

“Christ’s Kingdom Strategy”
(Acts 1:6-11)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation: This morning, we began to consider Luke’s introduction to volume two of his Gospel:

1. He backed us up to unpack what he said at the end of volume one: “you shall be my witnesses,” and “wait for the promise of the Father.” This told us three things:

- a. That the work Jesus began through the power of the Holy Spirit, He desires to continue by His Spirit working through His church.
- b. That the work we are to be about as a church is to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as to proclaim forgiveness of sins to all nations through faith in His name.
- c. And that Christ has promised to give us the power of His Holy Spirit to enable us to do this work that is clearly beyond our ability.

2. The book of Acts helps us in many ways:

- a. It allows us to have a clearer view of the life and worship of the early church to help guide us toward the most god-honoring and fruitful use of our own lives in these areas.
- b. But it also gives us clear direction on what our main goal as a church should be: evangelism and missions.
 - (i) Our worship, prayers, giving, sanctification and growth in grace all have a purpose, an end in view.
 - (ii) That end is to continue the work Jesus has entrusted to us for this generation: the proclamation of the Gospel to all the nations.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we’ll finish looking at the introduction, as we prepare to move on into the book.

- a. Apparently, when Jesus gathered His disciples together on the Mount of Olives, before He ascended into heaven, the disciples were still wondering about the kingdom, its relationship to Israel and when it would come.
- b. Though they misunderstood what Jesus was about to do, He didn’t correct them, but gave them direction: direction that would make these things clearer to them as they carried them out.
- c. They were to wait for the coming of the Spirit, and once He came, they would receive the power they needed to begin the work of advancing the kingdom, especially in that very crucial time before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70.
- d. After this command, Jesus ascended into heaven, from where He would direct their progress, with the promise that He would come again when the work was complete.

e. What we have in a handy summary is Christ's plan for His kingdom, from beginning to end.

2. In light of this, we'll look at three things:

- a. The nature of Christ's kingdom.
- b. The progress of the kingdom.
- c. And finally, the consummation of the kingdom.

II. Sermon.

A. First of all, let's consider the nature of Christ's kingdom. What was the kingdom of Christ going to be like? "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'" (v. 6).

1. The disciples apparently misunderstood what Jesus had been saying about the kingdom.
 - a. They had been taught that Messiah's kingdom would be political.
 - b. Jesus had been telling them that in the regeneration, or in the new age that was coming, they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; NB. Jesus was apparently including Paul, since Judas would apostatize and be destroyed).
 - c. They may have thought that Jesus would be coming again very soon to overthrow the Romans and to set up His kingdom with Israel.
 - d. It seems that the events Jesus referred to earlier on that very mount they were then standing (Mount Olivet, Mount of Olives) had been construed by them to be a destruction, then a restoration of Israel.
2. But they were mistaken.
 - a. If they had listened more carefully to Jesus, remembered what He had said, understood it more clearly, they wouldn't have thought this.
 - (i) In the Parable of the Vineyard, Jesus described how the Jews treated the prophets and finally what they would do to Him: kill Him and throw Him out of the vineyard.
 - (ii) As a result, the owner of the vineyard would come and bring those wretches to a wretched end, speaking of the coming of the Lord in judgment in AD 70.
 - (iii) To make it even clearer, "Jesus said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner *stone*; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust'" (Matt. 21:42-44).
 - (iv) The kingdom was being taken away from Israel and given to a new people, those who would do that work and bring forth the fruit of converts: the New Covenant Church, which is now the Israel of God.

- b. Jesus was not about to restore the kingdom to national Israel.
 - (i) The Jews had rejected Him and put Him to death.
 - (ii) Jesus had taken the kingdom from them forever.
 - (iii) This doesn't mean God is finished with Israel:
 - (a) He has hardened them partially, that He might turn to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25).
 - (b) But He has turned to the Gentiles that He might provoke Israel to jealousy (v. 11).
 - (c) And as He does and gathers His elect Jews together, He places them in His one sheepfold: the church.
 - (d) The church is the true Israel of God.

- c. But notice that Jesus doesn't correct them on this point here, but simply dismisses the issue:
 - (i) First, with a statement about the timing of the kingdom – because there is a kingdom, just not like the one His disciples may have been expecting.
 - (ii) And second, with a promise and command.
 - (a) The promise of power with the coming of the Spirit.
 - (b) And the command to bear witness to Him in all the world.
 - (c) As they begin to do what Jesus called them to do, He would eventually begin to make things clearer to them.
 - (d) This brings us to our second point:

- B. Second, let's consider the progress of the kingdom. How would they find the strength and where were they to begin? We have two things here:
 - 1. First, the promise of power through the Holy Spirit. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (v. 8).
 - a. We know something of this power:
 - (i) The increased love for the Savior.
 - (ii) The powerful desire to glorify Him.
 - (iii) The ability to go beyond what we're normally capable of doing.
 - (iv) The energizing of our gifts in God's service.

 - b. But we don't know it as they appeared to know it in their own lives.
 - (i) On the day of Pentecost, they were filled with the Spirit and bore powerful testimony to the Jews.
 - (ii) Peter preached a sermon that was used to convert three thousand Jews.
 - (iii) The Lord continued to add to their number daily through their testimony.
 - (iv) Peter and John stood before the leaders of Israel and boldly proclaimed Jesus.
 - (v) This is what we need to pray for, what we need to be seeking God for.
 - (vi) The church needs this power: hopefully the book of Acts will encourage us to seek it more that Christ's work would advance.

2. Second, the command, which reveals something more of Christ's strategy:

“And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (v. 8).

 - a. This isn't merely a prediction (future tense); it has the force of a command.
 - b. The command is that they are to begin with the Jews.
 - (i) God began with them: salvation was from the Jews (John 4:22).
 - (ii) And so Jesus began with them: He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24).
 - (iii) And so His apostle must begin with them: the first chapters of the book of Acts are all about the evangelization of Jerusalem and Judea (Chaps. 1-7).
 - (iv) When Paul goes out to missionary work, he begins with the Jews (Acts 13:46).
 - c. But then they are to move out to Samaria (Chap. 8).
 - (i) The half-Jew, half-Gentile race, hated by the Jews.
 - (ii) The Lord graciously brings Philip to preach the Gospel to them.
 - d. Finally, to the Gentiles (Chaps. 8-28).
 - (i) It begins with the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40).
 - (ii) Continues with the conversion of a group of God-fearers (Cornelius, an uncircumcised worshiper according to Jewish religion; Chaps. 10-11).
 - (iii) And culminates in the evangelization of the whole Roman Empire (12-28).
 - e. They were to begin with the Jews, and as the Jews became increasingly hostile – filling up the cup of God's wrath, which would be poured out in AD 70 – they would turn to the Gentiles – again to bring salvation to the Gentiles and to make the Jews jealous.
 - f. Since this work of reaching all the Gentiles hasn't been completed, we are still to reach out to them today – in places where the Gospel has come and in place where it hasn't – as well as the Jews.
- C. Finally, let's consider the consummation of the kingdom. When would the work begin and when would it end? “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority’ . . . And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (vv. 7, 9-11).
1. This stage of the kingdom of God would begin with Christ's ascension into heaven for His coronation.
 - a. Jesus told His disciples that it was important for them that He go; if He didn't, the Helper would not come (John 16:7).

- (i) He didn't mean that the Spirit wasn't already there, but He hadn't yet come in power, as He would on the day of Pentecost.
 - (ii) Once He came, the work could begin.
- b. But it was also important that Jesus go so that He might receive "dominion, glory, and a kingdom" (Dan. 7:13).
- (i) Jesus' ascension was His coronation day: the day He assumed the throne of heaven, over His kingdom and all the kingdoms of the world.
 - (ii) It was important that He be at the helm of this ship, that He be the captain of this work that He might guide and direct all things to its progress.
 - (a) That He might effect spiritual good in this world.
 - (b) That He might subdue the leaders of the nations.
 - (c) That all might one day bow the knee to Him (1 Cor. 15:25; Phil. 2:9-10).
 - (d) His kingdom is not of this world, but it affects this world spiritually.
 - (e) His kingdom is not a political kingdom, but it affects the politics of this world, as well as everything else.
 - (f) Jesus is in absolute control of all things, and will be until every one of His foes is subdued under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25).
 - (iii) The disciples saw His ascension into heaven which would give them an even greater confidence that He was in control.
2. But the kingdom would also end with His return.
- a. Once all of His enemies are subdued, Christ is returning.
 - (i) When they are vanquished, He will return to do away with the final enemy – death – by bringing about the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:26, 51-55).
 - (ii) Then will be the final judgment, the final separation and the eternal state.
 - (iii) At this time, the kingdom will reach its final stage.
 - (iv) This appears to be how Jesus understood the question: "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (v. 6).
 - (v) It appears to be the question He answered: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (v. 7).
 - (vi) Or He may be referring to His coming in judgment against Jerusalem and Israel in AD 70, which is very much like that final event.
 - (vii) But either way, it was not for them to know.
 - (a) Israel's judgment would begin once they had their chance to repent.
 - (b) Christ's kingdom will come in its fullness after the last elect person has been converted (Rom. 11:12-15).
 - (c) These things would happen in God's time: it was not for them, or us, to know.
 - b. It almost appears as though they thought it was going to happen right away.
 - (i) When they saw Jesus go up into heaven, they kept looking.
 - (ii) Maybe they thought He was going up and then coming right back.

- (iii) But the Lord sent two of His angels to remind them there was a work to do first: Jesus will come again, but why do you stand watching? Go about the work He has commissioned you to do.
- c. And so we see something here of Christ's kingdom strategy:
 - (i) The kingdom was no longer exclusively for natural Israel, nor did it belong to them any longer: It was now centered in the church.
 - (ii) In order to advance this kingdom, they would be empowered by the Spirit and were to go, beginning with the Jews, but were to reach all the nations.
 - (iii) The kingdom, in this phase of its development, would begin with the ascension of Jesus Christ and end when He would come again.
 - (iv) But again, since He hasn't returned, there is still work to do. Therefore:
 - (a) Let's continue to equip: worship, Bible reading, prayer, fellowship.
 - (b) Let's continue to labor: through giving, prayer, witness, evangelism and missions.
 - (c) And for motivation, let's continue to watch for His return: He is coming again to bring in the final stage of the Kingdom: the eternal state. Amen.