**A Question About the Future**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 A woman went to see a psychic to ask about her future. After the psychic gazed into her crystal ball for a moment, a disturbed look came across her face. When the woman asked, “What is it?” she replied: “You must prepare yourself to be a widow. Your husband is going to be murdered.” Hearing that, the woman was visibly shaken, but managed to compose herself enough to ask one more question: “Will I be acquitted?”

 Well, I suppose everyone has questions about the future, even the 12 apostles—although they had enough sense to ask the Lord about the future, rather than a psychic, as we see in our opening text:

 **“When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).**

Now the kingdom they were asking about was the kingdom Daniel predicted in Daniel 2:44:

**“…*in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom,* which shall never be destroyed…it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, *and it shall stand for ever”***

As you can see, God is not going to let this sorry world continue to be ruled by kings and rulers who don’t love and honor Him. Men who pass laws that don’t reflect what He says in His Word will one day be a thing of the past once He sends His Son back to *conquer* the kingdoms of men and establish *His* kingdom on earth.

 Now it’s no surprise as to why the 12 would ask about this kingdom, for the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of little else during the three years of His ministry to them. The word “kingdom” appears *55 times* in the gospel of Matthew alone, and most of those references have to do with the kingdom of God. In addition, the Lord had taught them to *pray* for the coming of His kingdom. When they asked Him how to pray (Luke 11:1),

**“He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. *Thy kingdom come.* Thy will be done in earth, as in heaven, so in earth” (Luke 11:2).**

As you can see, when the kingdom comes, the will of God will be done in earth as it is in heaven. If you’re wondering, “Isn’t God’s will being done on earth *now?”* the answer is yes, but not like it is in heaven! On earth, the will of God is done by *some* of the inhabitants of the earth *some of the time.* In heaven, the will of God is done by *all* of the inhabitants of the earth *all of the time.* And someday that’s how it will be done on earth too.

 If that sounds heavenly to you, why not give it a try in your own personal life? People talk a lot about having “heaven on earth,” and that’s something the world won’t have until the kingdom comes. But you can have it *now* by doing God’s will all the timein your life. Try it and see. What have you got to lose? Imagine living your life on the very highest spiritual plane, living life as it is lived in heaven.

 But after the Lord told the 12 about the kingdom for three years, He died and rose again, and then spent an *additional* “forty days” with them “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). And after three years and forty days of instruction about the kingdom, they probably knew everything there was to know about it—except the big question: was it time for the Lord to “restore” it to Israel?

 Now you’ll notice that they didn’t ask if it was time for the Lord to *create* the kingdom *for* Israel. They asked if He would now “restore” the kingdom *to* Israel. And you know what the word *restore* means, right? The dictionary says it means to bring something back to a former state from a state of ruin. Hair restoration for men has always been a booming industry, as aging men seek to bring their hair back to its former state. And that’s how the word *restore* is used in the Bible as well.

 Back in the Old Testament, a certain king got on the wrong side of one of God’s prophets, and speaking of that prophet, we read:

 **“…a man of God…cried…saying, Lay hold on him. *And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him*…And the king answered and said unto the man of God…pray for me, that my hand may be *restored me again*. And the man of God besought the Lord, *and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before”* (I Kings 13:1-6).**

Do you see what the words *restore again* mean there? That king had a perfectly good hand, but when he sinned God *judged* him, and his hand became dried up and useless, until the man of God restored it again and made it like it was before.

 So when the 12 asked if the Lord would restore again the kingdom to Israel, they weren’t asking if He would create something for the people of Israel they had never had before. They were asking if He would *restore* a kingdom to them that they had in the past, a kingdom that dried up and became useless to God.

They were thinking of the kingdom that Israel enjoyed under King David and King Solomon. When they were the kings of Israel, the nation reached her *zenith,* the height of her influence and power in the earth. At that time, she was the head of the nations and not the tail, as God promised she could be if her people obeyed Him (Deut. 28:13). This is why when the people of Israel looked to the Lord to restore their kingdom, they called it “the kingdom of our father David” (Mark 11:10).

The subsequent kings of Israel lost the kingdom due to their rebellion against God. But when that happened God planned to restore it *to the 12 apostles,* as the Lord promised them, saying,

**“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure *to give you the kingdom”* (Luke 12:32).**

God promised the people of Israel that He would “restore thy judges as at the first” in His kingdom (Isa. 1:26), and the Lord later promised the 12 apostles that they would “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19:28). This restoration of men who would judge Israel justly was just a part of God’s plan to restore again the kingdom to Israel.

 Now maybe you’ve been thinking that the restoration of Israel’s kingdom isn’t exactly the same as the restoration of a hand. I mean, that king’s hand was restored *to the same man who lost it,* but the kingdom won’t be restored to the same *men* who lost it. So in what sense could the kingdom be *restored* to them?

Well, consider that when King Saul lost *his* kingdom, His son Mephibosheth was accused of trying to get his dad’s kingdom back. His wicked servant accused him of saying,

**“…To day shall the house of Israel *restore me the kingdom of my father”***

**(II Samuel 16:3).**

Now Israel’s kingdom never did belong to Mephibosheth. But he would have inherited it if his father hadn’t gone and lost it by his sin and rebellion against God. It was only his kingdom in the sense that he was the *heir* of the kingdom. But because he was heir of the kingdom, it was legitimate to talk about restoring it to him.

 And the same was true for the little flock of the Lord’s followers. They never owned the kingdom, but it was theirs in the sense that they were “*heirs of the kingdom”* (James 2:5). So they could legitimately talk about the Lord *restoring* the kingdom *to them.*

But now there’s something you should know about the question that the 12 apostles asked about the kingdom. A lot of Bible commentators say that it was a stupid question, for they think the Lord never meant to establish a literal kingdom here on the earth, with a literal king, sitting on a literal throne, in one of earth’s literal cities.

 If you are wondering where they might get an idea like that, it’s a concept that they draw from a couple of different verses. First, they point to when the Lord said, “the kingdom of God *is within you”* (Luke 17:21). Well, that sure *sounds* like the Lord only meant to establish a kingdom within men’s hearts. The problem with drawing that conclusion from this verse is the context in which it is found. We need only back up one verse to learn who the Lord was addressing here, for it was

 **“…when He was demanded *of the Pharisees,* when the kingdom of God should come, he answered *them* and said…the kingdom of God is within *you”* (v. 20).**

Do you really think that the kingdom of God was within the hearts of those unsaved Pharisees? No! But what then could the Lord have meant when He told them that the kingdom was within them?

 Well, in that verse God was using that word “within” in the same way that He used it when He told His people in Israel,

**“The stranger *that is within thee* shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low” (Deuteronomy 28:43).**

Here God was speaking of the *Gentile* strangers who lived *among* the people of Israel (cf. Lev. 18:26). He warned His people that if they didn’t obey Him, He would let those strangers rise above them, and the Jews would be brought low.

 That means when the Lord told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was “within” them, He wasn’t saying it was in their hearts, He was saying it was *in their midst,* like the Gentile strangers were in the midst of the Jews. And what He meant by that was that as their king *He* was in their midst, and the kingdom was vested in Him! That’s why, when the Lord rode into Jerusalem, they cried,

**"Blessed be *the King* that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38).**

But in Mark’s version of the Lord’s words that day, we read:

**“Blessed be *the kingdom of our father David*, that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:10).**

Do you see how the kingdom of David that Israel lost and the Lord came to restore was vested in Him? When their King rode into Jerusalem that day, it was legitimate to say that *their kingdom* had ridden into town as well. And while the King was in the midst of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, *the kingdom was within them.* It was theirs for the asking. But it was never in the hearts of those wicked unsaved men.

 Another verse that men use to say the Lord never meant to establish a literal kingdom is found in John 19:16, where the Lord said to Pilate,

**“*My kingdom is not of this world:* if My kingdom *were* of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews…”**

Well now, you have to admit, that *too* soundslike the Lord didn’t mean to establish a literal kingdom! But look how the verse ends:

**“…but *now* is My kingdom not from hence” (John 19:16).**

Here the Lord went on to imply that eventually His kingdom *would* be a literal earthly kingdom, it just wasn’t one at that time. You see, He knew He had to die and rise again, then ascend into heaven to go and *get* the kingdom, and return to earth with it (Luke 19:11-15). That’s why the Lord didn’t let His servants “fight” to keep Him alive. When Peter sought to prevent Him from dying by hacking off a soldier’s ear with a sword, the Lord told him to knock it off.

 But when the Lord added that “now” His kingdom wasn’t that kind of kingdom, that means that someday it will be! We know it will be a literal kingdom with a literal earthly king, for that’s how the prophets describe it:

 **“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, *and a King shall reign and prosper*, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely” (Jeremiah 23:5,6).**

Let me ask you a question. Can a kingdom in the hearts of men “execute judgment and justice in the earth?” No, but a king who rules with a rod of iron can! And that’s how the Lord will rule the nations (Rev. 19:15). Let me ask another question. Can a kingdom in the hearts of men ensure that “Israel shall dwell safely?” No, but a king who rules with a rod of iron can!

 So the question the 12 asked the Lord wasn’t a stupid question. It’s the commentators who are stupid, for misunderstanding the restoration of Israel’s kingdom.

 Now here I hasten to add that they mean well. The reason they think the Lord only meant to establish a *spiritual*  kingdom in the hearts of men is that He left without establishing a literal kingdom. So if that’s what He came to do, *He must have failed.* So to keep the Lord form looking like a failure, Bible commentaries often say that He only came to set up a kingdom in the hearts of men. After all, that’s the only kind of kingdom God has had here on earth for the past 2,000 years, right?

 What they fail to recognize, of course, is *the mystery.* They fail to recognize that God *interrupted* His prophetic kingdom program with the dispensation of the mystery, and put Israel’s kingdom “on hold,” so to speak. They likewise fail to understand that after the Rapture puts an end to the present dispensation, the kingdom of David will be restored to the people of Israel in a literal fashion.

 Another way we know the commentaries are wrong is by the way the Lord *answered* the 12:

**“And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7).**

If the 12 were mistaken about the kind of kingdom the Lord meant to give them, don’t you think this would have been a good time for Him to tell them that? Wouldn’t you think He would have answered them by saying, “You boys got it all wrong, I only meant to establish a *spiritual* kingdom in men’s hearts.” But that’s *not* how He answered them! He didn’t slap His forehead and cry, “After three years and 40 days of instruction about the kingdom, you still don’t get it. There’s never going to be a literal kingdom!”

Instead He just said that it wasn’t for them to know if it was time to restore the kingdom. In other words, He graciously told them, “It’s none of your business!” Or as we used to say when I was a snotty kid, “That’s for me to know, and you to find out!”

Although the Bible doesn’t say for sure, I believe that the Lord knew the Jewish rulers would reject Peter’s offer of the kingdom (Acts 3:19) by stoning Stephen. But he couldn’t tell the 12 that, or they wouldn’t have been able to put much heart into their preaching, and Israel would have had an excuse on Judgment Day for not believing a message that was presented to them in a half-hearted way.

But now, what’s all this about “the times or the seasons” (Acts 1:7)? I believe this phrase is defined when Daniel used those words to say of God,

**“…He changeth the times and the seasons: *He removeth kings, and setteth up kings…”* (Daniel 2:21).**

As you can see, changing times and seasons means changing kings, and the season of time they reign in their kingdoms. Well, isn’t that how Daniel described the establishment of the kingdom of God, saying that His kingdom would remove the kingdoms of men by consuming them, and replacing them with *His* kingdom (Dan. 2:44)? It just wasn’t for the 12 to know the times and seasons. It wasn’t for them to know if it was time to restore the kingdom yet.

 But let me introduce you to some people who *did* know the times and seasons—and knew them pretty well! Paul wrote to the members of the Body of Christ living in Thessalonica,

**“*But of the times and the seasons*, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. *For yourselves know perfectly…”* (I Thessalonians 5:1,2).**

Unlike the 12 apostles, it was okay for the Thessalonians to know the times and the seasons. You see, they got saved after Israel rejected her kingdom and Paul introduced the mystery. So they knew what you know, that the mystery interrupted God’s kingdom program. This gave them a perfect understanding of God’s plan to remove the kingdoms of men after the conclusion of the dispensation of the mystery, and replace them with Himself.

 Do you know what an understanding of the times and the seasons will do for you? Look what it did for the folks in I Chronicles 12:32:

**“…the children of Issachar…*were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*…”**

 When it says that those men “had understanding of the times,” it means they knew where they stood in God’s timetable. And because of that, they knew what Israel ought to do. And the Thessalonians were like that! They knew Israel had rejected her kingdom, so they knew what *the Body of Christ* ought to do. They knew we shouldn’t be trying to *spiritualize* the promises of Israel’s kingdom in order to keep the Lord from looking like a failure. They knew we should be telling men about the mystery to explain why the Lord “failed” to establish a kingdom while He was here.

The bottom line is, God has always expected His children to operate on a need to know basis, and the 12 didn’t need to know if it was time for the Lord to establish the kingdom. All they needed to know was all that the Lord went on to tell them:

**“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).**

After the Holy Ghost came upon the Jewish kingdom believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), they were empowered to do things like speak in tongues and heal the sick. The Lord gave them that power to confirm the Word they preached (Mark 16:20). Remember, “the Jews *require* a sign” (I Cor. 1:22), and since the Lord was instructing the 12 to begin their world-wide witness with the Jews in Jerusalem, they *needed* that power in order to meet the Jews’ requirements.

Of course, now that those powers are all gone, if you want to confirm the Word that *you* preach, you have to show the power of God’s *grace* in your life. You must show it by letting His grace be sufficient for you when you are sick, as it was for Paul (II Cor. 12:7-9), instead of running to a pretend healer for some of his pretend healing.

Next, you’ll notice the Lord told the 12 that they would be His “witnesses.” When the Lord was here on earth, witnessing for Him meant witnessing the fact that He was Israel’s Christ, as John the Baptist did:

**“*John bare witness of Him,* and cried, *saying*, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: *for He was before me”* (John 1:15).**

John was able to witness that Jesus was the Christ because He had witnessed the Lord’s miracles (cf. John 14:11). That kind of goes along with the strict definition of the word “witness,” which refers to someone who saw something happen. When John’s faith began to flag after he was arrested and thrown in prison, the Lord reminded him of the mighty works he’d seen his master do (Luke 7:19-22) so that he would *continue* to witness that Jesus was their Christ.

But that kind of witnessing made the Pharisees angry*,* of course, for they didn’t *want* to believe that the Lord Jesus was their Christ. That’s why they were His chief enemies while He was here on earth. But once the Lord died and rose again, witnessing for the Lord involved witnessing the fact that He had risen from the dead (Acts 2:32; 3:14,15; 4:33). That made *the Sadducees* angry, for they didn’t believe the dead could rise (Mt. 23:33). So when the 12 went out *preaching* His resurrection, *the Sadducees* became His chief enemies, as we’ll see in our study of the Book of Acts yet to come.

By the way, all of this means that technically we can’t “witness” for the Lord. I mean, we can’t witness that Jesus was the Christ, for we didn’t witness the miracles He performed that *proved* He was the Christ. And we can’t witness the resurrection of Christ, for we didn’t see the many infallible proofs He presented that proved He was alive (Acts 1:3). That’s probably why the Apostle Paul never talks about “witnessing” for the Lord.

Now I’m not going to get upset if you use the word *witness* to describe your ministry to lost sinners. If you’re out there telling people about the Lord, you can call it anything you like, as far as I’m concerned. I’m just saying that technically we can’t *witness* for the Lord, for we weren’t eyewitnesses of any of the things that made the Lord’s people His witnesses back in Bible days.

But while we can’t witness for the Lord, we can *testify.* That’s the word the Apostle Paul used when He spoke of how the Lord had sent him “to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:23,24). That word “testify” means *to make a declaration to establish some fact.* You can’t say that you *witnessed* the Lord’s resurrection, but you can *testify* that He did, for you can testify that *that’s what the Bible says.* You can declare His resurrection to be a fact on that basis. And you can also testify to how the Lord’s resurrection changed your life when he saved you by His grace.

But do you know what all this means? It means the Lord’s enemies *today* aren’t people like the Pharisees, who don’t believe that Jesus was the Christ. And the Lord’s enemies today aren’t people like the Sadducees, who don’t believe He rose from the dead. The Lord’s enemies today are those who oppose the gospel of grace, as Paul tells us in Philippians 3:17-19, where he wrote,

**“Brethren, *be followers together of me*, and mark them which walk *so as ye have us for an ensample.* (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ”***

The Lord’s enemies today are *the enemies of the cross.* You’re not going to make enemies today telling people that Jesus was the Christ, or that He rose from the dead. But if you follow Paul in testifying the gospel of the grace of God, you’ll have plenty of enemies. Because to preach grace you have to preach *the cross,* not just the deity of Christ and His resurrection. The Roman Catholic church I grew up in teaches those things clearly among their *one billion* constituents. Satan has no problem with that being preached. He doesn’t bother opposing those doctrines, for believing those doctrines can’t save you in the dispensation of grace in which we live.

 But do you know what they *don’t* preach in the church in which I was raised? Salvation by grace through faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5). If you preach that, you’ll experience *a firestorm* of opposition from Satan and men alike, for that’s the gospel that has the power to save men’s souls in the present dispensation. But the firestorm in Acts 1 was directed toward the apostles who were proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, for the resurrection of Christ was the basis of salvation at Pentecost (Acts 2:36-38).

You’ll notice that the Lord told them to begin their witness in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8 cf. Lu. 24:47). That’s because it was always God’s plan for Jerusalem to be the spiritual headquarters of the world, His base of operations on earth. The apostles were told to begin there to *establish* that base of operations, from which the gospel could then go out to “all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth,” as the prophet Isaiah predicted:

**“…*out of Zion* shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord *from Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 2:3).**

So when the rulers in Jerusalem decided to stone Stephen instead of going along with God’s plan to reach the world from Jerusalem, God reacted in two different ways. First, He raised up Paul to take the gospel to the rest of the world *in spite* of Israel’s obstinacy, instead of through her instrumentality. But he also determined to maintain His original plan to reach the nations through Israel after the Rapture, when He will pick up where He left off with Israel in His prophetic program. God’s people in Israel weren’t willing to take the gospel to the world in the days of the 12 apostles, but the psalmist prayed, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power” (Psalm 110:3). That’s when this prophecy will come to fruition:

**“…this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world *for a witness unto all nations,* and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14).**

The Lord sent the 12 to witness the gospel of the kingdom to the nations of the world, and someday that gospel will be preached in all the world “for a witness” to those nations.

But in the meantime, if you want to be a solder of the cross, *fight the real enemy.* God’s enemies in the dispensation of grace are all who oppose the gospel of the grace of God, the preaching of the cross, and anyone and everyone who would add anything to the simplicity of the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith apart from works.