

April 10th, 2022

# The Progress of the Kingdom in the Gospels

1 Corinthians 15:24-27a

## The most basic questions

In approaching any text in Scripture, in order to understand what is being taught, we must ask those fundamental questions: *who, what, where, when, why, how?* That's precisely what we've been doing here in **1 Corinthians 15:24-25** as Paul talks kingdom. *Who* is the King of this Kingdom? Jesus Christ. *What* is the nature of Christ's kingdom? "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (**Isaiah 9:7**). *Where* is this kingdom located? "He [has] dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!" (**Psalms 72:8**). *When* was Christ made King? At His resurrection and ascension. It was then that a new era in world history began (**Matthew 28:18**<sup>1</sup>). *Why* was Christ made King? That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him (**Daniel 7:13-14**). That's essentially where we have been in our last three messages.

## Gradualism vs Immediatism

This morning, I want to ask the question, *how* does Christ advance His kingdom in this world? Our passage says in **v.25** "He must reign *until* he has put all his enemies under his feet." How does Christ defeat His enemies in this age? Gradually or all at once? *How* does He move His kingdom forward? Gradually throughout this age, or is Christ waiting until the end to suddenly bring it in all at once? I imagine that most if not all of us would answer the latter. Many of us have been taught that the world is growing worse and worse, and only when Christ comes back when He will immediately and suddenly usher in His Kingdom all at once. So does Christ advance His Kingdom gradually

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<sup>1</sup> cf Daniel 7:13-14 which is a picture of Christ's ascension (Acts 1:9) not His second coming.

throughout history or all at once at the end?<sup>2</sup> This morning we turn to the gospels to see what the NT authors say about how Jesus' kingdom advances in this age.

### *The Big Idea...*

The gospels tell a story of Jesus' Kingdom progressively increasing in history such that the mustard seed becomes a tree, and the whole lump is leavened

★ Our Doctrine

★ Our Duty

★ Our Delight

## I. Our Doctrine

### The Kingdom in Matthew at 30,000 feet

Please turn with me Matthew 1. Now Matthew primarily had the Jews in mind as his audience when he wrote this book. It has a very Jewish flavor to it, and the emphasis of his gospel is that Jesus as King.<sup>3</sup> I counted 62 passages

<sup>2</sup> Well there is a sense in which both are true. There are in fact three stages of progress in many of God's works. For instance Scripture says **1) we have been saved** [past tense] at the moment of justification (**2 Timothy 1:9**); **2) we are being saved** [present tense] more and more from sin and enabled to live more and more to righteousness (**1 Corinthians 15:2**); and **3) we will be saved** finally from the wrath of God on the day of Christ Jesus (**Romans 5:9-10**). Christ's Kingdom takes this same three stage approach: First, Christ was given the Kingdom **legally** on the day of His ascension (**Acts 2:29-26**). Secondly, Christ is **progressively** advancing His Kingdom in this age (**Isaiah 9:7**). Thirdly, Christ will finally usher in His full Kingdom at His second coming when history is concluded (**Revelation 20:10-15**). See Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion* 3rd Edition, (Chesnee, SC.: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2021), pg. 2; David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion*, (Horn Lake, MS.: Dominion Press, 2007), pg. 24

<sup>3</sup> There are different emphases that the gospel writers make in their writings. I've heard it put like this: Matthew presents Jesus as the King; Mark presents Jesus as the Servant come to seek and save the lost; Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man; and John presents Jesus as the Son of God.

that speak to Jesus as King, or refer to His Kingdom. Let's consider but a small sampling. Now we are going to go over this rapid fire. The point here is be able to see the emphasis of Jesus's Kingdom from 30,000 ft.

**Matthew 1:1** "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of *David*, the son of *Abraham*." Why are Abraham and David mentioned as Jesus' predecessors? God told Abraham that *kings* would come from him (**Gen. 17:16**). And to David He promised that His Greater Son "...shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his *kingdom* forever" (**2 Sam. 7:13**).

This was not only the expectation of the Jewish people, but of the Gentile wise men. Look at **Matthew 2:2** they ask "Where is he who has been born *king* of the Jews?" That's why King Herod tried to kill Jesus, because he didn't want his own kingdom threatened.

Next turn to **Matthew 3**. This was the first thing that John the Baptist started preaching. Look at **v.1-2** "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>"Repent, for the *kingdom* of heaven is at hand."

Look at **Matthew 4:17**. This was what Jesus preached at the beginning of His is ministry. "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the *kingdom* of heaven is at hand."<sup>4</sup> Consequently this was what Jesus told His disciples to preach when He first sent them out "And proclaim as you go, saying, "The *kingdom* of heaven is at hand"" (**Matthew 10:7**)

Nine times in His Sermon on the Mount, in **chapters 5-7**, Jesus teaches on the present reality of His Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Look at **6:10**. He taught us that His Kingdom

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<sup>4</sup> See Gentry pg. 220

<sup>5</sup> 5:3; 5:10; 5:19 (x2); 5:20; 5:35; 6:10; 6:33; 7:21

is the very thing we ought to pray increases in this age.<sup>6</sup> “Your *kingdom* come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>7</sup>

Next turn to **12:28**. Jesus says that His casting out demons was proof His kingdom had come “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then *the kingdom of God* has come upon you.”<sup>8</sup>

Next turn to **chapter 21**. As you know, next week is Resurrection Sunday, which means today is Palm Sunday, the day Jesus triumphantly rode into Jerusalem. That is this passage.

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will

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<sup>6</sup> See Herman Witsius who answers the question ‘why was Christ’s Kingdom ascribed to the Father?’ in *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord’s Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, Reprint 2010), pg. 219

<sup>7</sup> Look at **9:35** “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom* and healing every disease and every affliction.” Gospel is connected to Kingdom here. It is good news (that’s what *gospel* means) that Jesus has come as King to defeat all His and our enemies.

SCQ. 26. How does Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

<sup>8</sup> Three other critical passages that deal with the Kingdom that are worth mentioning here, which I hope to expand in a future message. In **Matthew 16:19**. Jesus here calls the preaching of the gospel the keys of the kingdom. He tells Peter “I will give you the keys of *the kingdom of heaven*, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. In **Matthew 16:28**. Jesus calls to His judgment over Jerusalem in 70 a.d. as the coming of His Kingdom. “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in *his kingdom*.” Likewise in **Matthew 21:43** Jesus pronounces judgment against the Jews because they rejected Him as King. “Therefore I tell you, *the kingdom of God* will be taken away from you and given to a people (ἔθνος ethnos) producing its fruits.” The nation that Jesus was to give the kingdom of God to is the global Church. The church is the holy nation (1 Peter 2:9-10) whom the kingdom of God transferred to when Christ took it from the Jewish nation at 70 A.D.

send them at once.”<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup>“Say to the daughter of Zion,  
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

The prophecy that Matthew is quoting from is **Zechariah 9**. Please turn there quickly. Just go to your left two books. **v.9** is the verse indicating Christ would enter Jerusalem on a donkey. Look what will happen in His Kingdom in **v.10-11** “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>11</sup>As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” Same gospel triumph that we saw last week. Palm Sunday has massive eschatological significance.

Next turn back to **Matthew 27:11**. Here he stands before Pontus Pilate, as He is about to be crucified. What does Pilate ask Him? “Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you *the King* of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” In other words Jesus says “Yes, I am King, you have spoken the truth.”

Finally turn to the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18**. On what basis does Jesus send His apostles out in the world to make disciples of all nations? **v.18** “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”” As one author says here: “[Jesus’ words] indicates something new occurs at his resurrection. He is *now* given “all authority.” The spoils of victory are His—victory over sin, death, and the devil belong to Him. His new found authority entails universal dominion: it encompasses “heaven and

earth.”<sup>9</sup> As we heard in our benediction this morning, **Revelation 1:5** “[He is] the ruler of kings on earth.” That’s Matthew at 30,000 feet. Matthew believed that when Jesus came into the world as God incarnate a whole new epoch began. The fullness of time had arrived.

### **Our doctrine: the gradual spread of Christ’s kingdom**

Here’s the question: does Matthew give us any clue as to *how* this kingdom advances *in history*? And so we arrive at **our doctrine**: *The gospels tell a story of Jesus’ Kingdom progressively increasing in history such that the mustard seed becomes a tree, and the whole lump is leavened.* To prove this, let’s look at the kingdom parables.

### **Proof #1: The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed**

Please turn with me to **Matthew 13:31**. This is the parable of the mustard seed.

“He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. <sup>32</sup> It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

First let’s deal with this phrase “*The kingdom of heaven.*” This doesn’t refer to the eternal state. How do we know? Because the other 6 parables in this chapter clearly are speaking about *this age*. The parable of the sower in **v.1-9** refers to how the gospel is received in this age. Some believe, some do not. Look at **v.11**, Jesus tells His disciples “To you it has been given to know the secrets of *the*

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<sup>9</sup> Gentry, pg. 225. R.T. France says this “Here at the end of the gospel, then, we find the culmination of the theme of kingship which was introduced by the Davidic royal genealogy (1:1-17), developed in the magi’s search for the ‘king of the Jews’ and the political threat to Herod in ch. 2, adumbrated in the developing language of Messiahship, and dramatically enacted in Jesus’s royal ride to Jerusalem (21:1-11); since then Jesus’ alleged claim to kingship has been a matter of accusation and mockery (27:11, 29, 37, 42), but now the true nature of that kingship is revealed. It stands far above local politics and extends far beyond the people of Israel.” *Ibid*

*kingdom of heaven.*” In other words, “you can know how this kingdom—the kingdom of heaven—is at work *now*.” Likewise in **v.24-30**, Jesus says that *the kingdom of heaven* is like the parable of the wheat and the tares. The wheat will be saved in the end, but not the tares. This is referring to this age. So the kingdom of heaven does not mean the eternal state. Rather this phrase means “the present, spiritual, developmental nature of the kingdom.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus says that His present kingdom began as grain of mustard—the smallest seed that farmers of His time planted in their fields. When Christ came into the world, His Kingdom was the smallest of kingdoms in the world. He was born in a manger, in an obscure town, to nobody parents. He was Jew, which were the most hated people in the world. He couldn’t have been more obscure. But what happens to this smallest of all seeds? Halfway through **v.32** “...but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” We shouldn’t *merely* speculate what this means. We should ask, are there other places in the Bible that uses this *same* imagery? Yes. Please turn with me to **Daniel 4**. King Nebuchadnezzar had a vision that he needed Daniel to interpret. Starting in **v.10**

“The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. <sup>11</sup> The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. <sup>12</sup> Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.”

How does Daniel interpret? He tells Nebuchadnezzar ‘...you’re the tree—the kingdom of Babylon—the head nation on the earth—is the tree that provides food and shelter for every other nation on earth.’ This God-given vision revealed the greatness of the Babylonian empire. The prophet Ezekiel says *the exact same*

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<sup>10</sup> Gentry, pg. 243

*thing* about Assyria. In **Ezekiel 31:3-6**, the prophet reflects back on the greatness of Assyria when it ruled the ancient world. What did he say Assyria was like? **Ezekiel 31:5** “It towered high above all the trees of the field ...[v.6] all the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs...and under its shadow lived all great nations.” So Babylon and Assyria are compared to towering trees that provided for all other nations. Are there any other OT passages that do the same? Yes. Turn to **Ezekiel 17**. The Lord promises to make one more Kingdom like a tree that all the nations are blessed through. Starting in v.22

“Thus says the Lord God: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. [*Now who do you suppose this tender twig planted on the mountain represents?*] <sup>23</sup> On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird [*people from every tribe, tongue and nation*]; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. <sup>24</sup> And all the trees of the field [*the nations of the world*] shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”<sup>11</sup>

So let's turn back to **Matthew 13**. Do you see? Jesus is drawing on OT imagery! In this parable (v.31-32), the mustard seed (Christ) is planted in the field (the world). As Christ's Kingdom grows, it will eventually tower above all the other plants (the nations), and all the birds of the air (the peoples of the world) will find all their peace and provision in Him, in His Kingdom. In short, Christ's spiritual Kingdom *in this age* before the Second Coming will continue to expand and grow until it reaches global triumph such that all the nations find

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<sup>11</sup> John Owen preaches a whole sermon on this passage giving the interpretation that I have alluded to here. cf. *The Works of John Owen Vol. VIII*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 311-339



rest in Him. Has that happened yet? Not yet. But it will. This is the destiny of Christ's Kingdom.

## **Proof #2: The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven**

Please look at **v.33**

“He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.””

Leaven is an ingredient used in cooking, typically yeast, that makes dough rise. Only a small amount is required, and it will spread and penetrate and transform the whole batch of dough. Elsewhere in Scripture leaven is analogized to represent sin<sup>12</sup> or false doctrine.<sup>13</sup> In **1 Corinthians 5:6** Paul commanded the Church to excommunicate the adulterous man, because “a little *leaven leavens* the whole lump”—meaning if sin is allowed in the congregation, it would *infect* the whole congregation. Now here it's clear that Jesus is *not* using leaven to represent sin. He explicitly says “The kingdom of heaven [*Christ's Kingdom*] is like leaven...” Christ's Kingdom is not like sin. The context determines what He is saying. Clearly He's speaking about transformative power of leaven—how only a small can penetrate, spread, and transform everything. So in this parable, the “three measures of flour” clearly represents the world, just as the field represented the world in the previous parable. So putting it altogether Jesus is teaching that when He came into the world, the leaven entered the dough. In the parable the woman hid the leaven in the dough—end of **v.33**— “till it was all leavened.” Therefore that is precisely what Jesus is telling us to expect will happen in the world. As one author puts it “Christ has planted into the world His gospel, the power of God unto salvation. Like yeast, the power of the Kingdom will continue to work “...until *all* is leavened.”<sup>14</sup> Another has said here

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<sup>12</sup> Exodus 12:15, 19 et.al.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 16:6, 11

<sup>14</sup> Chilton, pg. 71

“[this is nothing] less than a prophecy of a final complete triumph of the Gospel – that it will diffuse itself through all nations, and purify and ennoble all life.”<sup>15</sup>

## Summary

In summary, both these parables show us that Jesus believed that His kingdom is not *merely* to gain victory immediately and catastrophically at the end of history. But that His kingdom is gaining victory progressively gradually throughout history. The growth of the kingdom began when the King arrived. Though it began small (like the mustard seed and the leaven) yet its will not stop growing, spreading, penetrating, transforming, until a total conquest is achieved.<sup>16</sup> That’s **our doctrine**: *The gospels tell a story of Jesus’ Kingdom progressively increasing in history such that the mustard seed becomes a tree, and the whole lump is leavened.*

## II. Our Duty

Two duties...

### 1. Informatory Use

#### What have theologians of the past said?

Our first duty is simply to *consider* what theologians of the past have said about this. I’m not preaching some new or novel theology. In fact, writes Keith Mathison, “...from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, an optimistic

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<sup>15</sup> Richard C. Trench in John Jefferson Davis, *The Victory of Christ’s Kingdom: An Introduction to Postmillennialism*, (Moscow, ID.,: Canon Press, 1996), pg. 51

<sup>16</sup> As B.B. Warfield says here these parables “announce the complete conquest of the world by [Christ’s] kingdom.” Gentry, pg. 248

eschatology was predominant among the great Reformed theologians.”<sup>17</sup> Here’s a sampling...

The Savoy Declaration (1658), which included Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, includes these words:

“...we expect that in the latter days, antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than [ever] they have enjoyed.”<sup>18</sup>

Charles Hodge (1797-1998) the president of Princeton in it’s glory days said the “...common doctrine of the Church...is that the conversion of the world, the restoration of the Jews, and the destruction of Antichrist are to precede the second coming of Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Even the non-reformed hymn writer Charles Wesley (1707-1788) who wrote 6,500 hymns (many of which we sing) once wrote these words:

When He first the work begun,  
 Small and feeble was His day:  
 Now the word doth swiftly urn,  
 Now it wins its widening way:  
 More and more it spreads and grows,  
 Ever mighty to prevail;  
 Sin’s strongholds it now overthrows  
 Shakes the trembling gates of hell.

Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 128

<sup>18</sup> Ch. 26, paragraph 5

<sup>19</sup> Davis, pg. 19

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) the great prince of preachers admitted, on the one hand, that he was unsure how to put the end times events in order,<sup>20</sup> but on the other hand, insisted on the global triumph of the gospel *in history*. He said this in his commentary on **Psalm 86:9**: “David was not a believer in the theory that the world will grow worse and worse, and that the dispensation will wind up with general darkness and idolatry. Earth’s sun is to go down amid tenfold night if some of our prophetic brethren are to be believed. Not so do we expect, but we look for a day when the dwellers in all lands shall learn righteousness, shall trust in the Savior, shall worship thee alone, O God, ‘and shall glorify thy name.”<sup>21</sup>

One of America’s greatest theologians, B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), often called “the spoiler of liberalism”<sup>22</sup> wrote this: “According to the New Testament, this time in which we live is precisely the time in which our Lord is conquering the world to Himself; and it is the completion of this conquest which, as it marks the completion of His redemptive work, so it sets the time for His return to earth to consummate His kingdom and establish it in its eternal form.”<sup>23</sup>

Many more could be quoted. The point of these quotes is simply to demonstrate that this view is not some minority view in Church history. Nor is it the view of liberals who didn’t take the Bible serious.

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<sup>20</sup> “I see the conversion of the world, and the personal pre-millennial reign, and the sudden coming, and the judgment, and several grand points; but I cannot put them into order, nor has anyone else done so yet.” Murray, Appendix 2, pg. 263

<sup>21</sup> “...The modern notion has greatly damped the zeal of the church for missions, and the sooner it is show to be unscriptural the better for the cause of God. It neither consorts with prophecy, honors God, nor inspires the church with ardor. Far hence be it driven.” *Ibid*, pg. xiv

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-b-b-warfield/>

<sup>23</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Millenium*, (Philadelphia, PA.,: P & R Publishing Co., 1958), pg. 61-62

## How should we judge history?

That brings us to our second duty: we need to *re-evaluate* how we think about history. The most common objection against what I've been preaching is "...history proves this view to be wrong, look how bad it's getting." I used to say that.<sup>24</sup> Two answers to that. **First**, we should never formulate our eschatology by what we see in the world. We don't formulate our views of marriage or sexuality or God by what the world says. The Bible is the final authority for everything *including eschatology*. If the Bible says history will end in the global triumph of the gospel, than it will happen regardless of how history has played out thus far. But that brings us to our **second** response, history actually demonstrates the world is growing better as the gospel of Jesus Christ advances, just like the parables we looked at promised it would.<sup>25</sup> Let's consider the book of Acts from 30,000 ft. How did the book of Acts begin? The book of Acts began with small group of disciples huddled together in an upper room praying. The book of Acts ended with the Apostle Paul fearlessly preaching the gospel before Caesar in Rome . Between those two events, thousands upon thousands were converted, and even the enemies of the cross confessed "These men...have turned the world upside down" (**Acts 17:6**). Did the church see dark times in the book of Acts? Yes, many were put to death and she was violently opposed by the unbelieving Jews the Romans. But did Christ's kingdom advance and increase in size in the world? Absolutely.

## Too small of samples

You see the problem with evaluating history is that we often look at too small a period of time. We look at history in little 50 year or 100 year blips. Do you look at your child and say "Johnny's not growing because I don't see any difference in him since yesterday?" Of course not, neither should we look at

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<sup>24</sup> Unless Christianity diminishes and dwindle to it's original size in the 1st century, no one can make the argument that the gospel is losing in history.

<sup>25</sup> Read Jonathan Edwards' *The History of Redemption* "Period III. From Christ's Resurrection to the End of the World" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA...: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 582-619; and Ch.7 "The World is Growing Better" in Boettner, pg.38-47

little blips in history and conclude Christ's kingdom is not advancing. If we were to read just one verse in the book of Acts, say **8:3** which says "But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" we might conclude that things are getting worse and worse for the Church. But we if look at a wider period of time, if we fast-forward two decades in Saul's life, we see this same man writing more than 1/2 of the New Testament. We judge in too small of samples. Is the world better off today than it was 500 years ago? 1000 years ago? Has the world gotten better since Christ ascended into Heaven? Ken Gentry points out the irony of the objection that says history is getting worse and worse: "Here we are in a free land, sitting in our comfortable Bible-believing church, dressed in our 'Sunday best,' holding one of our many personal Bibles (the world's best selling book!) debating whether or not there has been any advance in the conditions of Christianity since its persecuted inception 2,000 years ago!"<sup>26</sup> Has there been ups and downs? Yes. But what is the overall trajectory of the world since the resurrection of Jesus Christ?<sup>27</sup>

### Geographical prejudice

The other mistake we make is we tend to practice geographical prejudice. 'It's going bad in our country so the whole world must be in the same shape' That's bad reasoning. Do you realize that in the 20th century as Western Civilization was engaged in it's two World Wars, the gospel was exploding in Africa? Statistics bear out that in 1900 there were only 9 million Christians in Africa. By the year 2000, there were 380 million.<sup>28</sup> The Christian Post in an article entitled *Fastest Growth of Christianity in Africa* reported "Further statistics show that according to the projection of the current trend, Africa's congregation

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<sup>26</sup> Gentry, pg. 431

<sup>27</sup> There are more Christians on the earth today than there were people alive in the the 1st century (200 million vs. 2.38 billion). According to Wycliffe, at least 3,495 languages have at some Scripture translations covering 7.04 billion of the 7.9 billion on earth. 90% of the world has access to some or all of the Bible in their own language. The Bible is the best selling book of all time.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 433

is likely to grow by another 200 million by 2025.”<sup>29</sup> But someone might ask, what about those two world wars, doesn’t that demonstrate conditions are worse in the West? Two answers. 1) Who won those wars? As one author asked “Did the world become a more dangerous place for Christianity because of the defeat of Japan in Asia and Germany in Europe? 2) The Scripture doesn’t teach the gospel will experience unbroken and steady upward growth in the world. It just teaches that before the Second Coming at some point, the world will be won by Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> The advance of Christ’s Kingdom in history may be compared to a war. At the end of a war, one side clearly gains the victory, but that doesn’t mean the victor never experienced setbacks or defeats in particular battles during the warfare.<sup>31</sup> So beloved, consider carefully how you evaluate and think about history. Dr. James Snowden said these helpful words in 1921:

“The true way of judging the world is to compare its present with its past condition and note [the] direction it is moving. It is going backward, or forward, is it getting worse or better? It may be wrapped gloomy twilight, but is it the twilight of the evening, or of the morning? Are the shadows deepening into starless night, or are they fleeing before the rising sun? One glance at the world as it is today compared with what it was ten or twenty centuries ago shows us that it has swept through a wide arc and is moving toward the morning.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 434

<sup>30</sup> “The very argument dispensationalists and premillennialists employ against postmillennialism—“we see no postmillennial progress”—can easily be turned in another way against them: Christ teaches us that he will come again. Since he has not come yet, and since his coming is allegedly always impending, we may assume he is not going to return at all. But surely this sort of argument is erroneous: simply because something as not happened yet, does not mean it cannot and will not happen ever.” *Ibid*, pg. 436

<sup>31</sup> “The tide of the war as a whole may clearly be running in one direction...but this does not mean that the victorious side does not experience setbacks and temporary defeats on various fronts on the way to ultimate victory.” *Ibid*, pg. 434

<sup>32</sup> Boettner, pg. 44-45

### III. Our Delight

#### The gospel is the power of God unto salvation

The most delightful thing is *how* Christ's kingdom advances. We've already made the argument that Christians should be involved in culture, that we should build schools, send missionaries, pray for revival, get involved politically, raise godly offspring, be faithful in our vocation. All those things as good and necessary are entirely insufficient to advance the Kingdom. The kingdom as one author has said "...expands *not* through evolutionary forces, human wisdom, political strategy, or military conquest."<sup>33</sup> If we put our hope in politics to transform the world, we have deified the state and have given her more power than God. The world can never be changed through politics. Ever. This world can only be transformed through the gospel. **Romans 1:16** says "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is *the power of God* for salvation to everyone who believes..." The gospel is the very power of God. And what is this power of the gospel aimed at? Saving the world.

#### God sent His Son to save the world

Listen to this **John 3:16-17** with new ears this morning...

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, *but in order that the world might be saved through him.*"

Did you hear it? This verse speaks of intention, of God's motive in sending His Son. God did not send His Son to condemn the world, but [His intention in sending His Son is...] that the world might be saved through Him. Jesus Christ came to save the world. As Reformed folk we rightly refute universalism, the false notion that every single person would be saved. But if we stop there we

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<sup>33</sup> Gentry, pg. 227



miss the glory of this verse.<sup>34</sup> This verse is *not* teaching Jesus will save every person, but it is teaching that the grand design of Christ's mission will one day be realized, namely, that "the world as a system (a cosmos)...will be redeemed."<sup>35</sup> "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, *but in order that the world might be saved through him.*" How can I say that?

Because that's what God said in His covenant to Abraham.<sup>36</sup> **Genesis 12:3** "...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."<sup>37</sup>

This is what God promised in the Psalms. **Psalms 22:27** "*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.*"

This is what God promised in the Prophets. **Isaiah 2:2** "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains...*and all the nations shall flow to it.*"

The gospels simply reaffirming what the OT has already laid down. The mustard seed will turn into the greatest tree in the earth where all the nations find rest and shade and food. The secret leaven will penetrate the whole batch of dough.

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<sup>34</sup> "The passion for missions is quenched when we lose sight of the grandeur of the evangel...It is a fact that many, persuaded as they rightly are of the particularism of the plan of salvation and of its various corollaries, have found it difficult to proclaim the full, free, and unrestricted overture of gospel grace." John Murray quoted in Iain Murray's *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 105

<sup>35</sup> Gentry, pg. 276.

<sup>36</sup> And in the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31:34 "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord."

<sup>37</sup> See Romans 4:13 and Matthew 5:5

Jesus really will save the world.<sup>38</sup> Behold the power and love of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

### **Experience His power and love**

You can experience that power and love of Christ this morning. Are you backsliding further and further into sin? Are you living a double life? Is your conscience blackened and your heart hardened? Do you feel trapped with no way of escape? Run to the Savior. Yes, you have offended His infinite holiness *again*. Yes, His eyes are too pure to look on your iniquity. But He already overcame your sin on the cross loved one. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>39</sup> The same gospel that saved you at the beginning is what restores you now. Though your sins have abounded since you first believed, grace abounds all the more.

Or perhaps you’ve never come to the Savior. Dear friend, you can be washed clean today. All the guilt you feel, all the condemnation that haunts you, all the accusations that you hear in your heart can be taken away. Jesus came into the world so that you might be saved through Him. That means that He would take away your sin, and carry it away into the land of forgetfulness. That means that He would cover you with His perfect righteousness so that you could stand before the Father on the Last Day. You can be made new. You can belong to Him. You can be given everlasting life. “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (**Romans 10:9**).

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<sup>38</sup> B.B. Warfield says here “The Scriptures teach an eschatological universalism, not an each-and-every universalism. When the Scriptures say that Christ came to save the world, that he does save the world, and that the world shall be saved by him, they do not mean that there is no human being whom he did not come to save, whom he does not save, who is not saved by him. They mean that he came to save and does save the human race; and that the human race is being led by God into a racial salvation: that in the age-long development of the race of men, it will attain at last to a complete salvation, and our eyes will be greeted with the glorious spectacle of a saved world. Thus the human race attains the goal for which it was created, and sin does not snatch it out of God’s hands: the primal purpose of God with it is fulfilled.” Gentry pg. 277-278

<sup>39</sup> 1 John 4:10