

FUTUREWORLD PT.2 1-12-14

“The Presence of The Future”

(Psalm 145) As most of you know, last Sunday we began a new series of studies on what the Bible teaches us about the future. Many of you, I know, are wondering what I'm gonna say about the millennium and the tribulation and the rapture and the Super Bowl. You were disappointed last week because we didn't get in to any of that; we simply laid a foundation for this study by looking at a Christian view of history. Well, today I'm gonna do it to you again. We still aren't ready to look at specific future events. Next week we will begin to examine the future of the future but today we need to learn about the presence of the future. That's my sermon title for today. I'm not the kind of preacher that gets into having cutesy, clever sermon titles but this one I like because it sums up well what we will discover in God's word and it does sound kind of intriguing. Let's begin with a question. How many of you would like to someday enter the kingdom of God? Raise your hand. Another question: How many of you have already entered the kingdom of God? You raise your hand. How many of you want to choose both A and B? How many of you don't like preachers who ask you to raise your hand?

A lot of you were hesitant in answering those questions, and some of you hesitant ones, I know, are well-informed students of the Bible. It's just that this whole business of the kingdom of God is confusing to you. The kingdom of God is a major Biblical theme, if not the major one. Jesus began his preaching by announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand. The book of Acts winds up with Paul in Rome preaching about the kingdom of God. The kingdom is referred to frequently but the Scriptures don't use that term to mean the exact same thing at all times and it leaves us asking, “What is the kingdom of God?” And, “When is the kingdom of God?” Let's tackle the *what* questions first. The definition I will offer is this: *The kingdom of God is the sphere in which God, or His Son, is regarded, honored and obeyed as King, and therefore, the blessings of His rule are being enjoyed* ®. That sphere may be a person, a group, or place.

Now, with that understanding, we can begin to address the *when* question. A couple of things we should all be able to agree on. The first is that God's kingdom will last for how long? How long will it last? Forever. Psalm 145:13 *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.* Daniel 4:3 *How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from*

*generation to generation. No problems there. But when does the kingdom begin? Clearly, God has had a people throughout the ages. There have always been some who honored Him as King, but the prophets looked forward to a new age, to a day of salvation and blessing, to a day in which the rule of God covers the whole earth. They looked forward to a greater epoch when the kingdom of God would come in a way previously unknown. Last week we talked about Daniel and how God used him to straighten out King Nebuchadnezzar's philosophy of history. I want to go back there now and read about the very interesting dream of the Babylonian king. 2:**31-44***

You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome.³² The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze,³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.³⁴ You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them.³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.³⁶ "This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king.³⁷ You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory;³⁸ and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.³⁹ After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.⁴⁰ Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces.⁴¹ In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay.⁴² As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle.⁴³ And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.⁴⁴ In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms,

but it will itself endure forever. That's it! That's the kingdom of God! The vision of the prophets was that it would come in the fullness of time, under the Messiah of God. But when exactly is that? Does this refer to an eternal kingdom that will be set up at the end of human history? Does it refer to a historical 1000-year reign of Jesus on earth which is still in the future? Or, is the kingdom of God something that was established in the first coming of Christ and is operating even today? If you pick #3 you win. The future is present; the kingdom has come; the new age has been inaugurated. There are many, many ways to show that in Scripture. Start right here in Daniel. Let me offer you an explanation of what Daniel said would happen. In verse 39 he tells Nebuchadnezzar that an inferior kingdom would arise after him. This would be the kingdom of the Medes and Persians who defeated Babylon but never became as powerful. Following the Medes and Persians will be the kingdom of bronze, which is Greece. The Greeks, under Alexander the Great, conquered the whole of the Mediterranean world. 40a *Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron.* What great empire followed the Greeks? The Roman empire. And 44a *In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed.* And it was set up, not after, but during the days of the Roman empire. Also, we read in Daniel 7:**13** *I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him.* This depicts the ascension of Christ, when He rose in the clouds to the place of power at the right hand of God. **14** *And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.* The coming of the kingdom is generally attached to the first coming of Jesus. But if one were to name a day on which the kingdom began in its full messianic expression it would have to be this one - the day of Christ's ascension and coronation which took place forty days after the resurrection and ten days prior to Pentecost.

This is the great message of the New Testament. Christ is King and He is King, not just for some time out in the future, but right now. John the Baptist burst onto the scene in the first century and announced that something tremendous was about to happen. He said, "Make ready the way of the Lord." He said, "One is coming whose sandals I am not fit to untie." And right behind John came Jesus who announced in Mark 1:**15** *The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.* We see right away a couple of things about

the New Testament era. First, it is a time of fulfillment. The prophecies of old were lived out in the life and ministry of Jesus and the establishment of the church. If you read the New Testament you see time and again the phrase, “And thus it was fulfilled.”

Secondly, we see the announcement that the kingdom is approaching, and it was more than just approaching. Where Jesus was, the kingdom was because He is the king. There are several lines of proof I can offer for this but I’ll try to be brief. First of all, we see the evidence of God’s kingdom in the defeat of Satan and his demons. In Luke 10:18 Jesus said, “I saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning.” In the coming of Jesus, in His obedience, in His miracles, in His death and in His rising the devil’s dominion was broken. Look at Matthew 12:**28** *if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* Jesus says that His power over the forces of evil is proof that the new age had arrived. In the next verse he speaks of the binding of Satan which we read of also in Revelation 20. Matthew 12:**29** *Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.* Christ bound the devil in order that He might take plunder from what did belong to him. The presence of God’s kingdom was expressed not only by the casting out of demons but also by the many miracles of Christ, by the preaching of the gospel, by the forgiveness of sins. It was not manifested, as the Jews had hoped, by the overthrow of Rome. Indeed, Luke 17:**20-21** *Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.* That is, the kingdom of God is present now for those who have eyes to see. In His parables, Jesus taught that the kingdom is a present reality and one of such great worth that you should sell all you have in order to enter. He spoke of the meek and the humble and the little children and said that the kingdom of God is made up of these. Luke 16:**16** *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.* What did that say? Did He say the gospel of the kingdom is preached and everyone is waiting for it to come? He said they are entering it. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:**13** *He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.* Clearly, the Kingdom of God has come in the coming of the King.

Now, do you remember the question I asked earlier? “Who wants to someday enter the kingdom of God?” And some of you raised your hand. And that’s good. You should, whether you are in the kingdom now or not, because there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is still to come. There is a *now* dimension to the kingdom, but there is also a *not-yet* dimension. Jesus often spoke of entering the kingdom as a future possibility and connected it to the day of judgment. In Matthew 7:21 “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*” And Matthew 26:29 *I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.*” Paul, as well, spoke of the kingdom as future. I Corinthians 6:9-10 *do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.* I Corinthians 15:50 *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* Since Paul is here speaking about the resurrection of the body, it is clear that the kingdom of God is being thought of as a future state. When you read the Scriptures, be alert to how the kingdom-of-God language is being used. And, as you serve the Lord, live in the awareness that the kingdom is here now but that the consummation, the fullness of it, is yet to come. Listen carefully to what George Ladd said in his book, *The Presence of the Future*, which he named after my sermon. (Ladd quote, p.51 of Hoekema) “*...the kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and this kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign. The kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history and consummation at the end of history.*” Do you see the profound implications of that for our lives? We enjoy the blessings of the kingdom, but not perfectly. We see the expressions of God’s power, but not entirely. Christ’s victory over Satan was decisive, but not final. D-day is passed, but V-day is still ahead and now we fight, with all our might, for the battle is real -- but we fight in the joy of victories past and in the confidence of ultimate triumph. The coming of Christ and, therefore, of God’s kingdom, has brought a decisive change to us as individuals and to the world as a whole but that change is not complete until the last day. We are in the last

days, but not to the last day. So, God's kingdom is a dynamic concept and an emerging reality. Jesus compared it to the mustard seed which starts out so very small and inconspicuous but gradually becomes quite large. The kingdom has come, is coming and will come. That is not just theological academics. That is an exciting concept that can make a powerful difference in the way you live. I am right now a citizen of heaven, a part of God's kingdom, and I know that kingdom has a glorious future and it's my privilege to watch it grow and have a hand in its growth. I'm not surprised by church growth partly because I know the kingdom of God is supposed to grow. So, this Biblical understanding of the kingdom which has come, is coming and will come does speak to our understanding of the future; but it also addresses the concerns of the present. And that is what I want to deal with now.

Let's look at how kingdom teaching impacts the way we see things now. And I'll pick just three things: Prosperity, suffering and people. When I speak of prosperity, I have in mind what we would call the happy blessings of life, both spiritual and material, temporal and eternal. How do we view these things from a kingdom perspective? Well, first thought is that we enjoy them and thank God for them. The earth belongs to the children of God and it is given to us for our pleasure. We are citizens of God's kingdom and there is no need to wait till eternity comes to enjoy what God provides for us now. Quickly though, I must follow that up by reminding us that God not only looks for us to enjoy His gifts but also to share them with others and to use them to promote His purposes. Since the blessings of the kingdom are only partially here we must remember that, sometimes, and with some persons, there will be a lack which we are to meet thru the sharing of what we have.

One issue that divides Christians is the question of whether believers should expect financial and physical prosperity or not. Some there are who say Christians ought to be wealthy and healthy because these things are rights of God's children, these things are kingdom blessings. And I agree. I agree that they are kingdom blessings, but again, the kingdom is not fully here, and so, Christians will not necessarily be physically and financially well in this age - but, on the other hand, we should expect that where there is the presence and blessing of Christ that there will be less poverty and less sickness. The more a society is given over to God's word and will the more that society will prosper in every way - but until the consummation of the age, until the perfect comes we abide in a cursed and fallen world where there are layoffs, and famines, and cancers and heartaches.

Still, there is more to be said for this life. For, right now, we experience righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Right now, we enjoy things beautiful and pleasant. Considering that I'm living on a cursed planet, my life isn't half bad. Many of the blessings of the kingdom we enjoy now and they are enjoyed even more by the child of God because we know that these good things are down payments on the future. One brother in our church who lost his job a while back told me that he has a rich grandpa, and he expects a nice inheritance when his grandfather passes on, but, he said, his grandfather just recently gave him a rather large check to help him out in the present crunch. Sort of a foretaste of what's ahead, and that's how Christians should view our present blessings. We enjoy now the presence of God's Spirit, but Ephesians 1:14 says the Holy Spirit is only a pledge of our inheritance. We enjoy now a measure of strength and comfort but this is nothing compared to what's ahead. We enjoy now the sweetness of Christian fellowship, but how much better it will be in glory. We enjoy now the beauty and bounty of physical pleasures and sensual delights but these will be so much brighter and purer in the world to come. We experience now the grandeur of worshipping God but this is only a small taste of what it will be like in heaven. All that we enjoy now we will have more purely and more perfectly in the kingdom of God. Hendrikus Berkhof says (Hoekema p.21) *With us human beings hope for a happy future usually rises from poverty and uncertainty; the Christian's hope, however, rises from a possession which opens many more vistas for the future. That is why hope is regularly found in connection with faith and love, which are both possessions. But the very fact that we possess makes us feel painfully what we still miss. Hope therefore is the fruit of both possession and lack.* Great insight! It reminds me of the words of Jesus, that to him who has shall more be given. So, we see our prosperity in this life as a gift of God to enjoy with thanksgiving, to share sacrificially with others, and to direct our mind toward the consummation of the age when we will enter into the joy of our Master.

The second thing we need to view from a kingdom perspective is suffering. I have already spoken to this in part under the previous heading, but there are a few things I need to add. First is this: Our prosperity reminds us to look ahead to what will be. So does suffering. Berkhof said our hope is founded in our possession and our lack and that is so true. When we suffer we find comfort in knowing that this condition of weakness is not always going to be with us. We see that God's kingdom will come in perfection some day and He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more sin, no more sickness, no more death. Praise God! Romans 8:**18**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. That is the kingdom perspective and in that is hope and strength to endure. For the kingdom is real - but so is the curse - and for now we experience both. We are redeemed people in a fallen world and should not be surprised by prosperity or suffering. Jesus promised us both didn't He? He said you will have great joy and abundant life and suffer hardship for my name's sake. But a kingdom perspective fills us with hope because we know that suffering is on the way out and prosperity is on the way in. Can I get an amen somebody?

The third thing we need to view from a kingdom perspective is people, or persons, homo-sapiens, mortals, whatever you want to call them. We need to understand something about the non-Christian and, that is, that he is in big trouble. The more Jesus expresses His dominion the more will He crush those who stand in opposition. For the unrepentant the coming of God's kingdom is the guarantee of eternal judgment. His only hope is to be swept up by a wave of grace into the kingdom of Jesus before it's too late. His only hope is to be born again because Jesus said *unless a man is born from above he cannot* what? He cannot *see the kingdom of God*. Non-Christian people think you are weird because you are into this Jesus stuff. They don't see anything to it, and you need to understand that they are utterly blind to kingdom realities. They are still living in the devil's darkness and may even be happy there for now. To see lost people from a kingdom perspective means to pity them. Even if they are on the top rung of the social ladder, pity them, pray for them and seek opportunities to speak truth to them.

Then the kingdom informs our view of Christians, both ourselves and others. The truth of the now and the not-yet reminds me that I need to be patient with myself and others. Hebrews 12:14 says that *without holiness no one will see the Lord*. II Corinthians 5 says that in Christ we are new creatures. We have every right to expect and demand that Christians be different from unbelievers, that children of the kingdom would act like it and express the power of that kingdom in their lives but, but, but, because the powers of the kingdom are not fully in force, because we still carry around the old man until the resurrection we will continue to fail and to sin. We must be patient with each other. Don't demand perfection. That is for another day. I like the old line that goes like this. "To dwell above, with the saints we love, oh yes, that will be glory. But to dwell below with the saints we know, well that's another story." And it is so because of where we are in redemptive history. A long time ago I attended the Bill Gothard

seminar in Basic Youth Conflicts where they gave me a little button at the end that said PBPWMGIFWY. That stood for “Please Be patient with me God isn’t finished with me yet.” And that’s right. We are a people in process.® Understand that. Be patient with others and for yourself make sure that you continue to grow into Christ-likeness.

Well, not only do we need to be patient with what we are but we need to eagerly await what we will become. Philippians 3:20-21 *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.* The Scriptures say that at the consummation of the kingdom we will be made glorious like our Savior, that we will be perfected in holiness, that we will reign with Christ. Did you know that about yourself? Did you know that about the lady next to you? C.S. Lewis has written that if we could see our fellow-Christians as they will be in glory we would be tempted to fall down and worship them, so awesome and magnificent shall we be. I love the story of the old lady at the retirement home who approached a man there sitting on a bench and said to him, “Why you look just like my third husband.” “Oh really,” he replied, “how many husbands have you had?” She said, “Two.” You see, we need to view people for more than they appear. We need to see them for what they can be and what they are becoming in Christ. You probably weren’t tempted to worship the fella sitting in front of you this morning but one day he’ll be pretty special so you treat him with respect. I John 3:2a *Beloved, now we are children of God.* That is part of kingdom life in the present. We don’t wait for that, but there’s more. 2 *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.* Now look at the next verse. Look at it. 3 *everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* We are people in process. We know the glorious goal set before us and because we do we are diligent to grow in holiness now.

Man, I don’t know about you but I feel set free by these truths. I feel lifted up and encouraged - just to reflect on what God has waiting for us. It’s gonna be good isn’t it? And it’s good now. Right now, because Christ is Lord, we have, in part, all that will be ours in the age to come. That’s why I talk about the presence of the future. We can enjoy the riches of heaven now, to some extent. Ron Jenson tells of how he was sitting on a plane one day next to the CEO of a major corporation and they were having a lovely time talking until this man asked Jenson, “What do you do?” Jenson told him, “I work with a school of theology.” This man suddenly

reeled around and looked at Ron with anger in his eyes and with bitterness in his tone he said, “You mean to tell me that you’re a Christian?!” How would you respond if some big shot said that to you? Oh, we can be so intimidated and defensive, but listen to what Ron Jenson said. He looked back at this fella and said, “You mean to tell me that you’re not a Christian!?” This took the other guy by surprise so he says, “what do you mean?” Ron explained, “I’m going to heaven how about you? I have a degree of peace and love and joy in my life what about you? I believe in a book that gives me a sense of right and wrong, some absolutes for my life what about you? I have a sense of destiny, my life is going to count beyond the grave, what about you? What do you have to give me? The fella hung his head and said, “Not a thing.” The world has nothing to offer the children of God but do we have something to offer the world? You better believe it. And we need to make it known and declare as Jesus did, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe the gospel” - Let’s pray-