**The Nature of the Kingdom of Christ**

**Dan. 2:44**

Introduction:

1. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon dreamed of a great statue.

 a. Its head was of gold; its breast and arms were of silver, its belly and its thighs of

 bronze, its legs of iron and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

 b. Daniel, the Hebrew captive, interpreted the dream. He said the dream represented

 four kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar represented the first. The next three world

 empires after him were the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek Empire and the Roman

 Empire.

2. Daniel said, “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.”

3. This was not the first time God had revealed that He would set up a kingdom.

 a. When Jacob blessed his sons he spoke of the ruler’s staff between Judah’s feet

 (Gen. 49:10).

 b. When the nation later asked for a king, God appointed Saul, but He promised to

 build David’s house and to establish the throne of His kingdom forever (2 Sam.

 7:12).

 c. But now, during Nebuchadnezzar’s day there was no king on the throne of David.

 d. But other prophets had spoken of the coming of a kingdom in which God would set

 one of David’s descendants upon the throne.

4. Like the kings of the four great world empires one would expect that this King would take His position by the execution of military and political power.

5. So the Jews of the first century were an expectant people. They were looking for the kingdom that God would set up that would crush and put an end to all other kingdoms and then endure forever.

6. I believe that Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was praying for God to set up His kingdom when an angel appeared to him and told him he was going to have a son, who would turn people’s hearts in order to make ready a people for God’s King.

7. The anticipation must have been intensified when the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary and said of the child she was about to have, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Lk. 1:32-33).

8. BUT as God began to execute His plan it seemed that things were going in the wrong direction.

Discussion:

I. When John the Baptist began his work of preparing the way for the King his approach was different.

 A. While it involved rallying people together, it did not involve collecting finances,

 creating an army, or anything of that nature. Instead he preached repentance.

 1. This is a rather unusual approach for inaugurating a kingdom.

 2. People came to him confessing their sins and being baptized by him.

 B. He anchored his message in the O.T. prophets saying, “Repent for the kingdom of

 heaven is at hand.”

 1. Identifying it as the kingdom of heaven identified God as its source.

 2. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Lk. 3:3).

 3. “What would forgiveness of sins have to do with establishing a kingdom?” but

 good Jews might not see this as odd. Their government had been a

 theocracy. Civil and religious rule were together. There was no separation of

 church and state.

 C. This repentance involved a change in direction evidenced by changes in moral

 behavior.

 1. Pharisees and Sadducees were commanded to bear fruit in keeping with their

 repentance (Matt. 3:7) and not depend on their lineage as descendants of

 Abraham (Lk. 3:8).

 2. The crowds were told to share their tunics and food.

 3. Tax collectors were told to “collect no more than what you have been ordered

 to.”

 4. Soldiers were told, “not to take money from anyone by force, or accuse

 anyone falsely, and to be content with their wages.”

 5. What kind of kingdom is prepared for by repentance, sharing, rather than

 greediness, truth rather than falsehood and contentment are the necessary

 preparations?

 D. John’s message included a warning to “flee from the wrath to come.”

 1. He spoke of “an axe already being laid at the root of the trees.” If people did

 not repent they would be cut down.

 2. He said the king would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

 3. He said the king would gather His wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff

 with unquenchable fire.

 E. What about developing a political movement? Raising an army? Creating a

 military rebellion? John does none of that.

 1. Herod slaughtered babies in order to remove any threat to his position (Matt.

 2:11).

 2. John was locked up in prison, not for political upheaval, but for condemning

 Herod for taking his brother’s wife (Lk. 3:19-20).

II. When Jesus, the new King, began His ministry, He aligned Himself with John.

 A. He was baptized by John and thus validated John’s call to repentance.

 B. He began preaching in the synagogues. At Nazareth He anchored His identity in

 Isa. 61:1-2.

 1. He would preach the gospel to the poor.

 2. Proclaim release to captives.

 3. Recovery of sight to the blind.

 4. Set free the oppressed.

 5. But it was not economic prosperity that He was promising. He was not

 promising release for those improperly imprisoned. Instead He was promising

 physical, mental, moral and spiritual healing. It is evident in His work. He cast

 out demons, healed diseases, and forgave sins.

 C. What kind of King and kingdom would this be? These are not the “normal”

 practices of those establishing kingdoms. Teaching and healing?? Inexhaustible

 kindness and complete understanding?? This is not the method of

 Nebuchardnezzar, the Medo-Persian kings, Alexander the Great, nor the Romans.

 D. People were shocked by his unconventional ways.

 1. The religious leaders were shocked by his mixing with undesirable people.

 He said they needed him (Lk. 5:29-32).

 2. He welcomed women, Samaritans and children and even His closest followers

 seemed shocked (Jn. 4:7ff, 27; Matt. 19:14; Lk. 18:16; Mk. 10:14).

 3. Even John the Baptist questioned whether He was the Expected One or

 should they look for someone else. He said, “Go and report to John what you

 have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are

 cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel

 preached to them. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me” (Lk. 7:22-

 23). He quoted from Isa. 35:5; 61:1. The nature of His kingdom was consistent

 with prophecy. Unconventional by the world’s standards, but consistent with

 heaven’s plan.

 4. The Pharisees and lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves (Lk. 7:28-

 30). Note Lk. 7:31-34.

 5. He did not amass wealth. Instead he said, “Do not lay up treasures on the

 earth.” He did not have a place to lay his head. He said, “Sell your

 possessions and give to charity” (Lk. 12:23) as he stressed focusing on

 “treasures in heaven.” No focus on land, palaces, power, prestige, or wealth,

 but devotion, service and sacrifice.

 E. Some sought to take him by force to make Him king. He withdrew from them (Jn.

 6:15). And when He predicted His death Peter rebuked Him (Matt. 16:21-22).

 Many incidents like this are confusing.

 1. The people are ready to make Him king and He withdraws?

 2. But predicts His death? The supposed King is going to die? But what about

 establishing His kingdom?

 3. The triumphal entry reveals the people’s perception that He is a king, but He

 comes into the city riding on a donkey in humility (Mk. 11:1-11). No white

 horse? No great procession? What kind of King can this be?

 4. As the disciples argue about who is the greatest among them He turns their

 perceptions upside down (Lk. 22:24; the greatest must be like the youngest

 and the leader like the servant).

 5. When on trial before Pilate, Pilate asks, Are you a king? Jesus answers,

 “Yes,” but then diminishes any perceived threat to Pilate by saying, “My

 kingdom is not of this world or my servants would fight” (Jn. 18:36). A king

 who has servants who do not fight for Him?

III. The cross is the culmination of the direction of this kingdom—a king crucified in humiliation and this same direction continued in the preaching of the early church.

 A. What kind of kingdom is this who has a crucified King? What kind of kingdom is

 this that has a humiliated King?

 B. God has a kingdom founded on the humiliation of His King.

 1. God raised Him from the dead. This is what Peter preached on Pentecost.

 2. This was their message (Acts 17:7).

 3. This is the kingdom that they preached (Acts 28:31).

IV. What does this mean for us?

 A. Christ’s Kingdom is not a political and military kind of kingdom. That is not its

 nature.

 B. It is a kingdom built upon the King’s sacrifice and humiliation.

 C. It involves healing (especially spiritual healing), kindness and complete

 understanding.

 D. It involves repentance—a change of direction, away from the ways typical ways of

 the world and turning toward God. This turning finds its evidence in such things as

 sharing what you have with others, not being greedy, not extorting money from

 others, not accusing them falsely (in other words being truthful) and being content

 with your wages.

 E. Note again that it is a matter of direction, not mere directions. Christ’s kingdom

 involves serving not being served!

 1. Revealed through Moses (Deut. 17:14ff). Cf. 1 Sam. 12:12ff.

 2. Revealed through Samuel (1 Sam. 8:10ff).

 3. What this means is that the Kingdom of God is a benefit to us. And that as

 citizens in that Kingdom we are to be a benefit to others. It is not about what we

 can get, but about what we can give. That’s the nature of the Kingdom. It

 destroys worldly kingdoms by going in a totally different direction. It transforms

 hearts and leads others to be like the King.

Conclusion:

1. Do you understand the nature of this kingdom?

2. Are you executing this direction in your life?

3. Will you repent?