

“Christ, Kingdom, and Covenant” (Colossians 1:16)

We’ve just started a new series “Living in the in-between.” We are actually living in the unique period, which is the time after Jesus’s cross and resurrection, and before his second coming.

In this series of “Living in the in-between” we will look at the meaning of our lives from the perspective of God’s eternal plan, and we will learn some of the key Biblical concepts which guide our lives meaningfully, effectively and fruitfully as we are living in the in-between.

Let’s make a quick review of what we learned last time.

God is Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Triune God has perfect unity, harmony and love relationship within Him. The Church, the whole assembly of Christians, is going to be welcomed into that perfect unity, harmony and love relationship for eternity. And in this perfect relationship, the glory of God will be perfectly manifested forever.

God created the universe and humans. That is the kingdom of God. All His creation glorified him. There was perfect, close relationship between God and man. However, Man denied God's authority and disobeyed Him. Sin came into man. And the creation began to decay (Rom 8:21).

Christ came for restoration of the kingdom of God. Now we are living as God’s kingdom people in the in-between after the completion of Christ’s redemption and before the completion of God’s kingdom.

Today we will focus on the three key themes of the Bible, which are Christ, Kingdom and Covenant.

1. Christ

If your Non-Christian friend asks you, “What is the central message of the Bible?” What is your answer?

Perhaps you may answer that is the salvation of human beings. God created heaven and earth. And humans used to live there happily without any inconveniences. It was a real paradise there. But they committed sin, and they were banished from the paradise. But merciful God had sent a Savior for human

beings. His name is Jesus. Anyone who believes in Him will be saved and will go to heaven and live there happily forever. And they will also receive God's blessings on this earth. If you are in trouble, all you need to do is to pray. Then God will answer you. All who call on the name of Jesus will be saved.

Perhaps the answer will be more or less something like this. I wouldn't say it is totally wrong, but this sounds as if the world, and even the Savior and God existed for Man. Are humans really the center of the Bible?

Let's start from here. Did God create the universe for human beings? Does the world exist for man?

Colossians 1:16

All things have been created through him [Jesus] and for him [Jesus].

The world, the whole universe is created for Jesus. It is created for his glory. That is what the Bible says.

And Jesus himself clearly says that the theme of the Bible is Himself.

John 5:39

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.

This whole Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, speaks about Jesus Christ. Christ is the Alpha and Omega. Really the Bible starts with Christ and it is completed with Christ. The history as recorded in the Bible is developing toward the glory of Christ.

The first man Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and disobeyed God. The harmony in the garden of Eden was collapsed. And at that time, God immediately said,

Genesis 3:15

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."

The woman's offspring, Christ who comes as a man, will strike Satan's head. This is the beginning of the redemption of Christ. The story of the Bible

unfolds according to this prophesy. In the following, the Bible shows how and when the Christ is to be sent into this world.

It was Abraham whom God had chosen in order to send his only Son, Jesus who is Christ. And it was Israel, Abraham's descendants, whom God had chosen. God prepared Israel, the Jews for this purpose. This was written from Genesis to Deuteronomy. And historical books show their history with God.

And the books of poems and wisdom like Job and Psalms, express their longing for Messiah, Christ, the Savior.

And in the books of prophets, when and how Christ comes on the earth is written. And God foretold it to Israel through the prophets.

History in the Bible reaches its peak at Incarnation, the Cross and resurrection of Jesus. And this history will conclude at Christ's second coming.

The goal of the history is that Christ recreates the kingdom of God. And all nations, all tangs give glory, praise and honor to him, and we will be part of them. In that sense, we will be in his glory, cerebrating together forever. So the goal is not that humans get saved through Christ and achieve happiness by Christ. It's the other way around! The goal is that the glory of Christ is manifested through humans and by humans. That is the goal. And it will last forever.

2. The Kingdom of God

This Jesus Christ came to the earth as a man about 2000 years ago, as it was prophesied.

Then what was the main theme of Jesus mission? Jesus didn't just come to the earth. He had a mission to accomplish. I think you would like to say his mission was the salvation of human beings, redemption of sin, eternal life, and to open the way to heaven. I think it's okay to say this. Then, what does the Bible say about his mission?

Mark 1:15

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Like this, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God everywhere. From the beginning to the end the focus of Jesus' mission is, "the kingdom of God." The purpose of Jesus' coming to the earth is the plan of the kingdom of God. Salvation of humans is the part of the completion of the kingdom of God.

Jesus told this at the beginning of his sermon on the mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:3)" The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God. And the last of the eight blessings is "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:10)" The first and the last of the eight blessings are about "the kingdom of heaven". That is, the sermon on the mount is teaching about the kingdom of God.

Jesus told clearly in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." It is about the kingdom of God.

And in the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches about "prayer". This is called the Lord's prayer. In this prayer, we pray "May your kingdom come. (Matt 6:10)" Jesus is teaching us that we should pray to the heavenly Father, "May Your kingdom come to the earth." Here please take note that we are not told to pray that we can go to the kingdom of God, but we are to pray that God's kingdom come to this earth.

And the kingdom of God has come here on the earth with Jesus Christ.

Jesus talked about various parables. The parable of sowing seeds. The parable of the mustard seeds. The parable of the weeds among the wheat. The parable of the talents. The parable of the workers in the vineyard. Check out for yourself, you will find how many of his parables are talking about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. Can you see how much Jesus wants to talk to us about the kingdom of God?

Jesus not only talked about the kingdom of God, but he also showed that the kingdom of God had come to the earth with him.

He said, "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Luke 11:20)" And he actually drove out demons, healed the sick, and transformed the lives of people like Mary Magdalene and many others.

Christ showed us what would happen when the kingdom of God has come, he showed us that even the nature obeys Him.

And the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ show that He will defeat the rule of Satan, the kingdom of Satan completely, and will bring the rule of God, the kingdom of God perfectly.

After his resurrection Jesus was on the earth for forty days. And he spoke to his disciples during that precious last forty days on the earth. For sure he spoke to them the most important thing.

Acts 1:3 “After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days” And what? “spoke about the kingdom of God.”

Jesus talked about “the kingdom of God” from the beginning to the end of his mission. Not only that, he helped people to actually experience the blessings of the kingdom of God.

The Acts began with the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Then how did it end?

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (Acts 28:30-31)

It also ends with the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

And the central theme of the letters the apostles wrote are also “Christ” and “the kingdom of God”. And they say the kingdom of God will be finally completed when Christ comes again.

Of course the central theme of the book of Revelation is how the kingdom will be completed. It talks about a new heaven and a new earth, and the new Jerusalem. And Jesus is the King of kings, the Lord of lords. And there will be celebration for him forever.

Then what about the Old Testament?

The kingdom of God is the rule of God. In the garden of Eden, which we see in the beginning of Genesis, there was a perfect rule of God. That was so-called the model of the kingdom of God. And the creation was subjected to frustration because of the sin of human beings, and brought into bondage to decay (Rom 8:20-21). But Christ came to restore the kingdom of God.

In the beginning part of the Old Testament, from the latter half of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy, the Laws are recorded. The Laws point to Christ.

The law can be classified into three categories: The ceremonial laws, the civil laws and the moral laws.¹ The ceremonial laws are about how to offer different kinds of offerings or sacrifices, for example. They are designed to foreshadow the coming one, Jesus Christ. Just as Israel's ceremonial laws prefigured Christ as the great prophet and priest, so her civil laws prefigured Christ as the great king. For the civil laws, through Israel, God gives us object lessons about the kingdom that will come with Christ's ministry. And the moral laws show that we are sinners, we need a savior. And the moral laws illustrate the culture of the kingdom of God. So it's all about Christ and the kingdom of God.

And it was Israel, Abrahams descendants, that God chose to send Christ to the earth. And through Abraham, people of Israel came out and Israel takes the mission of the kingdom of God which is described in the Old Testament.

The focus of Jesus' mission is the kingdom of God, which is the main stream of the Bible.

3. Covenant

The third theme is the Covenant.

The Bible is the book of covenant. Someone divided the Bible into two parts, and named them the Old Testament and the New Testament. Now, here is the question. Where is the old covenant written? Where does it say the new covenant?

The Bible unfolds with covenants as its pivots. The Bible recorded many covenants. And covenants are its pivots as the story of the Bible develops from Genesis to Revelation.

Among all the covenants, the one the Lord made with Abraham is especially important. The Lord made the covenant with Abraham and his offspring, that is, Israel. It is the covenant in which God says he will bless Israel unconditionally, and bless all peoples on earth through Israel. Let's check it out.

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ Michael S. Horton, "The Law of Perfect Freedom," Moody Publishers, 1993, [Kindle], location 17-18

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.”

Then where is the new covenant? Where is it written? Of course, in the New Testament! Really? Actually, it is written in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 31 :31

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

The new covenant is the restoration of the people of Israel, the land of Israel, the gift and mission of Israel. And it is the promise that those who believe in Christ will receive new life, be filled with the Holy Spirit and enter the kingdom of God.

All these covenants are directly made between God and Israel. We, gentiles are grafted onto this covenant by faith in Jesus Christ, and we inherit the covenant (Gal 3:29). First, God made the covenant with Israel, and now in Christ we gentiles also receive the blessings together with the Jews.

God’s covenant with Abraham is indeed written in the Old Testament, but it is still a living covenant today. And how wonderful is the fact that the new covenant is actually written in the Old Testament which was written in the time before Christ.

Actually in the Bible, there are no indications which say, “This is the Old Testament”, or “From here is the New Testament.” Actually it is one Bible. Please read it through at least once a year. We have NLIF Bible reading plan. If you haven’t started yet, please start today.

If you don’t read the Old Testament, you would miss the meaning of this important covenant, nor the meaning of Israel, their mission, nor their relationship with us. In other words, you wouldn’t understand why Christ is Christ, nor what the good news means. And you will end up viewing the gospel in a human-centric way.

Today we saw three important themes of the Bible: Christ, Kingdom and Covenant.

This is the summary for today.

All things have been created through Jesus Christ and for him. This whole universe has been created for Jesus Christ and for his glory. And we humans are big part of it.

The theme of Christ's mission was the kingdom of God. To begin with, the history of Israel was intended to model the kingdom of God. And it is Christ who will complete this kingdom of God. And the completion is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Israel. And we, gentiles are adapted into it through Christ.

The next time, we will study about the mystery of Christ, what he did for us and what is our call in order for the covenant to be fulfilled.

It's about living in the in-between.

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection

1. The kingdom of God is the rule of God. How the rule of God is illustrated in Genesis 1:1-25? How is human-beings described in Genesis 1:26-30? What is their part in ruling creation as the partner of God?
2. Matthew 5:3-10 shows about the kingdom of God. What is the character of the person who is in the kingdom of God like?
3. Jesus taught the prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Why do we need to pray "May your kingdom come" constantly? What will a society be like when this prayer is answered? How will God answer this prayer?