

CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

by Ron Kangas

“Yours, O Jehovah, is the greatness and the power and the splendor and the victory and the majesty, indeed all that is in heaven and on earth; Yours, O Jehovah, is the kingdom, and You are exalted as Head over all”
(1 Chron. 29:11).

“Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God”
(John 3:3).

“So is the kingdom of God: as if a man cast seed on the earth”
(Mark 4:26).

“John to the seven churches...from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth...who...has...made us a kingdom”
(Rev. 1:4-6).

These verses speak of four aspects of the kingdom of God—the kingdom of God as God’s reign over the universe and over everyone and everything in it, the kingdom of God as God’s reign in the realm of the divine life, the kingdom of God as Christ sown as a seed into the earth, and the kingdom of God as the genuine and proper church life in the present age. As a simple introduction to the general subject of this issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, this essay serves the purpose of identifying certain crucial aspects of the kingdom of God that will be developed in the articles that follow.

God’s Reign in a General Way

In order to carry out His eternal purpose by acting without hindrance to fulfill the desire of His heart, God must have a kingdom over which He can exercise His authority. The kingdom of God is the reign of God, the rule of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His governmental authority. That the kingdom of God is the reign of God is indicated clearly in Revelation 11:15: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.” For God to have a kingdom is for Him to have dominion: “Your kingdom is

an eternal kingdom, / And Your dominion is throughout all generations” (Psa. 145:13). Here *Your kingdom* is the equivalent to *Your dominion*. Even proud, self-exalting Nebuchadnezzar, after a period of insanity, came to realize that the heavens rule, and thus he could say of the reigning God:

His dominion is an eternal dominion, / And His kingdom is from generation to generation; / And all the inhabitants of earth are considered as nothing, / But He does according to His will in the army of heaven / And among the inhabitants of the earth; / And there is no one who can resist His hand / Or say to Him, What are You doing?
(Dan. 4:34-35)

The kingdom of God is God’s reign in a general way by power and authority (Psa. 103:19; 145:11-13; 1 Chron. 29:11; Dan. 4:3, 34). As such a reign, the kingdom of God is God’s reign over the entire universe and over everything and everyone in it. This means that in a general and objective way God rules the heavens, the earth, all created things, and all the nations and peoples of humankind. The reign of God is coextensive with God’s existence. God’s existence is from eternity to eternity, without beginning or ending, and God’s kingdom, His universal and eternal reign, is likewise from eternity to eternity, without beginning or ending (Heb. 1:8; Psa. 145:13; Dan. 4:3).

As the reign of God over the universe, the kingdom of God is the power to subdue rebellion. There are two great principles in the universe—God’s authority and Satan’s rebellion. The unique controversy between God and Satan concerns authority and rebellion (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). Rebellion is the denial of God’s authority and the rejection of God’s rule. Satan was originally an archangel created by God, but due to his pride he uplifted himself, violated God’s sovereignty, rebelled against God, became God’s adversary, and established his own kingdom (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:2-19; Matt. 12:26).

When humankind sinned, we rebelled against God, denied

God's authority, and rejected God's rule (Gen. 3:1-6). At Babel the God-created race rebelled collectively against God to abolish God's authority from the earth (11:1-9). Although Satan rebelled against God's authority and although human beings violate His authority by rebelling against Him, God will not let this rebellion continue; rather, He will establish His kingdom on earth (Rev. 11:15).

The Lord Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose (Mark 1:14-15). The kingdom of God is a divine realm where God can exercise His authority to work out His plan (Matt. 6:10, 33; Luke 12:32; Col. 1:13). As God incarnate, the Lord Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God—to establish a realm in which God can carry out His purpose through the exercise of His authority (John 1:1, 14; 3:3, 5; 18:36). In order to establish the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus stood as a victorious man, defeating Satan and withstanding all hardship, opposition, and attack (Mark 1:13; Matt. 4:1-11). He also preached the gospel of the kingdom so that rebellious sinners might repent, be saved, qualified, and equipped to enter into the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 4:17). Furthermore, the Lord bound Satan, the strong man, and entered his house to plunder his goods so that sinners might be brought into the house of God through regeneration for the kingdom of God (Mark 3:27; Eph. 2:19). As the Lord Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of God, He was destroying Satan's kingdom and bringing in the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:28).

God's Reign in Life in the Realm of the Divine Life

The kingdom of God is also God's reign in a particular, organic way in the kingdom as the realm of the divine life (John 3:3, 5). As God's reign in the way of life, the kingdom of God is God's reign by Himself as life over those, in those, and among those who have been born of God in spirit to receive the divine, eternal life and thereby to enter and live in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life. This way of God's reigning—His rule in the divine life—is not outward but inward, not objective but subjective, and not by the exercise of power but by the sense of life.

Every kingdom involves a certain kind of life. Plants in the plant kingdom have the plant life, animals in the animal kingdom have the animal life, and human beings in the human kingdom have the human life. In the same principle, those who have been born of God to be in the divine kingdom have the divine life (vv. 3, 5-6, 15). If we would enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life and if we would become part of the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life, we must have the divine life—the eternal, uncreated, indestructible life of God. To be under the reign of God in power objectively, it is sufficient to be born of human parents to have the created

human life; however, to be under the reign of God in life subjectively requires that we be reborn, regenerated, born of God, to have the uncreated divine life. Then we are ruled not only by God's power and authority outwardly but also by God's life inwardly, for we are in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life.

In the sense of life and as the realm of the divine life, the kingdom of God is actually God Himself. A kingdom is a matter of life. The plant kingdom is the totality of the plant life, the animal kingdom is the totality of the animal life, the human kingdom is the totality of the human life, and the divine kingdom—the kingdom of God—is the totality of the divine life. Only God has the life of God, and thus (initially) only God is the kingdom in the sense of life and as the realm of the divine life. Before God in Christ made the divine life available to those who believe into Christ (vv. 15-16), the divine life was in God, not in anyone else. For this reason, the kingdom of God as a realm of the life of God was limited to God alone. The kingdom of God is God.

Because the kingdom of God is God Himself, God's kingdom has God with His life as its content; God Himself as life is everything as the content of His kingdom (1 Cor. 4:20; 15:28). This life forms the organic realm of God's ruling among His children, who have been born of Him and who possess His life and nature (Eph. 4:18; John 1:12-13; 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Therefore, in the sense of life, God's ruling over the believers in Christ is not an outward matter of power but an inward matter of the innate ability of the divine life. Regeneration is the unique way to enter into God as the kingdom of God. Thus, the life of God, being the kingdom of God itself, is also our entrance into the kingdom of God. To proclaim, "The kingdom of God has drawn near," as the Lord Jesus did in Mark 1:15, is to declare that God Himself has drawn near. Not only is the true God the God of life, but this God is the kingdom of God in the sense of life and as a realm of life.

We enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life through regeneration. The Lord Jesus made this emphatically clear in John 3, where He revealed that if we would enter into the divine realm, the kingdom of God in the sense of the divine life, we need to be born of God to have the life and nature of God. To be regenerated—to be born anew, born of God—is to receive another life, the uncreated, divine life, in addition to our natural, created, human life. Just as possessing the human life is the requirement for entering into the human kingdom, the realm of the human species, so possessing the divine life is the requirement for entering into the divine kingdom, the realm of the divine species. Entrance into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life requires that we receive the divine life, and we receive the divine life through the divine birth, that is, through regeneration.

In John 3:3 the Lord Jesus said, “Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In verse 5 He went on to say, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Verse 3 speaks of seeing the kingdom of God, and verse 5, of entering into the kingdom of God. In order to see, to perceive, the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life, we must receive the life of the kingdom of God through regeneration. The Lord told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God does not come “with observation” (Luke 17:20). The kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life is not physical, and its existence and reality cannot be discerned by natural, human sight. To see the kingdom of God we must be born anew; that is, we must be born of the Spirit in our spirit by believing into Christ, the Son of God and receiving the pneumatic Christ into our spirit to become children of God, God-men, those who possess the divine life and nature and who thus enter into and live in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life. Whereas we see the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life by being born anew, we enter into this kingdom by being born of water and the Spirit. In John 3:5 *water* signifies the death of Christ, into which we have been baptized (Rom. 6:4-6), and *Spirit* signifies resurrection, through which we have been regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3). Water is to terminate, to bury, the people of the old creation, and the Spirit is to germinate, to resurrect, people for and in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Only by being terminated and germinated in this way can we enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life.

The kingdom of God is the realm for this life—eternal life, God’s life—to move, work, rule, and govern so that God’s eternal purpose to have many sons for His corporate expression might be accomplished by His life. If we view the kingdom of God from this perspective, we will see that the divine kingdom of life is an organism constituted with God’s life and that in this sphere of life He reigns in life and expresses Himself as the Triune God in this life.

God rules in life, and we live by the sense of the divine life within our regenerated spirit, which has become life itself (Rom. 8:10). The sense of life is the feeling and the consciousness of the eternal life in the believers that enable them to know if their living at a particular time or in a particular situation is pleasing to God. The vital matter is that the divine life in our spirit knows the kingdom of God; it recognizes the Lord’s gentle rule by life and peace (v. 6). To honor this sense is to walk according to the spirit (v. 4) and to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25). This is to live by the principle of the tree of life—being dependent upon God and honoring the inner flow of life—instead of by the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—being independent of God and acting according to one’s natural or ethical concept of right and wrong. There are no words adequate to describe what a radical difference this

is. God’s original intention for humankind was that His creation would partake of the tree of life, receive eternal life, become children of God in life, and live by the sense of life and according to the principle of life. However, fallen human beings live by their knowledge of good and evil, and the result is always the same—death. With the redemption of Christ as the judicial basis, we, the believers in Christ, have been recovered to the tree of life and even have the right to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14). Only those who utterly forsake the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and live by the tree of life and its principle can live in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life. Only the life of God knows the kingdom of God in the sense of life, and only the life of God can live in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life.

The Kingdom of God as a Seed Sown into the Earth

The New Testament reveals that the Triune God has been incarnated in order to be sown into His chosen people and then to develop within them into a kingdom; this is the intrinsic element of the entire teaching of the New Testament (John 1:14; Col. 2:9; Mark 4:26-29; Rev. 11:15; 21:2). This is intrinsically related to the fact that the kingdom of God is Christ Himself as the seed of life sown into us, growing in us, spreading in us, and maturing in us until there is a full harvest—the manifestation of the kingdom (Mark 4:26-29; Matt. 13:43).

This is revealed in the parable of the seed in Mark 4:26-29. The man in verse 26 is the Son of God as the Sower who came to sow Himself as the seed of life in His word (v. 14) into men’s hearts so that He might grow and live in them and be expressed from within them. The seed is the seed of the divine life sown into the Lord’s believers (1 John 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:23). The casting of the seed on the earth indicates that the kingdom of God, which is the issue and goal of the Lord’s gospel, and the church in this age (Rom. 14:17) are a matter of the life of God, which sprouts, grows, bears fruit, matures, and produces a harvest (Mark 4:20). Christ establishes the kingdom by sowing Himself as the seed of life into believing people so that the kingdom may grow; this is absolutely a matter of the growth in life, not of our work (1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9; Matt. 13:8). Regeneration is the entrance into the kingdom of God, and the growth of the divine life within the believers is the development of the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). The seed of the kingdom is Jesus, and the development of the seed in the aggregate of the believers is the kingdom; this aggregate is the church (Rom. 14:17).

The kingdom of God is actually the God-man, the Lord Jesus, sown as a seed into the believers and developing into a realm over which God can rule as His kingdom in His divine life (Luke 17:20-21; Mark 4:3, 26-29). The kingdom of God is therefore a wonderful person—the Lord

Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). The Lord Jesus, who is the embodiment of the Triune God, came to be the kingdom of God by sowing Himself as the seed of the kingdom into God's chosen people (Col. 2:9; Luke 17:20-21; Matt. 13:3-23). Thus, the Lord is both the Sower and the seed sown; as the Sower, the Lord sows Himself as the seed of life through His word (Mark 4:3, 14). God's life, which is Christ Himself, is the seed of the realm of the divine life that develops into the kingdom for His ruling (vv. 3, 26-29).

The One who has been sown into us as a seed is what we may call "the kingdom gene"; the full development of this gene will be God's eternal kingdom in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). After this seed has been sown into the believers, it will grow and develop within them into the kingdom of God, which is for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose and also for their blessing and enjoyment (Col. 1:13). The development of the kingdom within us is our entering into the kingdom of God (2 Pet. 1:3-11). We need to be impressed with the reality that to enter into the kingdom of God is not a matter of entering into a material realm outwardly but of Christ growing inwardly and being formed in us (Gal. 4:19). In order to enter into the kingdom of God, we must humble ourselves and empty ourselves so that our entire inner being is available for Christ to grow in us (Mark 10:13-16; Eph. 3:16-17). Apparently, it is we who enter into the kingdom of God; actually, the entrance into the kingdom of God is supplied to us richly by the Lord through our growth in life and through the development of the divine life within us (2 Pet. 1:3-11). Under the direction of this remarkable revelation, we should be diligent to pursue the growth and development of the divine life within us until we are richly and bountifully supplied the entrance into "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (vv. 5, 11).

The Kingdom of God and the Church of God

It is significant that when the Lord Jesus spoke of the church in Matthew, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom of God (16:18-19; 18:17-18). This indicates how intimately the kingdom and the church are related. The New Testament presents first the kingdom and then the church, for the presence of the kingdom produces the church. The gospel brings in the divine life (John 3:15), and this life has its realm, which is the kingdom (vv. 3, 5). The divine life with the kingdom as its realm produces the church.

Because the kingdom of God is the reality of the church, we cannot live the church life apart from the kingdom life (Matt. 5:3). The kingdom life issues in the church life. As we live the kingdom life in a corporate way, we spontaneously live the church life. The genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age, and today the believers live

the kingdom life in the church (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4-6).

On the one hand, the kingdom of God produces the church through the gospel of the kingdom; on the other hand, the church brings in the kingdom of God. The work of the church is to bring in the kingdom of God in manifestation (Matt. 6:10; Rev. 1:6, 9; 11:15). The church exists for the specific purpose of ushering in the kingdom, and the work of the church is governed by the principle of the kingdom of God. The responsibility of the church is to cooperate with God in His administration for His will to be done on earth (Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50). For this the church must pray, asking for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Without this prayer ministry of the church, the kingdom of God cannot come to earth and the will of God cannot be done on earth. Therefore, the church occupies a central and crucial place in the divine administration, for it is the one place on earth that is the kingdom of God and that also brings in the kingdom of God. This concept is woven into the fiber of the book of Revelation.

If we have a spiritual understanding of Revelation, we will know that to be in a local church as an "embassy" is actually to be in the kingdom of God. In writing to "the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:4), John observed that Jesus Christ, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, has made us a kingdom (v. 6), indicating thereby that, in practicality, the kingdom of God today is in the church and even is the church. The word *kingdom* in 1:6 indicates that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is also; the church represents the kingdom. This view is supported by the fact that, according to 5:9-10, those who have been purchased for God by the blood of Jesus have been made a kingdom. The apostle John, by living in the church, was living in the kingdom (1:9). In a very real sense, therefore, the kingdom of God is present, and the believers may live in the kingdom by living in the church. Nevertheless, the kingdom of God will also come in the future. "Now has come...the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ" (12:10). "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15). To be in the church is both to be in the kingdom and to bring in the kingdom. Actually, the particular responsibility of the church as the kingdom of God is to bring in the glorious manifestation of the kingdom at the Lord's coming to claim the earth as His inheritance. What a mercy it is, under the government of God, to live in the genuine church life and to cooperate with God in arriving at the particular goal of His heavenly government and divine administration—to draw the Lord Jesus to come for His bride, to end the age of mystery, to defeat Satan in the ultimate spiritual war, to bring in the eternal kingdom of God, and to declare to the universe, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns" (19:6). **AFC**