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The Kingdom of Jesus, a Perspective

Reflections [Covenant and Doctrine](#) 26 July 2019

Isaiah 65:17

Often-asked questions about the Kingdom of Jesus (the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven being synonymous expressions) include these: is it on earth, or in Heaven? Has it come already, or is it something futuristic? Is it physical, or notional? Did Jesus introduce this concept, or was it already spoken of in Old Testament times? Must we wait until the Day of Judgement to gain entry to the Kingdom of Jesus? These are but a few of the questions Christians harbour in their hearts. While I make no claim whatsoever to knowing the answers, I will try to set out a perspective gained from reading the views of the scholars.

The Kingdom of Jesus is understood by liberal Protestants to mean the exercise of the moral life in society, or a supreme ethical ideal, thereby making it subjective, inward, or spiritual. On this reading, the idea becomes individualistic, and its definition varies largely according to personal feelings, tastes, or opinions. Such a school of thought moves the Kingdom away from spatiotemporal terms, so that it remains at a purely notional level.

Some scholars regard the Kingdom of God as continuous with progressive enlightenment, a static moral concept without eschatological overtone. A careful study of the teaching of Jesus, however, calls both these understandings of His Kingdom into question. The Kingdom of God was not to be seen as settled and static liberal moral values, but as a devastating apocalyptic moment, as narrated in the last Book of the Bible, the Revelation.

Nineteenth-century scholars asserted that the character of the teaching of Jesus was more in line with apocalyptic notions, and that Jesus was not to be seen as the moral educator of society. Others, disagreeing with this line of thinking, argued instead that the preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God was not futurist, but something already "realised" — that the Kingdom has already come. They further argued

that what the Old Testament prophets regarded as future, such as the coming of the "Day of the Lord," has been fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The most simplistic picturing of the Kingdom of Jesus would be to see Him upon the Heavenly Throne, surrounded by angels and the kingdom's populace. I would be sticking my neck out to say that this is most unlikely to be how the Kingdom of Jesus will be. Having said that, I have no doubt about being in the Glorious Presence of Jesus, in a New Creation that will be nothing like what we can even imagine. Any such imagining must be bound by our knowledge of the present created state. In Isaiah 65:17 we learn, "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." All we can say is that the Kingdom of Jesus is not going to be anything like what we presently know.

We, therefore, have three views to reconcile: that the Kingdom of Jesus has already been realised in the coming of Jesus; that it has to be inaugurated, meaning that its influence is already felt within human history, although its full realisation and fulfilment lie in the future; and that it is futurist, and therefore something that remains in the future, and will intervene disruptively in the midst of human history.

In accepting the teaching of Jesus Christ, we, in our present existence, as a prologue to our eternal existence, must take these values — ethical and moral — into our inner selves, and then go about proliferating them in society at large, after the pattern of the mustard seed of which Jesus spoke. We have the Spirit of God, Who stands ready to help us towards this end. Eventually, how and when Jesus will bring us into His New Creation, no one knows. While space, dimension, and time shape the physical world needed to house our physical being, I would argue that none of these will form part of the New Creation of Jesus, for it must be spiritual, and will remain for eternity without depreciation. Amen.

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