

# What Is the Kingdom?

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Kingdom of God is the sovereign government of God over all, and it is the will of God deciding everything eventually.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:28, Acts 1:3, Acts 8:12, Acts 19:8, Acts 20:25, Acts 28:23

**Topics:** "The Kingdom of God", "Spiritual Warfare"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound meaning of the Kingdom of God, emphasizing that it is not merely a realm but the personal rule of Jesus Christ, who holds all authority in heaven and on earth. He highlights the cosmic conflict over the Kingdom, illustrating how the early apostles preached about it amidst opposition, and how the Kingdom will ultimately be delivered to the Father after all authority and power are subdued. Sparks stresses the importance of understanding the phrase 'Thine is the kingdom' as foundational to the entire New Testament, and he encourages believers to view their struggles as part of the ongoing battle for the Kingdom, ultimately leading to God's sovereign will being fulfilled.

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## Transcript

"Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28).

"To whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

"But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).

"And he entered into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).

"And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more" (Acts 20:25).

"And when they had appointed him a day, they came to him into his lodging in great number; to whom he expounded the matter, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved" (Acts 28:23-24).

"Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:23-24).

"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come... And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matthew 6:9,10,13).

I do not know what version of the Bible you have in your hand, but if you have a modern translation you will find that the second half of Matthew 6:13 is not there. However, the people who made this version from which I am reading put a footnote, which says: "Many authorities, some ancient, add For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." Now, I am not going to have any argument with the authorities, but I believe we have very good reason for retaining the second half of that verse, and I think that the ministry that the Lord has given me for this week is based upon that questioned half-verse. I am going to speak about something in the Bible that some men say is not in the Bible: "Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever."

#### WHY SHOULD THOSE WORDS BE RETAINED?

Before we can go on any further we must state why we believe that that half-verse ought to be there. The whole Bible, especially the New Testament, is built upon those three words: "Thine is the KINGDOM" stands over the whole Bible; "and the POWER" stands over the whole Bible; "and the GLORY" - all the Bible is gathered into that. The New Testament is especially true to those three words, so that half-verse which is questioned is justified by the whole Bible.

We read that wonderful word in 1 Corinthians 15:23, which looks right on to the end of the Bible. It says: "Then cometh the end, when he (the Son) shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father." The Kingdom belongs to the Father, and Jesus included Himself in that prayer: "Our Father, which art in heaven... Thy Kingdom come." In the end the Son will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father: when He has done the work of the Kingdom He will hand it to its right owner. You will notice that this is very comprehensive: "Then cometh the end... when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power." Those are three very rich words: all RULE, all AUTHORITY, and all POWER. You cannot get outside of that! That comprehends every form of opposition to the will of God, and it says that all that opposition will at last be subjected and subdued. In a minute we are going to ask the question: 'What is the Kingdom?', but here we begin with this very comprehensive thing: "Our Father, which art in heaven... Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth... For thine IS the kingdom." The Kingdom is that which is above all other rule and authority and power that is against the will of God. 1 Corinthians 15:23 says: "Then cometh the end." The end of what? EVERYTHING that is opposed to the will of God. That little word: "Thy will" is a tremendous word! It reaches out to the uttermost bounds of everything opposed to the will of God.

Now the Lord Jesus knew what He was talking about. I expect you have used those words many, many times, for they are called 'The Lord's Prayer'. Whether that is the right title or not we will not discuss, but it came out of a vast spiritual knowledge; and this is one of the things, dear friends, that we must recognize in order to get an enlarged spiritual understanding: that in every small fragment that came through the lips of the Lord Jesus there was a whole universe of meaning. When we use these words: "Thy will be done", how little we understand of what we are saying!

#### THE BATTLE FOR THE KINGDOM OF THIS UNIVERSE

Let us see something of the range of that one fragment - "Thy will be done".

From before the foundation of this world, and all through the ages, there has been an immense cosmic conflict, and that conflict always had one issue: 'Who shall have the kingdom of this universe?' There was the One to whom the kingdom belonged, and it belonged to Him for ever and ever; and then there was the other one who aspired to have possession of that kingdom, and whose ambition was to be the "god", the "prince" of this world. And so, at some point, this great conflict commenced, this great cosmic conflict for the control of this universe. Once again we go back to 1 Corinthians 15: 'He must reign till He has PUT DOWN all rule, and authority, and power' - and that is what is going on now, and we are involved in that conflict. That will explain a very great deal!

We have a kind of microcosm of this whole conflict. In our arrangement of the Bible it is contained in twenty-eight chapters. It is only a little pamphlet, called "The Book of the Acts of the Apostles", but the Apostles never gave it that name! I would like to know what they would have called it. I know what I would call it, but that title is far too big and far too difficult: "A Microcosm of the Conflict of all the Ages." We think that the Book of the Acts is just a history of apostolic times. Well, it is that, but oh! it is the story of the conflict of the ages. In this little book heaven and hell are in deadly conflict, and the conflict concerns the kingdom. It is very impressive that this book BEGINS with the kingdom and ENDS with the kingdom. It begins by saying that Jesus, after He was risen, appeared unto His disciples "by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (1:3), and in chapter 28:31, the end of the book, the Jews were crowding into the little apartment of the Apostle Paul and he was "preaching the kingdom of God". These three words stand wonderfully over this little book! The Apostles and all the workers in that book were fighting the battle of the kingdom. They never arrived at any place in the world that then was but that this battle commenced. They went everywhere 'preaching the kingdom of God', and their arrival in every place was always anticipated by the rival to the kingdom of God. They were working out this little fragment: "Thine is the kingdom." It was not just a little bit of ritual, or a formal prayer: it was the battleground of the universe.

Now where in the New Testament did this real battle begin? It really began almost immediately after the Lord Jesus had said to His disciples: "There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom," though perhaps I ought to say that it entered upon a more intensive phase from that time. There ought to be no chapter division between Matthew 16 and 17, for after that verse it goes immediate]y on to say: "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: and he was transfigured before them." Now there are those people and teachers who think that the Transfiguration was the fulfilment of those words: "the Son of man coming in his kingdom", but that is only half the truth. What was the meaning of the Transfiguration? The Gospel by Matthew, as you know, is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the Transfiguration was the manifestation of the King in His glory. You must have a king before you have a kingdom, so in the Transfiguration you have a foreshadowing of the King in glory. The Kingdom is vested in the King. They came down from the mountain - and what would you expect to happen? Well, you would expect that those men would go out into the world and say: 'We have seen the King in His glory', but Jesus said emphatically: "Tell the vision to no man until...". Until when? "Until the Son of man be risen from the dead."

Now link together two little words. "Tell the vision to no man UNTIL...". Then He said: "Tarry ye in the city (Jerusalem) UNTIL ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), and UNTIL 'ye receive the promise of the Father' (Acts 1:4). That little word 'until' links two things together. 'Until the Son of man be

risen' - that involves the Cross. 'Until ye receive the promise of the Father' - that involves Pentecost. The Cross and Pentecost introduce the Kingdom. Before the Cross it was: 'Tell no man!' After the Cross and Pentecost they went everywhere preaching the kingdom.

We are answering the question: 'What is the Kingdom?' I hope I am not tiring you. I am only laying a foundation, and in a few minutes I will be saying something which I think will be helpful, but we must be clear as to what the Kingdom is.

First of all, the Kingdom is not a realm, but the personal rule of a Person. It is the dominion of a Person, that which belongs to that Person. You see, you must be very clear about that, because the whole conflict centres in the question of to whom the Kingdom belongs. The Kingdom is the sovereign government of God over all. It is the will of God deciding everything eventually. Only in a secondary way is the Kingdom a sphere, or a realm, and it is the realm in which God's will is absolutely sovereign: "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." God is absolutely sovereign in heaven, and there no one ever challenges His will. Angels and archangels bow in adoration and submission to the will of God in heaven, and if the Kingdom becomes a realm, it is only the realm in which it is like that.

You will be able to tell from that whether you are in the Kingdom. It is so easy to talk about the Kingdom, and to say "Thy kingdom come", and "Thine is the kingdom", but the fiercest battle that ever raged in the history of this world rages over that Kingdom.

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Perhaps some of you are not quite sure of the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven. I have often been asked that question. Well, I think the answer is quite simple. If you look in the Gospel by Matthew, and remember that that Gospel was written for Hebrews, the phrase is usually "The kingdom of heaven", but if you look where it was written in Greek you will find that it is "The kingdom of God". This is not always so, because there were always some Hebrews even amongst the Greeks, but it's a general distinction. To the Jews it was the Kingdom of heaven. Well, the Jews understood heaven, and the Greeks did not, but they quite understood deities. They had 'gods many', and 'god' was a kind of comprehensive term for them. So "The Kingdom of heaven" was all right for Jews, for they understood, and the Greeks understood "The Kingdom of God".

Well, that is only a technicality, and it has not helped you very much, but it is part of the answer, at least, to what is the difference between the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God.

#### THE KINGDOM IN THE HANDS OF THE ENTHRONED KING

Let us try to come to a close with something quite helpful. What have we been saying? The dominion belongs to God: "Thine is the kingdom." The securing of that Kingdom for the Father was committed to the Son, so that the Lord Jesus has the Kingdom of God vested in Himself, and as He moved from His Cross He said: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). So after the Cross, in the Book of the Acts, the Kingdom is in the hands of the enthroned King, Jesus Christ.

Now your problem arises, and here is something that is going to test every one of you. It has been my problem many times. If Jesus is on the throne of the Kingdom, and all authority is committed unto Him, what about things like this?

"Are they ministers of Christ? ...I more: in labours more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: in labour and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

And Jesus is on the throne! I venture to say that if you were in any one of those things you would ask the question: Is Jesus really on the throne? If all authority is in the hands of Jesus, why all this? And this is not the only list of Paul's troubles! Now, Paul, are you quite sure that the Kingdom belongs to Jesus? When something goes wrong, some tragedy enters into our life, when some great sorrow overtakes us, is not our first temptation to ask the question: Is the Lord really Lord? Please, Paul, answer my question! And Paul will answer by saying: 'This is all the battle of the Kingdom. Oh, no, things have not gone wrong. They are all going right, for this all says that the devil does not like what we are doing. If you will only wait until the end, you will see.' And it was this Paul who wrote: "Then cometh the end... when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power." You see, we just look at the things of the present, but Paul looked through the present to the end.

Well, were all these sufferings for nothing? Was Satan lord after all? What are we doing here tonight? Millions and millions have come this way and owe their debt to the Lord through this Apostle Paul. I can see a picture: a great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation and tribe and tongue, and the Lord Jesus standing with His arm around His Apostle Paul and saying: 'Look, Paul, do you see this great multitude? Do you remember that night when you were shipwrecked, and that day when they beat you with rods? Paul, this is all the fruit of that. The Kingdom has come and your sufferings have brought the Kingdom in.' That may be a bit of imagination, but I believe there is a lot of truth in it.

It depends on how we look at things. Do we interpret these adversities as the victory of Satan, or do we interpret them as the way of the Kingdom and look through to that day when He shall have subdued all rule and authority?

Well, we have got out into a big realm! How much more there is in "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done"!

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