

How Jesus is Establishing His Kingdom

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Date: 24 December 2023

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[0 : 0 0] message this morning. Thank you so much, children. They'll come back and lead us in one final song as we conclude our service today. As you know, I've been traveling quite a bit, and a while back, I was in a busy hotel that was full of people playing in a chess tournament, and walked downstairs one day, and they were all gathered in the lobby area, and they were just all bragging about how good they were at chess, and I thought, well, here we have a bunch of chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.

We're going to talk about boasting this morning as it connects to our text, Isaiah chapter 9. If you turn there with me, Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 through 7, which reads, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. This is our third week in this particular passage. Last week we asked, what evidence is there that the government has been on the shoulder of Jesus Christ? What about the world has changed since the first coming of Jesus Christ? And we saw, as we did a kind of moral history, we saw evidence that since Christ has come, especially in those nations which have known Christ the longest, we see a change, a pivoting in virtues and values and morals. And we spoke specifically of the issue of equality, the idea that all people have equal value because all people are created by God, and bear God's image. And we talked about how that is a, in terms of historical dates, a relatively new idea.

It began with the gospel. You don't see this idea manifesting itself in a scientific understanding of human beings or in a historical understanding of human beings. This idea comes from our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we concluded last week that there is evidence that Jesus Christ, upon his first coming, taking on flesh, living a perfect life, dying for our sins, being raised from the dead, and ascending to the right hand of the Father to reign until, Psalm 110, his enemies are made his footstool. We saw evidence that Jesus has been at work in the world and will continue to be at work in the world. Now, what we're not arguing for is some kind of utopianism. Merely, we would apply some famous words that John Newton used to describe his own life. We would simply apply this to the way the world is today. John Newton, of himself, once said, I am not what I ought to be, and I am not what I want to be.

But still, I am not what I once used to be. And we would say the same of the world after the coming of Christ. It is not what it ought to be. It is not what we want it to be. But still, it is not what it used to be. And this is why there is so much goodness in understanding history. Because if your understanding of history is your lifetime, for instance, or perhaps your lifetime and your parents' lifetime, you would have a very faulty understanding of what the Lord has been doing in the world.

[3 : 5 8] And this is why it's helpful to have an understanding of what God's doing throughout the world and not merely in one country or another. Because any country at any given time is perhaps on the downslide. While, on the other hand, if the numbers continue and there doesn't seem to be any reason for them not to, there will be more Chinese Christians in the near future than there are American Christians. So the Lord is working. He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. He is reigning until his enemies are made his footstool. And this morning, be a relatively brief message, we just want to start asking how. How is he doing what he's doing? How is he affecting the change that we can observe if we know our history? Verse 7 of our text says, Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it, to uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. And, you know, we can have different understandings as

Christians about when all of this comes to pass. But we need to have, as Christians, a common understanding of how. We can vary as members of Providence Community Church about when, but we need to have a common understanding about how. And so we're going to spend this week and next week looking at how is it that the Lord is bringing his kingdom to pass in the world today. And one of the first point, the first point this morning, has to do with this idea of chestnuts boasting in an open foyer. One of the ways that Jesus is advancing his kingdom is that he is rejecting elitism. He is rejecting elitism. We need to remember that while there are many legitimate warm and fuzzies to be had during Christmas time, we need to remember that there actually is a hard edge to the incarnation.

We need to remember what Simeon told Mary and Joseph. This child is appointed for the downfall and the rise of many. We need to understand that Christmas is for some, but it is also against others. And this is not a message we hear often enough. We don't hear about the hard edge of Christmas.

We don't hear about who Christmas is against. We hear about who it is for. We don't hear about who it is against. But when we examine all of our Christmas passages, when we examine the Bible as a whole, we see that among the things the Lord is doing is he is here for, he has come for some people and he has also come to oppose others. For instance, the text was read this morning from Mary's praise of the Lord when she discovers that she is carrying the baby Jesus. She says, he has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. Now we tend to read this and embrace the warm and fuzzies of who the Christmas story is for. But right here in this passage, we see that the

Christmas story is against some folks. He has shown strength with his arm. He's scattered the proud. He has exalted those of humble estate. He's filled the hungry, but the rich he has sent away empty.

You know, one of the things we've got to remember about the gospel is that above all, and most importantly, the gospel is good news to God. The gospel is good news to God. It's good news to us because it's good news to God. And we ask, okay, well, what kind of things about the gospel does God like?

[7 : 59] What is the good news of the gospel to God? One of the good news pieces of the gospel to God is the elimination of boasting. He has developed a way to life, the only way to eternal life, that adamantly prohibits boasting. And this makes God happy. One of the moments where we find Jesus to be openly, effusively happy is in Matthew 11. And he says to the Father in Matthew 11, verse 25, at this time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Father, for such was your gracious will. One of the things that gets Jesus excited is that God is opposing the wise of this world. He's opposing the self-important. He's opposing elitism. This is what God is thankful for, what Jesus is thankful for to the Father. I'm thankful that you've hidden these things from the prideful.

I'm thankful that you have hidden these things from those who trust in their own wisdom, and that you've revealed them to little children. We see in the book of 1 Corinthians, when Paul is explaining the gospel to the Corinthians, he says in verse 27 of chapter 1, but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. You see, this isn't just an incidental activity contained within the Christmas story that the wise, that the self-important, that the elitists are opposed. Now, it's not incidental. God has declared war on human wisdom. He's declared war on elitism in general, and that's a very good thing, because throughout history, there are moments where it appears that the people who have spent centuries amassing power for themselves have by no means are they ever going to be resisted. It appears as if they have unlimited power, unlimited control, and what we see in the Christmas story, among other things, is that God has come to oppose this very kind of thing. Again, God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. So that, what's his purpose? That no human being might boast in the presence of God. I sometimes find it funny. People are highly sensitive to, you know, is this a cult? Is that a cult? Is this a cult? Is that a cult? And they're looking around at all these religious gatherings and asking that question. Let me just tell you something. If you're inventing your own

walk with God, you're the cult leader of your own little weird twisted cult.

Like, and that's what God has come to oppose. He's come to oppose individuals who think they can write their own playbook. He's come to oppose people who are so proud as to think that they can make it on their own and come up with their own ideas. So Christmas isn't necessarily for everyone in this room.

It might be against someone in this room. If you are the kind of person who thinks that you have carved your own way out to God, Christmas is not for you. It's against you. He has come to oppose those people who think that they are above the Word of God. He's come to oppose those people who think that they are above repenting and trusting in Christ like saints have done for thousands of years. He's come to oppose some.

And he's come to embrace some. He's come to fill the hungry. Are you hungry this morning? He's also come to leave those who are full of themselves alone, to be rejected. And so the gospel is this magnificent, beautiful, not simply embracing of those who are hurting and those who are weak, but also a hard edge toward those who are full of themselves. So one of the ways that Jesus is advancing his kingdom into the world is he is opposing this self-appointed sort of wisdom and self-righteousness. He's opposing it. But there's another way that he's advancing his way into the world. In addition to rejecting elitism, rejecting pride, he is reigning in the hearts of human beings everywhere. He's reigning in the hearts of human beings everywhere. It just was hard to understand at the time when Jesus came into the world that his would be the very first government to be established through conversion and not coercion. It was a brand new thing. No one had ever done that before.

[13:04] We see the disciples on the one hand asking Jesus, when you come into your kingdom, will you allow me to sit at your right hand? And they are so confident that the kingdom is coming. And then we see mere days later, them deserting Jesus. Why? They had no category for the way in which the kingdom of God would be established. I said earlier that we don't all have to agree on the when, but we really do need to agree on the how. I myself have an optimistic perspective of God's kingdom coming into the world. And so my win is kind of optimistic, although kind of long-term. I don't believe the world's getting worse. I believe it's getting better. You might disagree. That's fine. But you know who I don't agree with, I won't agree with, is anyone, whatever eschatological stripe they have, who would coerce, who would force people into some sort of Christian behavior, right? I'm not for that. I'm not for any kind of manipulation, any kind of coercion, because here's the magnificent thing about the government of Jesus that differs from every other government. He doesn't have to force you. He can convert you. He can change your heart. And one of the things we see as we go through the scriptures, it's really crazy, and just no one could have added it all up at the time, is that you've got all these promises of him establishing his people.

And that establishment, by the way, is physical, and there's a physical prosperity element to it. He's blessing his people. But the thing that no one really picked up on was adjacent to all these promises of God establishing his kingdom is this kind of language. For instance, let me just read a few verses to you. Deuteronomy 30, verse 6. And the Lord will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. The end of the day, the promises of God always lead to this idea of conversion, of God changing the hearts of individuals from that prideful, I'm going to make it up my own, to I will trust in the Lord Jesus. Jeremiah 31, 33. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them. I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Ezekiel 36, 26. For I will give you a new heart and a new spirit that I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. So we're asking, how is Jesus making a positive difference in the world? The one is, is that more than anyone in this room, he hates pride, and he opposes pride, and he opposes human boasting. That's one way. But the other way is, is that he converts the heart. He converts individuals into a completely new way of living. Now, let me tell you one of the reasons why I'm optimistic. If you have your Bibles with you, just turn to Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5, verse 19. And just to give our kids notice, I'm kind of close to done. So you're not far away from being back up here, just so you know. Galatians 5, 19. Now, the works of the flesh are evident.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

Can you tell I've read that list a lot? I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things, there is no law. Let me ask you this. What happens when a considerable number of people move from living a life in which the things in the first list are prominent into living a life in which the things on the second list are prominent?

[17 : 33] That's what conversion is. That's what conversion is. That's what salvation is. Salvation is the movement of our appetites, desires, and the outcome of those things and our behaviors, the movement from the works of the flesh into the works of the Spirit.

You can trace this civilizationally, historically, socially. Societies have indeed moved. From sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalry, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like, to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

How is Jesus advancing his kingdom in the world? He's transferring people from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. He's giving people, through the power of the cross, victory over the flesh and allowing them, with the gift of the Spirit, to manifest these highly relationally gracious qualities.

Again, no one could see this coming, that the kingdom of God would advance not through coercion, but through conversion. But when you think about it, you realize, well, this could actually work.

If what it means to be a Christian is to stop doing the things on the first list, and to start doing the things on the second list, and we had a bunch of people doing that, well, I think we have an explanation for what we observed last week.

[19 : 12] How is it that some of these virtues, such as the idea of equality, have emerged over the last 2,000 years since the coming of Christ, to where now no one in this room would disagree, and take it as gospel, that we are all of equal value? No one believed that before.

How did this happen? Well, it happened because over time, Jesus keeps changing individuals, and he's changing them from one to the other.

And the question is, has he changed you? Last week, I quoted from Richard Halverson, one of the last really good chaplains of the United States Senate, and he wrote a number of years ago, the fact is, is that the birth, crucifixion, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are celebrated worldwide by folk of every race, language, and color every year.

And believing in Jesus, they have been delivered from the most evil, disastrous, frustrating, debilitating habits, and life forms possible. How is Jesus establishing his throne in justice and righteousness?

One Apostle Paul at a time, one Nicodemus at a time, one Mary Magdalene at a time, one woman at the well at a time. Over and over and over again, God reaches out individually, one-on-one.

[20 : 30] The God who created the universe reaches out to each individual sinner and pleads with them and shows them a better way and transforms their hearts. That's just amazing.

I was reading a document written by a man named Athanasius in 300 AD or so. I think he died in like 360 AD.

And he was at various moments completely isolated from everyone else, exiled, condemned, and so on and so forth, because he simply would not give up the idea that Jesus was God.

And that Jesus came in the flesh, that he died a real death, and that he was raised to life, and he just wouldn't give it up. And sometimes his beliefs were very unpopular.

And there was a point when someone said, Athanasius, no one agrees with you. And the phrase came out of that, well, Athanasius replied, Athanasius contra mundum in Latin, which means, well, then it's Athanasius against the world.

[21 : 34] He was a stubborn man, you know, in a good way. And he's writing this work explaining that Jesus is alive.

Jesus did come in the flesh. He did die physically. He did raise. And he's explaining this in this document. I just want to close with a couple of statements from him.

He says this. Now, this is 300 AD-ish. For now the Savior works so great things among men. And day by day, this is incredibly beautiful.

And day by day is invisibly persuading so great a multitude from every side, both from them that dwell in Greece and in foreign lands, to come over to his faith and all to obey his teaching. Will anyone still hold his mind in doubt whether resurrection has been accomplished by the Savior and whether Christ is alive or rather is himself the life? The part I find beautiful. And this is true, friends.

[22 : 38] If you're in Christ, you need to understand this. There were intermediaries involved. Some preacher, a parent, someone told you the gospel. Make no mistake. There's a moment when you as an individual encountered he who we celebrate today.

And he came to you to seek and save the lost. And he invisibly worked in your life. You have had, if you're in Christ, you have had an encounter with the one who created all things and for whom all things are created.

And he's the one that saved you. And he has done that faithfully for thousands of years now. As he says in the book of Revelation, Behold, I'm making all things new.

And where does he start? Because what is the crown jewel of creation in God's eyes? Is it the mountains? Is it the glaciers? Is it the sea? The crown jewel of creation? Human beings. He goes to each one of us.

Each one of us is in Christ. He has come to us to save us. He has spoken as he did to Lazarus. Come forth. Come forth out of your sin, out of the deadness of your sin and trespasses.

[23 : 47] Come forth in the newness of life. He has saved you. Athanasius continues. Or is it like a dead man to be pricking the consciences of men? And then he goes through this.

This is just beautiful too. So that they deny their hereditary laws and bow before the teachings of Christ. Athanasius says, you need to explain something. What is going on when a group of barbarians deny their hereditary laws, the things that they have been taught for thousands of years, the traditions passed on for thousands of years.

They deny those very things and bow before the teachings of Christ. The adulterer no longer commits adultery and the murderer no longer murders no more, nor is the inflictor of wrong any longer grasping and the profane is henceforth religious.

Or how is he, be not risen but is dead? Does he drive away and pursue and cast down those false gods said by the unbelievers to be alive and the demons they worship?

For where Christ is named and his faith, there all idolatry is deposed and all imposter of evil spirits is exposed and any spirit is unable to endure even the name, nay even on barely hearing it flies and disappears.

[25 : 02] But this work is not of one dead, but of one that lives. The unbelievers, especially of God. So how is Jesus doing Isaiah 9, 6 through 7?

He's opposing the elite. He's reigning in the hearts. He's converting individuals. Which brings us back to the quote that we started with. Old John Newton.

I'm not what I ought to be. I'm not what I want to be. But still I'm not what I once used to be. Wonder how much you know about John Newton.

Maybe you know that he wrote the hymn Amazing Grace. Well, there's something else you should know. Let me show you his tombstone. This is what his tombstone says.

John Newton, once an infidel and a libertine. He was on the other part of the Galatians list. A servant of slaves in Africa. Let's remember to go back to that. Was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.

[26 : 10] Now, what does this mean? A servant of slaves in Africa. This means that he is fundamentally in debt to the slaves in Africa.

Why? Because he was for many years a captain of a slave ship. He captained multiple slave ships. And then he was converted.

And he renounced those underhanded ways and chose to walk in obedience to the law of Christ. And he was saved and forgiven of his many sins.

But then God, remember how Isaiah 9, 7, established justice. This is the justice of God. God saved and forgave the slave trader.

The story's not done. John Newton winds up being instrumental in the outlawing of slavery. There's really no one more instrumental than John Newton.

[27 : 12] The man who was not only forgiven from being a slave trader moves on to accelerate the spiritual life, the obedience of a man named William Wilberforce, and together they bring the slave trade to an end.

How is Jesus advancing in this world? He's bringing the high-low. And he's bringing the low-high. He's converting people from the one side, the works of the flesh, to the other side, the works of the spirit.

And so we see now, and we'll continue to see next week, how Jesus is revealing himself in victory. Well, that's at least a partial explanation of how Jesus is, to quote Isaiah 9, 7, one last time.

The increase of his government, and at peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it, with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord will do this.

Let me pray for us, and the kids can come back down. Oh, Lord God, what a magnificent thing it is to see you at work, not only in opposing the proud, but in giving grace to the humble.

[28 : 34] Father God, I pray for every person in this room that you would give us the grace to embrace the truth about what you say, who we are.

Lord, what you say we are is dead in our sins and trespasses, unable on our own, with our own strength, with our own wisdom, to conjure up a life that pleases you or that warrants your forgiveness.

What you say that we are are sinners in need of a Savior. We could never on our own stack up enough good works to overcome the mighty debt we owe you through our sins and trespasses, but Jesus has come, and where our sin abounds, his grace abounds much more.

And so, Lord, I pray that today, even today, you would advance your kingdom by converting people to Christ, and by confirming those in Christ, letting them know, Lord, you have a plan for us, not only to save us from our sin, not only to bring us into eternity with you forever, but to make a positive difference in this world with the life that we have.

Father, we thank you for these children that have been brought today that are a part of our church. We thank you so much for the work that they've put in and the adults that have worked to make all this possible.

[29 : 48] And now, Lord, we pray that you'd help us to celebrate what Jesus celebrated in Matthew 11, that you've hidden these things from the self-important, and you've revealed them to little children.

We pray for these little children. We pray, God, that you would save them if they're not saved, and that you would set them out, Lord, on a path to serve you, to love others, and to be a light to the world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Kids, come forward. Amen.