there are times when God is more concerned with our spiritual development than with our physical well-being.
- ◆ We have a heavenly father who knows us intimately and knows what is best for us spiritually in order to mold and shape us into His image (Isaiah 64:8).
- ◆ And like Job we need to learn to trust Him with this process.
- ◆ There is a similar example to Job's story in the New Testament where a "messenger from Satan" is used to prevent the apostle Paul from becoming conceited.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 12:6-10 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.***
- ◆ Apparently this messenger was allowed to harass Paul so he would keep a healthy perspective on the task at hand, preaching the gospel to the Gentiles rather than boasting about his unique spiritual revelations.
- ◆ ***V.8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.***
- ◆ And, like Jesus, Paul's prayer for relief was not granted, ultimately because there was a higher spiritual purpose at work.
- ◆ But notice another important principle regarding sin and evil in our spiritual development.
- ◆ ***V.9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.***

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- ◆ Our failure to measure up under our own human strength, which is inevitable, forces us back to the One whose power we should be relying on in the first place.
- ◆ That is why Paul says, **v.10 *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***
- ◆ And the most powerful example of God overcoming evil with good is in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- ◆ The evil intent of the powerful physical and spiritual forces that schemed to destroy the Son of God resulted in the salvation of the world.
- ◆ This principle is still in effect today as we witness God preparing a holy people for Himself by turning the temptations of the flesh and the evil intent of the devil into godly righteousness.
- ◆ As prophesied right from the beginning in the book of Genesis, Satan sustained a fatal blow when Jesus rose from the dead (Genesis 3:15).
- ◆ His fate is sealed as we will soon see, but until that time he is allowed to perform his evil work as part of God's plan to prepare a holy people molded in His image.