

Living in the Kingdom While Waiting for the Kingdom (Romans 12:9–21)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (3/26/2023)

Introduction

This week I was confronted with Scripture from Romans 12 and the section denoting marks of a true Christian (vv. 9–13). In verse 12, Paul states that believers should “*rejoice in hope, be patient [or endure] in tribulation, [and] be constant [to give unremitting care] in prayer*” (Romans 12:12). Here is a great three-point sermon in itself. How are believers to survive the days we are in?

Hope is faith resting in promises not yet realized. Hope gives the saints confidence in present trials by knowing a glorious day free of all trial awaits in the eternal kingdom of God the Father. Now in the present hour, saints are to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), knowing that “*we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord*” (v. 8). But, in the meantime, “*we make it our aim to please him*” (v. 9). How do they do this? We are “*to continue in the faith [so] that through many tribulations we ... enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 1:4–7).

Paul presents an issue we must pursue by asking some questions: What did he mean by saying that “*we must enter the kingdom of God*”? Is the kingdom future? Yes. Is the kingdom now? Yes. Paul answers the question in 1 Corinthians 15. There are *two* aspects of the kingdom, one present and one future. Christ is now reigning in the period of kingdom *conquest* (v. 25; fulfilling Psalm 110:1). After the last resurrection, Jesus will turn the kingdom over to the Father (v. 24). Jesus will then begin His eternal reign (Daniel 7:13, 14).

So, we live as kingdom citizens, rejoicing in the hope of our glorious future free of sin, death, and suffering. In the meantime, we endure tribulation, knowing that He will never leave or forsake us. Because of this truth, we are to give be constant unremitting care to praying.

I. The Present State of the Kingdom of God

1. Jesus’ teaching corrected the Jews’ mistaken concept of the kingdom of God, which lead to their erroneous expectation that God would restore the Davidic kingdom to Israel.
 - a. To understand the true nature of the kingdom of God that corrects the error of the Jews, one must understand that there are *two Days of the Lord* (Malachi 4).
 - b. The *two Days of the Lord* are (1) for judgment on the old-covenant age and (2) for judgment on the new-covenant age. Jesus announced the first one when He declared that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi (Matthew 11:14). Remember, the Day of the Lord is designed “*to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.*”
2. Jesus’ explanation of Malachi 4 is found in Matthew 14 where He dealt with the imprisoned John, whose circumstances caused him to question whether Jesus was the Messiah. His imprisonment by Herod had taken place early in the Lord’s public ministry (Matthew 4:12).
 - a. His questioning was due to his not understanding the true nature of God’s kingdom. Thus, he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask whether Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 11:3). Jesus sent them back to John, reminding him that He was fulfilling all the prophetic signs that identified the Messiah (v. 5, alluding to passages in Isaiah—8:14–15; 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:18; 61:1).
 - a. Afterward, He turned to the people with Him and declared John to be the greatest born to women (Matthew 11:11). This declaration was followed by some very important truth couched in somewhat obscure language (see v. 15).

The first thing that Jesus said was that the true kingdom of God suffered violence by the wicked (Matthew 11:12), meaning that the old covenant aspect of the kingdom of God would suffer violence when they rejected Jesus and attempted to take the kingdom by force to establish the kingdom of Israel. God ended that effort in AD 70.

Curiously, Jesus followed by stating that the least in the kingdom of was greater than John (v. 11). Jesus was declaring that the new covenant kingdom had a new standard (Matthew 5:3; James 2:5). Elijah had come and the old covenant *Day of the Lord*, judgment day, was about to come (Malachi 4:1). A new covenant kingdom day was dawning. The new covenant era would rise out of the ashes of the first *Day of the Lord*.

- b. Jesus also declared the present status of the kingdom of God (Luke 16:14–17), where again, Jesus revealed that the false expectation of the kingdom would be the means whereby the Jews would reject the true kingdom and crucify their King.

II. The Present Duty of Believers in the Kingdom of God

1. We are living in the first manifestation of the kingdom of God—the kingdom of the Son (Hebrews 12:28, 29). However, we yearn for the future manifestation of the eternal kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:1–5).
2. We are to recognize that the kingdom must take first place in our lives (Matthew 6:33). It is our duty to invite all around us to leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the kingdom of light and prepare for the coming day of the Lord (2 Timothy 4:1, 2). We also recognize that one day, we will give account to the Judge on the Day of the Lord to come (2 Corinthians 5:9, 10).
3. Realize that we are obligated in the here and now to conform to kingdom principles (1 Corinthians 15:50; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Peter 1:10, 11).

Many are self-deceived, believing that if they do something, God must save them, but they evidence no change in their behavior or priorities. Paul warned, “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

Conclusion

So, how do we live in this now-but-not-yet kingdom age? We are to “*rejoice in hope* [anticipating the glorious day to experience when Jesus comes], [in the meantime, we are to] *be patient* [or *endure*] *in tribulation*, [because the world hates our King; and] *be constant* [to give unremitting care] *in prayer* [focusing on the needs and concerns of those around us, seeking God’s will for them]” (Romans 12:12; Colossians 1:10–14).

“*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen*” (Revelation 1:5, 6).