

Proclaiming a King



The First Church (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we continue with our theme for this week: "The First Church." I've said that in the first church, as described in the New Testament, and primarily in the book of Acts, God set a standard and a pattern from which He has never departed.

In my previous talks, I've pointed out certain distinctive features which were characteristic of that first church. The first one I pointed out was that the early believers were all witnesses to all men, they all spoke out of direct personal experience of what Jesus had done in their lives. Second, the early church was permeated in every area of its life by supernatural power: their praying was supernatural, their preaching was supernatural, the way they were directed was supernatural, their attestation was supernatural, and even as I said in closing yesterday, sometimes their transportation was supernatural, like Philip who was suddenly caught away and opened his eyes to find himself in a different place. It says specifically: "The Spirit of the Lord caught him away."

In my talk today, I'm going to focus on a third distinctive feature of the first church. And that is, they proclaimed a king and a kingdom. This theme of a king is introduced right at the beginning of the New Testament, but it is one which receives comparatively little emphasis today, and I think that's one major problem of the contemporary church, it's lost a vision of the king and the kingdom. For instance, in Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, we read of this that happened in connection with the birth of Jesus:

> "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi came from the east came to Jerusalem and asked. 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him."

This was the first presentation to the political set-up of the day of the fact that Jesus had come on the scene. And even though He was born as an infant in the natural way, He came as a King. And the news that the King had come disturbed King Herod and all Jerusalem.

I think it's very important we see that the news of the King and the Kingdom is disturbing to a lot of people. They don't like it. Basically, you can say both political and religious people usually tend to protect the status quo. They don't want anything to change too radically. And so, the fact that a King had been born into an existing political order which already had a king was very disturbing.

Right at the close of the ministry of Jesus, the same theme provoked the same response; that is, it was disturbing. This is the record of Jesus being cross-examined by Pontius Pilate in John 18, verses 33–37:

> "Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, 'You are the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?' Pilate answered, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.' [I want you to notice that in that simple short answer Jesus uses the word 'kingdom' three times. Pilate got the message.] Pilate therefore said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice.'"

And because He would not deny the truth that He was the King, He was crucified. It cost Him His life, but it's kingly to bear witness to the truth. The claim of Jesus to be King was rejected by men, but it was supernaturally endorsed by God Himself. It was endorsed primarily in two ways: first of all, by resurrection—the resurrection of Jesus was the vindication of God that the claims of Jesus were correct. Paul says this concerning Jesus in Romans 1, verses 3 and 4—it's not a complete sentence but it brings out the point of what I'm saying to you.

> "...regarding [God's] Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."

Notice it was the resurrection of the dead brought about by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit that affirmed and endorsed the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God and proclaim that God acknowledged Him as Lord.

Secondly, there was further supernatural endorsement of this claim on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended and filled the early believers and all Jerusalem was set astir. When Peter was asked to account for what had taken place, why this had happened, this is part of the answer that he gave, in Acts, chapter 2, verse 32 and 33. He said:

> "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. [I've been pointing out already that the apostles were primarily witnesses and primarily witnesses of the resurrection and that was the first supernatural endorsement of the claims of Jesus by God. Then he goes on to say:] Exalted to the right hand of God, he [Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

The second attestation of the poured out Holy Spirit was the attestation that Jesus had been not merely resurrected but exalted to the right hand of God the Father and the outpoured Holy Spirit which could be seen and heard by all the dwellers in Jerusalem, was God's attestation to the claim of Jesus. From that time onwards, the King and the Kingdom was a continuing theme of the early Christians.

For instance, later on, when Paul and some of his fellow-ministers of the gospel were in the Corinth, some charges were brought against Paul. They tried to arrest him. They went to the house where they thought he was staying but he wasn't there. They took the men that were in the house and dragged them out in front of the Roman ruler and demanded that they be put on trial. And I want to you notice the accusation that was brought against them. This is what their enemies accused them of and it's very revealing. Acts 17, verses 6 and 7:

> "And when they did not find them [that's Paul and his companions], they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have upset the world have come here also; [Notice, they were accused of having 'upset the world.' It's a disturbing message. The first time it was presented it disturbed Herod and Jerusalem. Every time we return to this theme, to some people it's

> disturbing. They went on with their accusations:] and Jason [this man they were accusing] has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar [the Emperor], saying that there is another king, Jesus.'"

You see, that's the root of the message. That's the root of the problem. There's another king. This world has its kings, but there's another King, there's another kingdom and we're the representatives on this earth of that other kingdom. That's why we're here.

You see, they represented to the world of their day an eternal and unshakable kingdom. This is a kingdom about which a great deal is said in the book of Psalms: the kingdom of God, His eternal heavenly unshakable kingdom. I want to read just two passages from the book of Psalms which describe this kingdom which the early church proclaimed on earth. Psalm 103, verse 19, says:

> "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all."

It's a totally authoritative kingdom. Everything is under the authority of this heavenly kingdom. And then in Psalm 145, the psalmist says in verses 10–13:

> "All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations."

In those verses that I've just read, the word "kingdom" occurs four times and the word "dominion" once. The emphasis is on this eternal, heavenly, unshakable, totally authoritative kingdom. The early church were its messengers, its heralds, its representatives on earth, and wherever they came with this message they frightened the existing political order.

And then the writer of Hebrews says this, in Hebrews 12, verses 28 and 29:

> "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

So, again, the testimony is this: the kingdom that we represent, the kingdom which we have been incorporated into, the kingdom which is coming through us upon earth is a heavenly kingdom, it's an eternal kingdom, it's a kingdom which cannot be shaken. And in the midst of collapse and disaster and fear, they were unshakable themselves because they represented an unshakable kingdom.

I suggest to you that our world needs the same message today—the message of the unshakable kingdom.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll be focusing on the fourth distinctive mark of the first church.

Radio Program

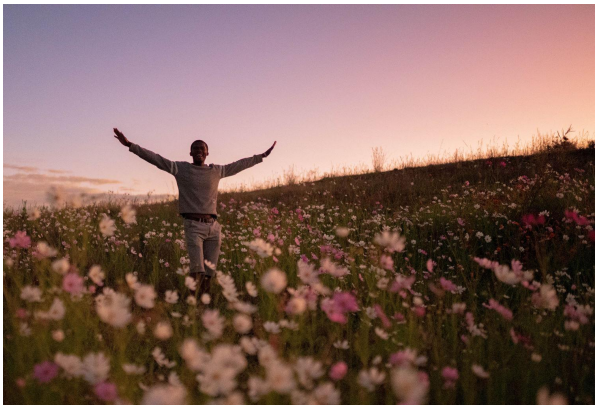
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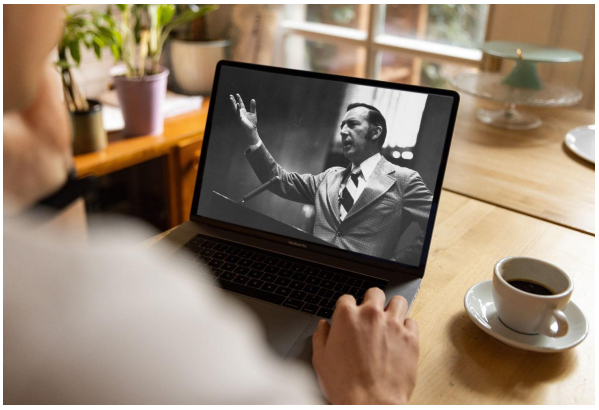
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