

Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology,

Session 17, The Kingdom of God, Part 2

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 17, The Kingdom of God, Part 2.

So, we begin to look at the Gospels, specifically Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and how Jesus preaches. The most characteristic feature of Jesus' preaching was his announcement that the Kingdom of God had come.

And so, we want to look at the Kingdom of God from the standpoint of the fact that Jesus seemed to say that it was already present. The Kingdom had already arrived, although it had not yet come in its fullness. So, we find this tension between the presence and the future of the Kingdom. We said this is probably the most characteristic feature of the Gospels and of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom, which is that it is, in some sense, already present, yet it is still in the future.

And I suggested to you that the eschatological tension between what is already a reality in advance of its full manifestation best accounts for Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom. So, this is not a contradiction; these are not different layers of tradition, but they simply reflect the inaugurated reality of the end-time prophecies of the Old Testament, which, when you get to the New Testament, are fulfilled in two stages. Initially in Jesus' first coming, but then finally and ultimately in consummated form at the second coming of Christ or in the future.

So, what I want to do is just look very briefly at a handful of texts that clearly demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom, but also the character of the Kingdom as well and help us to understand what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God that he offers. What is it that Jesus Christ brings and offers when he says that the Kingdom of God is present? Probably the best starting point and the clearest reference to the presence of the Kingdom, but also a text that helps us to understand a little bit about what Jesus means by the Kingdom, is found in Matthew chapter 12 and verses 27 and 28. Now, this section happens in the context of Jesus; Jesus cast out a demon from someone possessed by a demon. The Pharisees are watching this, and they come, and they suggest that interestingly, in verse 23, the people respond, could this be the son of David? And then the Pharisees see this, and they say no, it's actually by Beelzebub, it's actually by the prince of demons by Satan that Jesus is casting out demons.

In response to that, this is what Jesus says. I'll start reading verse 25; Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined,

and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself.

How, then, can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So, then they will be your judges. Then verse 28, but if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. In other words, Jesus seems to be suggesting that if he is casting out demons and he has, as the context just showed and as the surrounding context will show in the gospels, if Jesus is casting out demons, that must mean that the kingdom of God is already present because that's what Jesus says in 29 or verse 28.

If it's by the spirit of God, not Satan, but if it's by God's spirit that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has already come upon you. It has already arrived. That is, by casting out demons, the kingdom of God is already making inroads into this world to assert, overturn, and destroy the kingdom of Satan.

So, Jesus now recognizes Satan's kingdom rules, but how can Jesus cast out demons by the name of Satan? That would be self-defeating. But Jesus says instead, if I cast out demons by the spirit of God, then God's kingdom has already arrived. That is, the kingdom of God is now making inroads into Satan's kingdom.

The kingdom of God is now beginning to reclaim the earth, to bring God's sovereignty and God's rule over the entire earth by delivering men and women from the reign and rule and power and authority of Satan himself. So, by casting out demons, the kingdom of God is already advancing and is already beginning to assert Satan's reign and Satan's rule. So clearly, the kingdom of God is already present in a text like Matthew chapter 12, where Jesus casts out demons and, in his kingdom, rules invading that of Satan.

There are other texts we could look at in the book of Matthew, but I want to turn to a couple of others elsewhere in the gospel of Luke. Luke chapter 4 and verses 16 and following. Luke chapter 4, I'll begin reading verse 16; Jesus went into Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue as was his custom.

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written. The spirit of the Lord is upon me. Because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news of the poor, he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down, and the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, today, this scripture is fulfilled in your midst. In other words, what Jesus is

suggesting is that this text, which Jesus reads, is a quotation from Isaiah chapter 61, which is in the context of God restoring his people, God establishing his reign, and his rule in his kingdom.

Jesus is now saying, in my life and ministry, in my healing, in my miracles, in my setting people free from demon possession, in my bringing salvation to the people, in my miracles, Isaiah 61 is already being fulfilled. In other words, Luke chapter 4 clearly states that the kingdom of God has already arrived. The kingdom of God is already being fulfilled in the midst of his people, in the ministry, in the teaching, and in the works of Jesus Christ himself.

Another text in Luke that points clearly to the coming of Jesus or the coming of the kingdom in Jesus, the presence of the kingdom, is chapter 17 and verse 21. I'll back up and read verse 20. Once on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replies, the coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say here it is or there it is because the kingdom of God is in your midst.

Now, there is a debate as to how to translate this passage and interpret it, but it seems to me that the best way to understand it is for Jesus to refer to the fact that the kingdom of God has already arrived in part. It has not yet come in its full manifestation when it will be observed physically and openly, but nonetheless the kingdom of God was already in their midst. The kingdom of God was already present in the person of Jesus Christ and in his teaching and miracles so that men and women could already enter the kingdom because it was already in their midst.

It was already present. This is probably how we should understand the references, especially in Matthew, such as Matthew 13, references to the mystery of the kingdom. When Matthew refers to the mystery of the kingdom, we probably should not take this as referring to something else or something other, that this is a different kingdom or something different than the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims and offers somewhere or that the prophets proclaimed.

Instead, we should probably understand Jesus' teaching of the mystery of the kingdom, especially in Matthew 13, as the fact that the kingdom of God has already arrived, but not in a forceful way. It has not yet arrived in its full force. It has already arrived, and men and women could already enter it, but it has not yet arrived in the irresistible way that it will in the future as the Old Testament prophets predicted and promised.

Instead, the kingdom of God is already present. Men and women can enter it, but they can also resist it. They can also reject it.

The kingdom of God is already present in Jesus' teaching and ministry, but it has not yet come in its full manifestation that one finds in the prophets. That is why it is a mystery. The kingdom is present, but it is here as a mystery.

It has come in a way that people do not expect. It has come in advance of its irresistible, open, manifested, consummated form in the future. I think all of these texts, and we could point to a number of others, we could point to plenty of texts such as even in Luke chapter 4, Jesus' quotation from Isaiah 61, the word kingdom of God is not used, but we could point to a number of other texts where the kingdom of God is not necessarily used, but clearly the kingdom of God is already present.

This seems to be the force of many of Jesus' parables when he compares the kingdom of God to a seed that will eventually grow up into a large tree or to a lump of dough where the leaven will spread throughout the entire dough when he compares the kingdom to a field where different kinds of weeds are mixed together, where one day, the bad weeds will be taken out and burned.

All of those parables are meant to contrast the beginning of the kingdom, the inauguration of the kingdom, and its final manifestation. It is like a seed. The kingdom is already here, but it has yet to reach its final consummated form.

It is like a lump of dough with leaven that has yet to spread throughout the entire dough, etc. So, a number of Jesus' parables, especially in Matthew 13, are meant to describe this mystery of the kingdom. How is it that the kingdom is already present, yet it doesn't look anything like you read about in the prophets? That's because it's present in mystery form in advance of its ultimate consummation and its final form that will take place at, as theologians call it, the second coming of Christ.

And so, throughout the Gospels, you find references to Jesus referring to a future kingdom. That is, the kingdom has yet to come. Again, we should not understand this as contradictory history, conflicting accounts, or different traditions but as part of that eschatological tension between what is already and what has not yet come.

So, just to give a couple of very brief examples, in the Gospel of Matthew, in the well-known parable, The Sheep and the Goats, that comes at the end of a discourse where Jesus discusses his second coming, his coming at the end of history, in the context of the disciples' question to him. In the so-called parable of the sheep and the goats, we read this, verse 34: Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. And if you read the rest of the context, the whole context is who may or may not, or who will or will not, enter the future kingdom of God.

So, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, at the end of Matthew 25, the kingdom is not yet present. The kingdom is something that is still in the future. It is a future reality.

To go back to the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 6, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus' well-known prayer, where he teaches the disciples to pray. He begins in verse 9, and this is how you should pray, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom comes, your will be done. So, notice the parallelism there.

God's kingdom is God's will being done. Your kingdom comes, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, this suggests that God's kingdom has not yet embraced the entire earth.

God's kingdom has yet to come fully on earth. So this is the not-yet perspective. Interestingly, we see the already back in the so-called beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5. Notice the very first one.

In Matthew chapter 5, verse 3, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It seems to, at least, suggest we take that in an inaugurated way. That it's the poor in spirit who now enter the kingdom of heaven.

Although that could still be taken in a future sense as well, it probably suggests that those who are poor in spirit know the kingdom of heaven is theirs. But in chapter 6, verse 10, the kingdom of God, that is God's kingdom, his sovereignty that is now fully realized in heaven, has yet to come on earth. And that's what he tells his disciples to pray for.

So, we find then that the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims has both a present and future dimension. It's already present in Jesus' ministry and works in advance of his ultimate manifestation and consummation in the future. So, to summarize, there's so much more we could say in the Gospels.

There are a number of other texts that we could look at and spend time on, but we won't. I think you have enough now to be able to see what the kingdom is that Jesus offers and to see the already but not yet the present and future manifestations of that. But if I could summarize the Gospels teaching that we've looked at is then through Jesus Christ, the son of David, and through invading the realm of Satan, and by performing miracles, God is now beginning to restore his end-time kingdom in fulfillment of the Old Testament.

I would argue starting back with Genesis 1 and 2, but then throughout Israel's history and now in the expectations of the prophets, especially of a coming Davidic king, Jesus Christ is now the son of David who is now offering his kingdom and is

dispensing the blessings of the salvation of the kingdom to his people. And again, he does that now in advance of the ultimate climactic manifestation of that kingdom in the future. Now, when we get over to the Gospels, I'm sorry, when we move from the Gospels and get over into the rest of the New Testament, we'll actually skip to the epistles.

We do find an interesting reference to the kingdom at the very end of the book of Acts. We find Paul in Rome still preaching the kingdom of God in Acts chapter 28. But when we get to the New Testament epistles, especially Paul's epistles, it's interesting how much the phrase kingdom of God is lacking.

It's all over the place in the Gospels, and you get almost so used to seeing it, and you get to the epistles, and it's not there. Let me say a couple of things. Number one, I think, is because now Paul and the New Testament writers are primarily referring to the blessings of the kingdom and the blessings of salvation that come through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So they take on different languages to describe what Jesus Christ's death and resurrection have accomplished, but the second thing I would say is the kingdom of God has not vanished. The kingdom of God has not vanished from Paul's teaching.

Even though the terminology might not be there all the time, we still see the blessings of the kingdom. We still see references to Jesus as the son of David. We see Davidic covenant language all over the place.

We see allusions to Old Testament text in the context of the kingdom of God and the Davidic covenant. So, I wouldn't want to say that the kingdom of God has been set aside or replaced with something else. It just seems to now be communicated in a new key in light of fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, what I want to do is look at just a handful of Pauline letters. We'll start with Pauline epistles and then move on to a few texts outside of Paul's epistles. Once more, it ends with the book of Revelation, where we find the consummated form of the kingdom.

First of all, I'll follow Paul's letters roughly in canonical order. Let me start with Romans chapter 1 at the very introduction of and beginning of the pre-script to Paul's letter in verses 3 and 4, where Paul actually expands his epistolary introduction. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the church, etc.

Now, Paul expands that by saying that Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, was called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God. The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures. So, notice that language of promise fulfillment.

The gospel Paul preaches is the fulfillment of what was promised in the prophets beforehand. Regarding his son, verse 3, regarding his son who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David and who, through the spirit of holiness was appointed the son of God in power. Now, by his resurrection from the dead.

So, notice the Davidic language, the sonship language. Jesus Christ is now the true son of David, and even at the beginning of his letter, it's as if Paul wants you to understand that this Jesus Christ that he will discuss in the rest of the book and the salvation that he brings is part and parcel of the fact that Jesus is now the true son of David in fulfillment of Old Testament promises and now will dispense the blessings of salvation to his people. We perhaps find something similar in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, the well-known resurrection text that we've traversed on a couple of other occasions. Again, my purpose is not only to focus on Davidic texts, though we'll often do that, but simply on the language of reign and kingdom, God establishing his rule or kingdom.

Verses 24 through 28 is an important text. Let me back up and read 22. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

But each, in turn, Christ the first fruit, so that's a reference: Christ will be raised first, and then when he comes, those who belong to him. So, Christ will be raised first in anticipation of more fruit to come, that is, the resurrection of his followers, those who are united to him in faith. But then Paul goes on; then the end will come when he, Christ, hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet, Psalm chapter 8. He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, again a clear allusion to Psalm chapter 8, God has placed all things under their feet, which is connected to creation, Genesis chapter 1. Then, the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Verse 27, for he has put everything under his feet. There's a clear quotation of Psalm chapter 8. Now, when it says that everything has been put under his feet, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

But when he has done this, then the Son himself will be made the subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. So, you get this picture again that Jesus Christ in fulfillment particularly of Psalm chapter 8, but again probably other Old Testament text referring to the reign of the Son of David, but in fulfillment of Psalm chapter 8, which recounts Genesis 1 and 2, so we can say in fulfillment of God's intention for his creation and humanity in Genesis chapter 1, now we see Jesus Christ fulfilling this. Here's the not yet aspect.

Now we see Jesus Christ reigning until he has put all enemies under his feet, and he destroys the last enemy, which is death, and then he hands the keys of the kingdom over to the Father. And God's reign and his dominion last forever and ever in fulfillment of God's original intention for humanity in Genesis 1. Now, we find Genesis 1 reaching its culmination. Notice all the other, not only the reference to Psalm 8 but all the other Adam language, especially that we looked at several verses later.

So, Christ's resurrection, his own resurrection, is the anticipation of our resurrection, which brings about the ultimate defeat of death, so that once Christ has defeated all enemies, then Scripture is fulfilled. That the intention of God from Genesis 1 finds its fulfillment, and Christ has reigned and put everything under his feet and then turned the keys of the kingdom over to the Father. Another text, Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 20-22 is again a text that does not explicitly use the language kingdom of God, but a text that nonetheless resonates with the kingdom and especially the Davidic covenant language.

So, as we've already said, when we talk about the theme of the kingdom of God, there's a lot of overlap with the Davidic covenant theme because it's through King David, it's through the promises made to David, God's covenant with David, that he would bring about his rule, that he would ultimately fulfill his intention to rule over all creation. And now, in Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 21-22, referring to the power that now is available to God's people, is the power that is the same as the mighty strength that God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms. Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the age to come.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head of everything for the church. Now, what I want you to notice again, we've mentioned this already, but to recall, although we find no explicit quotations of Old Testament text, Paul clearly alludes to at least two psalms, one of them being Psalm 110, a Davidic psalm that refers to the son of David, the king, sitting at the right hand of God. The right hand of God is emblematic of a position of sovereignty, a position of authority.

Then, in Psalm 8, Ephesian 1 verse 22, he places all things under his feet. So what Paul is saying is that the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ to heaven was the entrance into Jesus' Davidic and Messianic reign. Jesus now is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, Psalm 110, and now all things have been placed under his feet, Psalm 8. So by virtue of Jesus' resurrection, Jesus is now beginning; this is already part; Jesus is now beginning to fulfill and accomplish the promised reign, not only of King David in the Davidic Psalms but also Psalm 8, which goes all the way back to creation.

So again, God's intention through his people to rule over all creation, to spread God's reign and glory over all creation, is now beginning to be fulfilled through a new Adam, a new image bearer of God, and that is the person of Jesus Christ, who now through his resurrection and exaltation to heaven, has entered into his kingly Messianic reign to begin to bring about the fulfillment of God's promises. We can easily couple this with the passage that we read in 1 Corinthians 15, 24-28, which also quotes from Psalm 8, so that this is the already, Jesus already has entered into his Messianic kingly rule in fulfillment of the Davidic promises and God's intention for creation in Genesis 1 via Psalm 8, and then the not yet we see in 1 Corinthians 15, where Jesus rules until all things are fulfilled finally under his feet. The last enemy to be defeated is death, which is what Adam brought because of his sin. God Christ then turns the keys of the kingdom over to the Father, and God rules forever.

His dominion is forever and ever. To move on to Colossians, a couple of passages from the book of Colossians also resonate with the kingdom language. We've already looked at Colossians 1:15, which says; The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over creation.

Now I want to focus on that last phrase, sometimes that's wrongly been taken to suggest that Jesus is part of the created order or something like that, but the language of firstborn here probably comes right out of another Psalm, another Davidic Psalm, and that is Psalm chapter 89. Now, we've read this before, but I want to read the verse again because it contains crucial language that helps us to understand this reference in Colossians 1:15: Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. Now, notice in Psalm 89, and I will read verse 27, Psalm 89, and verse 27, but let me back up just a moment to verse 20; I'll just read a couple of these verses.

I have found David, my servant; with my sacred oil, I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him, verse 22, the enemy will not get the better of him. Verse 23, I will crush his foes.

Verse 24: my faithful love will be with him, David, and through my name his horn will be exalted. Verse 25, I will set his hand over the seas, his mighty hand over the rivers. He will call out to me: you are my father, my God, my rock, my savior, part of the Davidic covenant.

Now listen to this, verse 27, still referring to David, the king in David's line: I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted king, the most exalted of all the kings of the earth. In other words, so when we get back to Colossians 1:15 when Paul says Jesus is the firstborn over all creation, I think he is alluding back to Psalm 89 and suggesting, again, as the Davidic son, as the greater son of David, as the true son of David, Jesus now fulfills God's intention for the Davidic king of Psalm 89 by being the firstborn of creation, which means he is the exalted king of all things. Firstborn does

not mean he is the first thing created, it means he has the status of the exalted king over all of creation in fulfillment of the Davidic promises.

So Colossians 1:15 clearly resonates with kingship language, with Davidic covenant language, so once again, it is through the person of Jesus Christ, it is through the person of Christ that God's intention to rule over all things is accomplished through David's greater son, Jesus Christ, who now as the firstborn, that is the exalted king of the earth, now begins to reign as the one who in fact is the creator, is the one through whom God creates all things. Another text right before that, which uses kingdom language and Davidic covenant language, is found in verses 12 and 13 of Colossians chapter 1. So, Paul tells his people to give joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified them to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. So now he described his readers as already sharing in the kingdom of light.

But now notice what he says, for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and has transferred us or brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves. So notice that verse 13 sounds a lot like the synoptic gospels, especially since it is almost Paul's version of Matthew chapter 12. If I cast out demons, if I deliver people from the power of Satan by the power of the spirit, then the kingdom of God has come upon you through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

And now we find Paul saying that God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness, from Satan's own dominion. He's rescued us, and now he's transferred us into another dominion or kingdom, which is the kingdom of his beloved son. And I think this language of the kingdom of the son he loves or of his beloved son, again, is Davidic covenant language.

Back in chapter 89, he is the one I will set my love on him. We elsewhere find that David is the one that God loves. David is the king on whom God sets his love.

So here we find, outside of the gospels, here we find Davidic language. We find Jesus as the Davidic king whose kingdom people can now enter through God's delivery and rescue of them from Satan's kingdom. Now he transfers them into and delivers them into the Christ kingdom, the Davidic son that God loves.

Verse 14, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Now, just to refer to a couple of other texts that particularly refer to Davidic kingdoms or Jesus Christ fulfilling the Davidic covenant as a Davidic king who now inaugurates his promised kingdom and rule. Most of these texts once more are ones that we've already referred to, but since so many of these themes, as we've noted, overlap, we can't help but refer to them again.

Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 5, which we read in conjunction with the Davidic covenant. To which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son. Today I become your father.

The answer isn't to none of them. He's only said it to the son. Or, again, I will be his father, and he will be my son.

A combined quotation of Psalm chapter 2 verse 7 and 2 Samuel 7 verse 14 to make it abundantly clear that Jesus Christ now inaugurates the end-time kingdom promised to David that one reads about in the prophetic text. So, to summarize the evidence we've looked at so far in relation to the gospels and Paul's letters, this is a quotation from Roy Champa in the book Central Themes in Biblical Theology. He says, if his, that is Jesus's, if Jesus's death and resurrection are the keys to the restoration of Israel, then he, Jesus, can now enter into that long-awaited glorious and universal phase of the Davidic kingdom and that salvation may or rather must now go to the ends of the earth.

So now that Jesus has entered into that Davidic reign, the blessings of the kingdom, the salvation associated with the kingdom can now be dispensed to his people and spread to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises but ultimately in fulfillment of God's intention for creation in the first place. Now, just a couple of texts, once more that we've looked at, but I want to raise them again because interestingly, they demonstrate even more clearly God's people's participation not only in entering the kingdom but in ruling themselves, in themselves fulfilling God's intention for the Davidic king to rule, that is participating in the Davidic covenant. The two texts we looked at, and I won't go back and read them, but 2 Corinthians 6:18 and Revelation 21:7, both of those either quote or refer to the Davidic covenant prompt formula that is I will be your son, I will be your father and you will be my son.

Both of those refer to that but do not apply it to the person of Jesus Christ. These two texts apply the covenant formula to the people themselves. So once again, Jesus Christ is the true son of David who brings about the fulfillment of the Davidic promises, but we are also sons of David in a sense, or we also share in the Davidic covenant promises by virtue of belonging to Christ, who himself is the true son of David. And we've already seen in Colossians 3:10 that we also share in being restored in the Davidic image.

We saw already in Colossians 1:12-13 we ourselves have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness from Satan's kingdom and out from under his dominion into the kingdom of God's beloved son in fulfillment of the establishment of the Davidic dominion, the Davidic rule that is beginning now to spread throughout the entire earth. Now, what I want to do is look very briefly at the consummation of God's

kingdom in Revelation 20-22. So, this is the not yet aspect, John's vision of the not yet becoming a reality.

And the first place I want to start is with Revelation 20 and the reference to the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20, verses 4-6. The reason that I raise this text is because this is often deemed to be a very significant text in the development and understanding of God's kingdom and rule on earth. But it also clearly refers to God's people reigning and ruling after being raised.

It's interesting that it combines resurrection and ruling. But in Revelation chapter 20 and verses 4-6, the author says, I saw thrones, so once again there are thrones; thrones imply probably both judgment but also ruling and kingship and sovereignty and authority. So, the author says, I saw thrones on which those who had been given authority to judge were seated.

And this is Revelation 20, 4-6. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.

They came to life, and they reigned with Christ a thousand years. Then, the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years had ended. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. Now we could discuss the different views of the millennium, whether it's amillennialism, we should understand this from the perspective of amillennialism, that is, the millennium symbolizes the entire church age, but from the first coming of Christ or the second coming of Christ, that entire period is the millennium.

Or should we understand this in terms of postmillennialism, that it's through the church's preaching and evangelism and through the power of the spirit that a millennium will emerge and then post after that, Christ returns? Or should we understand this in terms of premillennialism, that is, Christ will return and set up his kingdom? So, Christ comes back first pre and then he establishes his kingdom on earth.

Even within that, there's a variety of positions, and my intention is not to discuss those positions or to argue for one or the other, but simply to ask how this fits within the theme of God's kingdom and God's rule. The first thing to note is chapters 20:4-6 take place in the context of the defeat of Satan and judgment on Satan. So, Satan,

first of all, is bound in the pit in the first three verses of chapter 20, and later, he'll be let out, and he'll finally be judged and dispensed of.

But in the midst of that, we find this reference to the saints coming to life and reigning with Christ. Again, I'm not interested in arguing for different theological positions. I just want to ask the question: how do we understand this? First of all, I think the millennium is meant to be a reversal of what Satan has done.

So when you read the rest of the book of Revelation, especially back in chapters 12 and 13, Satan is the one who rules. Satan is the one who deceives people. Satan is the one who kills the saints.

He puts the saints to death. As the saints try to carry out their ministry under the dominion of Satan, under the kingdom of Satan, they are put to death. Satan wrongly accuses them in chapter 12.

Now, what we find is a reversal. Satan is now the judge, but the saints are vindicated. And they are vindicated by themselves, now ruling.

So, they come to life, and they reign. Again, this is the very fulfillment of God's intention for his people back in Genesis. Adam and Eve were to spread God's rule and to reign, yet they died and brought death.

Now we see that being reversed with God's people being raised and brought to life and reigning with Christ. So again, there is much more that could be said about that, and I don't want to go into the pros and cons of the different millennial positions. Whatever one you hold, I think you at least have to understand in this framework that this is the reversal of Satan's reign.

This is the vindication of the saints. It's a reversal of Satan's reign and Satan's treatment of them. Now, he is judged, and he loses his kingdom.

Now, the saints come to life, and they reign. But it's also a fulfillment of God's intention for humanity that was lost at the fall. Now, because of Adam's sin, humanity dies, and they fail to fulfill the commission that God gives to Adam.

Now we see that reversed with God's people rising to life and now reigning with him. That's all I want to say about that. Again, whatever view you take, you at least have to understand it in that context.

But I think the reference to the reign in the millennium here. However, you understand that, is only a harbinger to or only preparation for the saints reigning and the arrival of the kingdom in Revelation 21 and 22, which we'll get to in just a moment. But before we get there, and even before looking at a text like Revelation

chapter 20, it's important to understand that Revelation chapter 4 begins with a vision of God's sovereignty. That is, God sovereignly sits on his throne.

The throne is a symbol of rule and sovereign authority. Caesar's throne, the emperor's throne, is on earth, a symbol of his authority and sovereignty. But God's throne is in heaven so that God's sovereignty, his kingship, and his rule are fully recognized and perfectly realized in heaven.

Chapter 4 has all of creation, and chapter 5 has all of creation gathered around the throne, worshipping God and the Lamb and acknowledging their complete sovereignty. The questions in chapters 4 and 5 are: how will God's rule and his sovereignty, how will God's kingdom be fully realized in heaven, and how will it finally come about on earth that contests it? Again, on earth, we have Caesar's throne. Caesar is the king.

Caesar is the ruler, and Christians suffer by refusing to acknowledge that. So, how will God's rule, his kingdom, and his sovereignty be fully acknowledged and realized in heaven? How will that get realized on earth? In a sense, the book of Revelation and the rest of Revelation is an account of how that takes place. British New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham suggested that, in a sense, the book of Revelation could be seen as sort of an expanded commentary on the Lord's prayer that we read a moment ago, chapter 6 and verse 12.

I'm sorry, chapter 6, verses 9 and 10. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's sovereignty is already realized in heaven. His will and his kingdom is already acknowledged and realized in heaven. How will that come about on earth, which the disciples were to pray for? Well, now Revelation tells us, here's how chapters 4 and 5, the scene of chapters 4 and 5, will eventually become a reality on Earth.

And 21 and 22 are the answer to that question. Now we find in chapters 21 and 22 that God's kingdom, his sovereignty, and his rule are fully acknowledged and fully realized on this earth but a renewed, recreated, reconstituted earth stripped of all the effects of sin where there no longer is anyone who resists God's rule. No longer is there anything to resist or thwart God's kingdom in Revelation 21 and 22.

So again, I think it's important to read Revelation 21 and 22 in light of chapters 4 and 5. So, for example, we could look at a number of texts in Revelation chapters 21 and 22, but if I can skip ahead to chapter 22, actually start with 21 and 1, and then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and earth had passed away and the sea was no longer. In other words, the kingdoms of this world have passed away. This is probably not only an ontological statement but also a political one.

The first heaven and the first earth, the place ruled by Caesar, the place ravaged by sin and death, the place ravaged by the Roman Empire, ravaged by human rulers and empires such as the four beasts that we saw in Daniel chapter 7 and the beasts that we find in Revelation, that has now passed away and now it has been recreated and renewed into a new heavens and a new earth where now we find God's sovereign promises being fulfilled. Now we find God's kingdom being established. That is, we find the answer to the Lord's prayer.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done now on earth. Now it's realized on earth, on a new earth, a new heavens and a new earth just as it is in heaven. In fact, what we actually have is in chapters 4 and 5, heaven now comes down to earth.

Heaven and earth are now co-extensive in Revelation 21 and 22. Before that, we find John going back and forth between heaven and earth. Heaven is God's sanctuary.

Heaven is where Christ is exalted. Heaven is where everything takes place in chapters 4 and 5. Now heaven comes back to earth. I once read a sermon title and saw a sermon title in Revelation 21 and 22 entitled God's New Home.

I was puzzled by that for a moment, but then I realized how accurate that is. It's not just that we get a new home and a new creation, but now God does as well. God's dwelling and his kingdom and his rule now come down to earth.

We find in chapter 21 God's presence, God himself, and the Lamb residing with God's people. In Revelation 22 and 23, no longer will there be any curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb that we saw in Revelation 4 and 5. Now the throne of God and the Lamb, symbol of their authority, their kingdom, their rule, the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. So now the throne of God, his rule, his kingdom, the throne of God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ come down to the earth.

We should also show that we should still understand the throne of God, especially the throne of the Lamb, in terms of the fulfillment of the Davidic promises. Back in chapter 5, when John is looking for who is going to go, he finds the scroll in God's hands, and he begins to weep because he can't find anyone to open it. So, he wonders who is going to fulfill God's plan of redemptive history, which I think is what the scroll is about.

Who is going to bring about God's kingdom on earth? And it's interesting that one of the elders comes to him and says, do not weep, see the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed. So again, this Lamb is none other than the son of David. The kingdom that he finally establishes in Revelation 22:3, where his throne is in the center of the city on a new creation, is the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic promises.

So, God and the Lamb's throne are in the center of a new creation and the Garden of Eden. However, again, the throne symbolizes authority, God's kingdom, in contrast to Caesar's throne, which was operative in between chapters 4 and 5 and now 21 and 22, but has now been destroyed. Chapter 22, verse 5, and before we get there, we find other anticipations of this throughout the book of Revelation.

We find other anticipations that God's kingdom would one day arrive in a way that would embrace the entire earth. That is, the kingdoms of this world, the kingdom that belonged to Satan and the beastly figures like the Roman Empire, now would be transferred under God's dominion and God's rule. So, for example, in Revelation chapter 11, anticipating that, the author says, the seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven which said, the kingdom of the world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

Now, notice what we find in chapter 22 and verse 5. In the text we've already read, but at the very end, there will be no more night; they will not need the light of the lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever. In other words, God's people will reign with Christ forever and ever. Verse 3, God and the Lamb's throne are on the new creation to reign.

Now, God's people reign. God's people reign forever and ever over a new creation. So, once more, I take it that this is the goal of God's intention for humanity back in Genesis 1 and 2. That Adam and Eve, as God's image bearers, would extend God's rule to embrace the entire creation.

That the whole earth would be filled with God's glory, to quote text from the Psalms. As God's image bearers, Adam and Eve, as God's representatives, would spread God's rule over all of creation. Now, we find that fulfilled.

With God's image bearers, his people reigning forever and ever, along with God and the Lamb, reigning forever and ever over a new creation. So, putting this all together, what I think we find is, in the Old Testament, we find, starting with creation, God's intention to, through his people, his image bearers, rule over all creation. We find how that was thwarted because of sin, but throughout the Old Testament, through choosing the nation of Israel, through the choosing of a Davidic king, and then through prophetic anticipations of a restored Davidic kingship and anticipations of God ruling, we find the Old Testament expecting a time, anticipating, promising a time, when God would establish his reign and rule throughout all the earth.

Now, that begins to be fulfilled. That kingdom is inaugurated with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the son of David, begins to fulfill those promises, and through

his death, resurrection, and exaltation, he again enters into his messianic reign and rule, where he begins to extend his rule throughout all creation.

But we find then, as a result of that, God's people can be delivered from the kingdom of Satan, from the kingdom of darkness, and they can be transferred into Christ's kingdom. They can now enter, belong to, and participate in the kingdom and the blessings of salvation that it brings. But that all points to a day when God's kingdom promises will be consummated.

When Christ will reign until all enemies are put under his feet, and when God and the Lamb reign and rule in a new creation, but when their people also reign with them on a new creation forever and ever. Then, the long history of God's redemptive dealing with humanity will finally reach its goal and climax.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 17, The Kingdom of God, Part 2.