

## 1. 'Thy kingdom come.'

We're beginning a new sermon series today on the topic of the church and it's a topic which has caused lots of confusion in the religious world. It's caused confusion because people claim there are many churches and one church is just as good as the next. But the truth of the matter is that the Bible only knows of and speaks about one church, the church that Jesus came to establish and purchase with His own blood.

A young boy was watching his father, who was a preacher, writing a sermon one day and the young boy said, 'dad, how do you know what to write and say?' his father thought for a moment and said, 'well, God tells me what to write and say.' The young boy looked at his father in the eyes and said, 'if God tells you what to write and say, then why do you keep crossing things out?'

Many people today refuse to believe that the church was prophesied about in the Old Testament and so in effect they have to cross out everything God said about the coming of His church in the Old Testament. So, I would like us to begin our journey back in **Genesis 3:15** where God said to the serpent after the fall of man, 'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.' God promised that Jesus, the head crusher would come and destroy the devil. **What has this promise got to do with the church?** Well, Jesus didn't come just to defeat the evil one, He had to come to die in order to establish His church.

Now turn with me to **Genesis 12:1-3** 'The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' **What has this promise got to do with the church?** This promise of making 'a great nation' to Abraham, was going to be partly fulfilled when Israel became a nation.

Now turn with me to **Exodus 19:5+6** 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Now notice the four promises of God concerning the Israelites, if they obeyed Him and kept their side of the agreement.

God says, 'out of all nations', in other words out of all the people who were around at this time God deliberately chose them. **But why? Why these guys?** Well it's certainly not because they were better than all the other people around them. No! God chose Israel because He had plans to save the world through them.

And God says, I'm choosing you because 'you will be my treasured possession.' Think about the most valuable jewellery you possess, think about all the gold and silver in the world, think about expensive pearls and precious stones. God says, because I brought you out of slavery and bondage, you guys are going to be my personal treasure, that's how much your worth to me.

And notice the word 'possession', in the Gospel's we read about people being 'possessed' with an evil spirit. When a person became possessed by an evil spirit, the evil spirit took over their lives and took full control of their lives. Well, in much the same way, God's people need to be possessed by God, He owns us, He lives in us and we need to allow Him to do whatever He wants us to do.

And then God says, 'you will be a kingdom of priests.' You see loved ones a kingdom needs a king and God was to be their King. **But what was a priest's duty?** Well if a prophet's job was to speak to the people on behalf of God, then the priest's duty was to speak to God on behalf of the people. The priest was the mediator between God and man, in other words, they had the job of reconciling the world back to God.

And finally, God says, 'you will be a holy nation.' The word 'holy' means set apart and Israel was set apart from all the other nations for the purpose of preserving and sharing the knowledge and worship of God. Now again, you might ask, **what has all this got to do with the church?**

Loved ones, the promise of the head crusher, the promise to Abraham concerning a great nation, God choosing Israel was God's way of bringing the Messiah into the world to die for us and establish His church. God's mission has always been to reconcile the world back to Himself through His Son and His church.

Now there are many prophecies concerning the coming of the church in the Old Testament but today we're just going to focus our attention on one. Please turn your Bibles to the **Book of Daniel**.

The prophet Daniel prophesied about the church when he was interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

**Daniel 2:31-35** 'Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.'

Now notice that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which he saw a great image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron and feet of part iron and clay. He saw a stone, cut out without human hands, strike the image upon its feet and destroy it, the stone went on to become a great mountain filling the earth. The king was troubled about the dream, but was unable to interpret it and so, it was at this point that Daniel came on the scene, and he was able to interpret the King's dream.

Now let's read on in **Daniel 2:39-44** 'After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.'

Again, notice what Daniel says, he told Nebuchadnezzar that he, as the king of Babylon, was the head of gold and after him would arise another kingdom inferior to his kingdom, then a third kingdom would arise, followed by a fourth. Since the stone was to strike the image in his feet, and since the feet represent the fourth kingdom, it follows that the kingdom of God was to be set up during the existence of that fourth kingdom.

**Now who are these different kingdoms?** The **first** kingdom was Babylon of whom Nebuchadnezzar was king and this is represented by the '**head of gold**' and we know that Babylon fell around **536 B.C.** The **second** kingdom was Medo-Persia of whom Cyrus, was the king of Persia, and Darius was the king of Media, this is represented by the '**breast and arms of silver**' and this kingdom fell around **330 B.C.** The **third** kingdom was Macedonia, the Greek empire, this kingdom was established by Alexander the Great and later divided among his generals around **323 B.C.** this kingdom is represented by the '**belly and thighs of brass.**' The **fourth** kingdom was the Roman Empire, this was established as a world empire by Octavius Caesar about **30 B.C.** this kingdom is represented by '**legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay.**'

Now notice the phrase in **Daniel 2:44** '**In the time of those kings**'. In other words, during the time when Rome ruled the world, '**the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.**' **What's Daniel talking about? When is this kingdom that God is going to set up going to be fulfilled?**

Now as we turn to the New Testament, notice who's ruling the world at this time. **Luke 3:1+2** '**In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.**'

The Romans were ruling the world and it was during this time that Daniel prophesied that God would set up His kingdom. **Now did that time come? Did Daniel's prophecy see it's fulfilment during this time? Matthew 3:1+2** '**In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'**

For almost 2½ thousand years, the Jews had longed for the kingdom to come.

Way back in Old Testament times, God had promised, He would establish a kingdom, which would endure forever. There has been silence from the prophets for 400 years until John the Baptist came and stood on the banks of the River Jordan and said, **“Repent” Why? “For the kingdom of heaven has come near.”**

Now the Jews were waiting on a physical kingdom being established, they were waiting on the Messiah coming to get rid of these filthy Roman dictators. But Jesus said in **Matthew 5:44**, **“You are to love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.”** So, the people were looking for a physical kingdom, a material kingdom but Jesus says, **“Listen it’s not a physical kingdom but a spiritual kingdom.”** He says, **“This is what the Old Testament prophets were talking about.”** Remember what Jesus said in front of Pontius Pilate in **John 18:36**, **“My kingdom is not of this world, otherwise my servants would fight.”**

And Jesus mentions something else about the kingdom too, the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament is a spiritual kingdom, which is also known by other names. Let me give you an example, we all know that the church is referred to by various other names, sometimes it called **‘the body’**. **Ephesians 1:22+23** **‘And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.’**

Sometimes the church is referred to as **‘God’s household’**, **1 Timothy 3:15** **‘if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.’**

Well, in much the same way, the kingdom also refers to **‘the church’**. **Matthew 16:18+19** **‘And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’**

Now notice that Jesus promised to build His **‘church’** and gave Peter the keys of the **‘kingdom.’** It seems to me that the word **‘church’** and **‘kingdom’** are both referring to one in the same place. If you’re in the church, you’re in the kingdom, if you’re in the kingdom, you’re in the church. It would make no sense at all to say, **‘I will build a house and give you the keys to my car.’** But it would make sense to say, **‘I will build a car and give you the keys to my automobile,’** because both terms are used for the same thing.

Jesus building His church is the same as Jesus building His kingdom, that same kingdom that Daniel prophesied about. Notice He gave Peter **‘keys’** plural, one key was used to open the way to God for the Jews in **Acts 2** and another key was used to open the way to God for the Gentiles in **Acts 10**.

Now when Jesus said in **Matthew 6:10** **‘your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’** **Did that kingdom come in the life time of Jesus?** Look at **Mark 9:1** **‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.’** Now loved ones either Jesus’ kingdom came during His lifetime or there are people walking around today who are at least 2000 years old!

God’s kingdom did come and it was established during the reign of the Romans Empire just like Daniel said it would. But this kingdom came with a price, **Acts 20:28** **‘Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.’** It cost Jesus His very life to bring the church into existence.

You see loved ones, the church has always been God’s plan, even before the foundation of the earth. But He needed Jesus to come and crush Satan, He needed to fulfil the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through Israel as a nation, He needed Jesus to come to die and establish His church.

Now all this may sound a little mysterious to you but that’s ok because until Jesus died it was a mystery to everyone else too. Paul tells us why in **Ephesians 3:7-12** **‘I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.’**

Paul recognised he needed God’s grace and he recognised that he needs to tell others that they too need God’s grace.

Paul says that those things that he preached weren't conceived in the minds of religious men who thought up a way to be right with God, the riches of the grace of God were revealed to man by God. The word 'mystery' is 'mysterion' in Greek and Paul uses this word 7 times in the **Book of Ephesians** and it means something that was once hidden. **So, what was the mystery? What was kept hidden in God?**

**A Christian was being challenged by a very sincere Muslim one time, he said, 'you know, when we Muslims go to Mecca, at least we can find the coffin of Mohammed, our great prophet. But when you Christians visit Palestine, all you find is an empty grave.'** **The Christian replied and said, 'that is just the difference, Mohammed is dead and still in his casket. All other religious leaders are dead, but Jesus Christ, whose kingdom includes all nations and all races of different colours, isn't in a Palestinian grave. He is risen from the dead and lives and rules forever.'**

The mystery was the Gospel, if anyone believed in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, they could be saved. But it wasn't just the Gospel that was a mystery, the whole concept of the church was a mystery too. **Ephesians 5:25-32** "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church."

You see, Satan and all the angelic beings didn't know about the mystery that God had in store for the coming of the Son of God. And despite the prophets speaking about these things, they didn't understand what they wrote. That's what Peter's point is when he wrote in **2 Peter 1:20+21** 'Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'

Now Satan knew that something was up concerning the fulfilment of the prophecy that God had made concerning his crushing but he didn't know the full story until Jesus was resurrected from the dead. And notice that phrase in **Ephesians 3:11**, 'His eternal purpose'. The plan of God to redeem mankind was accomplished in Christ and the church was God's plan before the creation of the world. Jesus had to die and rise from the grave in order to accomplish God's eternal goal of reconciling all of mankind and bringing them to Himself through His Son. And because of Jesus and our faith in Him, we can approach God with freedom and confidence.

The concept of the Gospel, the concept of the church was once hidden from mankind but now Paul says, the whole plan has been revealed to mankind by God. **Do you realise who you are and to Whom you belong too?** Turn your Bibles back to **Exodus 19:5+6** 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Now remember all the Israelites were supposed to be a kingdom of priests but because they built a golden calf when Moses and Joshua were up the mountain, God punished them. And in **Exodus 32** where the people had to choose sides, only the Levites stood with Moses. **Exodus 32:25+26** 'Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So, he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.' Because the Levites were the only ones for the Lord, they were chosen to serve as Priests in God's tabernacle and from that time on, only a Levite could serve in the tabernacle and the temple. But loved ones, God's original plan was for all the Israelites to go out and reconcile the world back to Him and to tell the nations around them about who He is.

**Do you realise, if you're a Christian this morning, that you are a part of that same plan today?** **1 Peter 2:9+10** 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'

The Israelites were a chosen people, Christians are a chosen people. The Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests, Christians are a part of a royal priesthood. The Israelites were a holy nation, Christians are a holy nation. The Israelites were God's treasured possession, Christians are God's special possession. The Israelites weren't a people, Christians weren't a people.

Loved ones, you are a Christian who belongs to God, **why?** Because God did something for you which you could never do for yourself. He **'called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'**

**Revelation 1:5+6 "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."**

**Colossians 1:13+14 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."**

**Do we understand that we couldn't save ourselves? Do we really understand that we are sinners in need of rescuing?** You can always tell the people who don't understand, they are the ones who are constantly complaining and moaning about something and other people. They are the ones who constantly point out the speck in someone else's eye whilst ignoring the plank in their own eye.

But you can always tell the people who do understand, they are the ones who are always, **'declaring His praises'**. They're always rejoicing in God for what He has done for them in the past and continues to do for them in their lives. They know that **'once they were not a people, but now they are the people of God'**. They know that **'once they hadn't received mercy, but now they have received mercy.'**

If we truly believe that we belong to God and we truly believe that we are His people, those beliefs should be reflected in everything we do, say and think. **Proverbs 23:7 "As a man believes in his heart, so he is."** Don't tell me you belong to God if you're purposely getting involved in sin. Don't tell me you belong to God if you don't regularly pray to Him and give Him thanks for what He has done in your life. Don't tell me you're a Christian if you're not willing to forgive someone whose wronged you. Don't tell me you're a Christian if you're not willing help the helpless and the needy.

You see, the word **'Christian'** isn't a title, it's who we are, it's a reflection of who we belong to. And in every department of life, we should be demonstrating to the world what God is like and how life is to be lived in His kingdom, the church.

You see loved ones, it's not what we eat but what we digest that makes us strong. It's not what we gain but what we save that makes us rich. It's not what we read but what we remember that makes us learned. And it's not what we preach but what we practice that makes us Christians. God wants us as His church, to do what the nation of Israel failed to do and that's to go out into our world, to share with the people in our world how they can be reconciled back to God.

And if you're not a Christian this morning, then please know this, when I'm speaking about the church, I'm not talking about a building, I'm talking about the people, it's the people who are the church. And you too can become a part of the kingdom not made with human hands, God's kingdom, the church. Ask yourself, **do you believe the good news that Jesus died for you because you have a sin problem? Do you believe that He was buried and rose again three days later so that you too can live forever with Him in His everlasting kingdom?**

If you do then please don't leave here today without speaking to someone about how you can enter the kingdom of God, His church.