

Has the Church Been Eclipsed by the Kingdom Age?

There are a rising number of leaders in the body of Christ claiming that God is ushering in a new “Kingdom Age” to replace the “Church Age.” While I understand why this is being said, there is an urgent need for biblical clarity regarding the role of the church and kingdom. Once these roles are defined and established, the confusion will clear up.

The claim of there being a new “Kingdom Age” that’s now replacing the “Church Age” is rooted in presumption. This presumption is that because leaders in the church have a “trending teaching” on the kingdom, therefore, it must be that God is ushering in a new Kingdom Age. Unfortunately, this short-sighted premise brings scholarly disrepute to certain segments of the culturally active church. This exciting new understanding puts emphasis on the need to activate believers in the workplace, which they say is ushering in a new kingdom era that bypasses the church era. However, when one examines the Scriptures, one will observe that the believers’ involvement in the marketplace is not new. Therefore, this new teaching on the kingdom era is merely the recovery of the true nature of the church.

Why do I make this statement?

There has never been an example in the New Testament of a church confining their activities within a building. All of the miracles and expansions recorded in Scripture took place in the streets. When Paul used a lecture hall to make disciples, the result was the Word of the Lord multiplied throughout the region of Asia Minor as well as to all the residents of the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:10-20). Consequently, the Ephesian church transformed the religious belief system. This resulted in the transformation of the

economy in the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). Jesus never commanded believers to plant the gospel in buildings for two-hour meetings on Sundays, but in cities and nations (Acts 1:8-9).

Furthermore, not one of the apostles chosen by Jesus was formerly a religious leader. The original 12 apostles were involved in the marketplace. Even the apostle Paul was a tentmaker, and the leaders of the church of Antioch were all marketplace leaders (Acts 18:3, Acts 13:1-2). The erroneous separation between the church and workplace started soon after the Roman Emperor Constantine was converted, which institutionalized the church in the early fourth century. Huge cathedrals were built and an unhealthy bifurcation developed. This brought a separation from the so-called "clergy" and "laity," thus creating a professional class of "priests."

Before this bifurcation, all believers were considered priests. They all did life together in house churches. They seamlessly made disciples in the context of their workplace. They understood that since the earth belongs to the Lord, all space was considered sacred, not just buildings erected to house believers for Sunday worship gatherings. When present-day leaders announce the church is being bypassed by the "Kingdom Age," they continue to perpetuate the dualistic institutional view that started in the fourth century. This view shows a lack of historical and biblical perspective. Rather, what they should say is that the church is finally being restored to the original missional purpose, which was designed by Jesus as illustrated in the book of Acts.

Additionally, John the Baptist and Jesus announced the Age of the Kingdom with His first advent (Matt. 3:2, Matt. 4:17). Luke described the apostle Paul's teaching as "preaching the kingdom" (Acts 20:25, Acts 28:31). The Kingdom Age was already enunciated more than 2,000 years ago with the advent of Messiah, so why are people saying that now we are suddenly coming into the Kingdom Age? Many pastors and marketplace

leaders have awakened to the fact that the church was never supposed to be defined by a building. This realization is not ushering in a so-called new Kingdom Age, but is reawakening the faithful to an age-old biblical truth.

What does the Bible mean by the kingdom of God on earth?

Luke summarizes Paul's teaching as "preaching the kingdom of God," but why doesn't Paul focus on the word "kingdom" in his epistles (Acts 28:31)? Were there two Pauls? Did the Acts account of believers "turning the world upside down" depict something different from the epistles (Acts 17:6)? I think not.

When we read the epistles, the mystery of the purpose of God revealed is not the kingdom, but the church. The kingdom of God was not a new truth. It was already expounded in many of the Old Testament books such as Psalms, Daniel and others. The revelation of the great mystery of God was the unveiling of His body, the church, in which God would reveal His wisdom to the invisible and visible powers (Eph. 3:1-11).

What Luke meant regarding the "preaching of the kingdom of God" was that the life, mission, activity and demonstration of kingdom life was manifested by the church. The demonstration of the kingdom is not merely signs and wonders. It is husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church, children honoring their parents, Christ-followers speaking the truth in love, having a good work ethic, people-loving and respecting one another (irrespective of economic status, gender and ethnicity) (Eph. 2-6). We cannot demonstrate the kingdom with weak and unhealthy local congregations.

The church subverted the kingdoms of this world by catalyzing movements of Jesus communities whose counter-cultural example permeated every aspect of society. When the people of God do life as one, mature as the corporate Son and act as one holy nation, then the created order will be liberated by a

manifestation of the true sons of God (John 17:20-23, Eph. 4:13-16, 1 Pet. 2:8-9, Rom. 8:19-23). This is why Paul said that he was an apostle “for the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1). Notice, he did not say he was an apostle for the sake of community transformation. He knew that if the church wasn’t aligned properly, there could be no genuine societal shift. Jesus prayed not for the world, but for the ones the Father gave Him (John 17:9). The focus of Jesus was always on His bride, the church. The church models the kingdom because the unredeemed in the world are under the power of the wicked one (see 1 John 5:19). Only a strong “holy nation” can disciple the nations of the world (Matt. 28:19).

For the past 2,000 years, Jesus has been purifying, preparing and reforming His true church until the full consumption culminates in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7). Since the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, the body of Christ has been able to outlive and outlast every earthly kingdom in the past 2,000 years (Matt. 16:18-19). The gates of hell can prevail against political and economic institutions and empires, but not against the true church.

Our bridegroom, Jesus, is waiting to present to Himself a “glorious church,” not merely a “conservative America” (Eph. 5:27). In His second bodily return, He will once again fully unite heaven and earth in Him (Eph. 1:10-11). The church is “the body of Messiah Jesus,” and believers will share in His reign over the nations at that time (Eph. 1:17-23). Rather than the Kingdom Age supplanting the Church Age, a modicum of the missional nature of the church is beginning to manifest again in contemporary culture.

When we define “Kingdom Age” as merely political and economic shifts, we miss the point of the kingdom. Only people “born from above” can be in the kingdom (John 3:1-8). Geopolitical systems can and should be modified to reflect biblical values. Only redeemed people can truly live in the kingdom. Consequently, the more true disciples live out their faith in

the workplace, the more systemic change will take place as they aptly apply Scripture to culture within their spheres of influence. However, to say the “Kingdom Age” is bypassing the church is to speak of a mission without a body of people to carry it out. To focus only on changing culture without a strong ecclesiology makes us no different from a think tank or political party.

May those of us who proclaim the kingdom never lose sight of the prominent place the church as the body of Christ has in the plan of God, both now and in the ages to come (Eph. 2:7).