

# Gospel of the Kingdom P1

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## **Genesis 1**

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Jon: In this episode of The Bible Project podcast, Tim and I are going to be dialoguing about a theme in the Bible that begins at the very beginning of Scripture, it goes all the way to the end. It's a theme that's central to Jesus' message, but it's incredibly difficult for us to understand. Well, I should say, at least for me to understand. It's the theme of the Kingdom of God. This dialogue was super helpful for me in wrapping my mind around why that was so central to Jesus' message and what it should mean to me if I'm trying to follow Jesus.

We broke this up into three parts. In this first part, Tim introduces the concept of the Kingdom of God and shows us how it is staring us in the face in Genesis chapter 1.

Tim: One of the most interesting little mental exercises to do is to ask yourself, "Have I tried to boil down everything I know about what Jesus ever said? If I had to summarize it in one sentence or think of one saying or teaching that is the essence of what I think he taught, what would that be?"

Jon: So what would it be?

Tim: Well, you tell me. We have done it before.

Jon: Yeah, we just did this. We already went from this exercise. But I said, "Love your neighbor." Is what I said.

Tim: Yes. Love your neighbor, popular number one. Coming in at hot second would be the golden rule, "do unto others as you would have them do to you." Maybe somebody who's really passionate about social justice might think of "love your enemies, forgive them, pray for them," that kind of thing.

Jon: Someone who deals with a lot of anxiety like me, I always go to "do not worry." For some reason that one feels like an important.

Tim: Birds don't worry about food, so why should you? Here's what's interesting about that is that how I summarize what I think is the main message or teaching of Jesus tells me a lot about who I think Jesus was. In contrast to that is an interesting fact. The three of the four accounts of Jesus' life in the New Testament, the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they summarize the whole message of Jesus for us. In the first sentence that they put in is his mouth when he comes on to the

public scene in each of those gospels. And that summary sentence is, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is here, or it has arrived."

So from the Gospel authors point of view, the moral teachings of Jesus, love your neighbor, the scandalous moral teachings, forgive your enemies, that kind of thing, those are not the essence of Jesus' message. Those are subordinate to some larger, more important idea. Those behaviors only make sense in light of some bigger thing. And that bigger thing is that the Kingdom of God is here.

Jon: Would you say because the gospel authors summarize it as "the Kingdom of God is here" or near...What are they saying? Here or near?

Tim: Near or has arrived is kind of way I like to paraphrase it.

Jon: Since they're doing that, that's how a Christ follower should do?

Tim: Yeah. We tend to, by those summaries, think of Jesus primarily as a moral teacher. The gospels are interested in portraying Jesus as a prophet in line with Israel's prophets who was announcing and heralding the great day of God's justice and salvation.

Jon: Do you think that we don't emphasize that because we just don't understand? I mean, it's a lot harder to understand this idea of the Kingdom of God, how that ties into all this prophecy? I mean, it's really dense.

Tim: It's a foreign narrative to us. We in the West have a grand narrative of moral progress. Really. I mean, that's the driving narrative of the Western world is of moral progress.

Jon: Good point.

Tim: So, we like to tie Jesus into that where we can, but Jesus' grand narrative was about the covenant story of God in Israel and the world coming to its climax in himself and the arrival of the kingdom. That's weird. Because kingdom and prophecy has an American Christianity mostly been dominated by end of the world left behind weirdness that we don't know what to do with this part of who Jesus is.

Jon: Yeah, that makes sense. And that's why this project so much it's going back and saying, "Okay, what is this kind of crazy story that's unfamiliar to us. We get feedback that the word "crazy" is a bad word to use. And we like to use it. It's unfamiliar, surprising, strange story. And so this idea of God's kingdom, that's one of the strangest things for us to think about.

Tim: I mean, there are still kingdoms in the world today but they're more likely kind of—

Jon: Like?

Tim: The United Kingdom. Britain have a queen and prince and princess and that kind of thing. But for the most part of their archaic revivals from an earlier era of human history. So kingdom and kings isn't a social reality for most Westerners or for most of the modern world. So we think of democracy not kings. So the word is foreign, and its imagery. And then the story, the biblical story that Jesus sees himself fulfilling is also foreign to us because it's not our grand narrative.

The whole point is that for Jesus he summarized his message the Kingdom of God is what Jesus talked about more than any other topic hands down. So just in the Gospel of Matthew alone, Jesus mentions the kingdom over 50 times, which is 1.5 times per page of the 28-chapter Gospel of Matthew. So it's clearly that's what he dominated. That was the dominating theme of his teaching.

So if we want to understand who Jesus is and who he sees himself as, we need to learn what this term meant and how it fits into the story in the Bible.

[00:07:18]

Tim: The English word "Kingdom" if you look in the dictionary, it primarily refers to a place. And the Greek and Hebrew words, Greek, *basileús*, and Hebrew, *malkuth* refers to an activity, an action or—

Jon: In English, it refers to a place, and Hebrew and Greek—

Tim: The biblical term Old Testament and New Testament refers primarily to an action that includes a place. So here's how I say in the notes here, that in Bible it refers to an action - the rule or the reign of a king over Israel people, which is going to be somewhere.

Jon: So like your kingdoming someone?

Tim: Yeah. I actually think the verbs "rule" or...we have a noun and English "the reign of a king," which obviously has to take place somewhere—

Jon: So by saying, "The reign of the king" is the same thing as saying the kingdom of the king?

Tim: In the Bible, yes.

Jon: In the Bible?

Tim: Yeah. The word "Kingdom" has stuck with us from older English from the King James and Tyndale before him, and that noun has just stuck in English translations over time. But the biblical word refers to the activity of a king reigning over his people.

Jon: So when Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is here," you could translate that "the reign of God is here"?

Tim: Correct. And the importance is that especially because Matthew was the first gospel in the New Testament, the frequent phrase and Matthew is "the kingdom of heaven," which Jesus uses anonymously with "the kingdom of God." "Heaven" is just paraphrase for talking about God's reign or the reign of heaven. But the problem in the history of Western interpretation has been because kingdom of heaven is what people read first in the New Testament, they think of it as a place.

Jon: Yeah, because Heaven is a place.

Tim: Heaven is God's space in the cloud somewhere.

Jon: And so there's a kingdom up there.

Tim: There's a kingdom up there and it's arriving here. I mean, that's not too far from the idea, but it's more talking about there's God's space where God is king and where everything—

Jon: There's a reality in which God reigns.

Tim: There's a reality in which God reigns and where everything that is done is God's will. The story of the Bible as it goes on, the earth has become a place where God's will is not done because we assert our will over it. And God's allowed us to do that. And so Jesus is announcing the arrival of God's reign to take back His world from us. That's at least phase one. It's not quite as simple as that.

Jon: Phase one meaning idea one?

Tim: Idea one, yeah. There you go. Kingdom in the Bible refers to an activity. Primarily, it assumes a place. So if a king is reigning, he's reigning over some people somewhere.

Jon: So that idea is taken for granted in Hebrew thought?

Tim: Yeah. Whereas in English, it refers we think of a place as opposed to the person and the way that the person is reigning.

Jon: The word kingdom, is that Latin dom? What's dom even mean?

Tim: Dom. The Latin root dom. Well, on Wiktionary, it forms a noun that denotes the condition, power, dominion, authority or state from proto-dramatic [SP] domas.

Jon: Domas.

Tim: Ah, so forming nouns that denote condition or state. Boredom, freedom, martyrdom, stardom.

Jon: Okay. So a state of the kingdom?

Tim: Forming nouns that note the dom, domain or jurisdiction. Christendom, fiefdom, kingdom. Those are the two main ones. A condition or domain.

Jon: A domain kind of speaks to land.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. Geography. It can also form a condition.

Jon: But that's what you're speaking to is the condition.

Tim: In Bible, it's referring to a condition or a state of activity. So boredom is a state of being bored. Kingdom is a state of being ruled - a state of being under someone's rule. If you're in the kingdom, if you are bringing the kingdom, you are reigning.

Jon: You're bringing the rule.

Tim: You're bringing the rule, yes. Some of my favorite New Testament scholars on this whole topic, RT France or NT Wright or a German guy, [unintelligible 00:12:31], they translate it as "the rule of God or the reign of God has arrived." And I think that's helpful. Just twisted in English a little bit to make it fresh. And then it gets you to ask a question: what does it mean for Jewish prophet to come onto the scene 2,000 years ago, saying, "The rule of God has arrived?" Has God not been ruling?

Jon: And it's helpful because it's a word we still use.

Tim: It's a word we still use. To rule.

Jon: I don't go around really talking about kingdoms.

Tim: And even rule or reign, it's not like you wouldn't...like a manager doesn't reign in the office?

Jon: Who's in charge?

Tim: We would say, who's in charge?

Jon: Who is the boss?

Tim: NT Wright paraphrase is running the show or in charge. Which just begged the question, so what does it mean for the reign of God to arrive in Jesus?

Jon: And how would a Jewish person perceive that.

Tim: That's right. There, I think we have to go back to just the biblical story. The Kingdom of God is one of these themes that run from Page 1 to the very last page. Literally, from Page 1 to the second to the last paragraph of the Bible.

Jon: Nice. So it's truly a theme that runs straight through the Bible?

Tim: Yeah.

[00:14:23]

Tim: A good Bible trivia fact, great at parties to now, where's the first time that the word rule or reign or anything to do with a king or reigning appears in the Bible? I guess I've already given it away.

Jon: You have. But if I hadn't looked at your notes, I probably would have guessed...I'm looking at your notes though now and so I'm—

Tim: It's ruined.

Jon: It's ruined.

Tim: There's one more. There's one more Bible trivia fact that I won't reveal to you yet. Where in the Bible is the first time the idea of ruling or reigning appears? Page 1. Or in some Bible, the way the page might be formatted, page 2. It's closely connected to the image of God.

Jon: The idea of reigning is.

Tim: The idea of reigning is. So God makes a really good world full of potential, it's exploding with potential and life. The culmination of Genesis 1 is the famous line, God created mankind in His own image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, every other living creature that moves on the ground."

So that word "rule," it's one of the standard Hebrew words for what kings do - to rule or to reign.

Jon: And it's not the word "kingdom"?

Tim: It's not the word kingdom. No. In studying biblical themes, you need to be sensitive to not just assuming—

Jon: Not do word studies.

Tim: Yeah. Theme studies are distinct from word studies. An idea can be represented by lots of different words or even metaphors. So the idea can be present in executing that.

Jon: But if the word "kingdom" kind of means the verb "rule," there's another word that also means rule.

Tim: Yes. There's multiple - probably about three different verbs that describe the act of ruling and reigning as a king and they all have different nuances. But this one has to do with ruling - having an authority to oversee and to steward and manage.

Jon: Does it have kind of kingly connotations?

Tim: Yes. It's a great translation because you to say rule, who uses that word? right? That's not what your boss does at Subway. He doesn't rule the place. Even in English that we think of someone in a state of governing authority, that's what we use the word rule for. And that's similar here.

So it's depicting humans as having some royal task. And that connects back to the Image of God. So here's the big question, do we do a quick movement on the Image of God in this video?

Jon: We did that in Genesis 1.

Tim: We did that quickly in Genesis 1, but this would be to bring out a different nuance of it. That's Genesis 1.

Jon: Did we ever talk about just doing a video on Image of God. I thought so and then I looked in our theme videos—

Jon: I know it's on the list, but I think we had discussed it before.

Tim: Yeah, we had. I think it's actually will be wrapped up in the new humanity. I think that we're doing something on new humanity. So that would be that one.

Jon: So, when you say it's a royal task, I mean, I don't even really understand royalty and kingdoms that well, but it seems like that had a certain very special meaning, royal.



Tim: Yes, it does. So let's look at Psalm 8, and then let's think about the Image of God, and then this all comes together in a really, I think, profound way. So Psalm 8 is a poetic reflection on Genesis 1 and specifically humanity's role in the world.

So Psalm 8:4 begins with this line, "What is mankind that you are mindful of him; what's humanity that you care for him. You've made him a little lower than the angels—

Jon: Which is pretty awesome.

Tim: Right. That's reflecting on this: Human beings are made out of dirt, so we're Earthlings, literally, but there's also something transcendent or sacred. The biologists call this what? An emergent form or something. This is physics. An emergent form, where in evolutionary development, there are these leaps that happen where the complexity of a form isn't reducible to any one cause, but to multiple factors. And it's a new entity.

Jon: A lot of people think of consciousness that way.

Tim: That's right. Exactly right. And it doesn't mean we can't trace the development, but it doesn't mean at some point, it stops being a whole bunch of the things from the previous stage and it is a new genuine thing in its own right. What am I talking about?

Jon: We were dust but there's something there.

Tim: Something other about humans.

Jon: Other than dust.

Tim: In Genesis 1, that's reflected as image of God. Genesis 2, it's called the divine breath that animates the humans. But it's that humans are a mix of heaven and earth, would be the Bible's way of talking about it. And notice immediately it goes, they are crowned with glory and honor, you made them rulers over the works of your hands and everything. So, crowned and rulers.

Jon: And under your feet, that's a very royal—

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It's about being on a throne with having like a footstool, or an image of again of authority.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Within the narrative world of Genesis 1, God is the Creator-king; he speaks things happen. He makes people who are going to live under His reign. He makes these people in a certain way and gives them a unique role. They are the image of God.

Traditionally, in western history, image of God has been studied as some trait that makes humans unique from animals.

Jon: Like our ethics or—

Tim: Ability to forgive, relationship, or covenant or the intellect, consciousness, something like that. So by far, the consensus in biblical studies, like every commentary, is that the meaning of the image of God is anchored one in Genesis 1, the way the sentence has put together, but two, in its ancient Near Eastern context. I don't know if we have time to go into this, but it's interesting.

"Then God said, 'Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea.'" In Hebrew, there's no periods, so let's take out that period. Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness and let them rule or let them have dominion."

So in the first time, the image of God is used, it's directly connected to reigning. So humans are the way that God reigns the world. It's a very interesting narrative beginning. The image of God is something that humans are and something's humans do. They embody and image God's rule and reign over the world.

That's how the narrative of the Bible sets up is that God's plan was to share His world with humans and to have His reign and His rule and His will be brought out in the world through human beings. If you start thinking through the stories of the Bible, there are very few store is where God acts or does anything that doesn't happen through a human.

Even think of the Exodus, like the parting of the Red Sea. If you're just an Israelite looking on, you would see Moses put the staff over the waters. So the way the God of the Bible works is through image-bearing human beings. And that's how God reigns the world through humans.

This is the ancient Near Eastern context is that the word "image" refers to statue, and it is used to refer to idol statues in Israel's history. Israel was not supposed to ever make images to represent God.

Jon: But they were one.

Tim: But the Bible begins with God making an image of God's own self in humans. Most of the large scale, like large statues that have survived from the ancient world are images of gods or kings. Specifically, Egyptian and Assyrian and Babylonian kings viewed themselves in their cultures as deities. So in Egyptian, the phrase "image of God" is used but only ever to describe the king as the Image of God. And it's the same in ancient Assyrian and Babylonian.

Jon: So this is very flattening democratic kind of thing happening at the beginning of Genesis?

Tim: Yeah. This is what's cool. Genesis one, I think is intentionally making a charged statement in its day that being the image of God is not something that only the elite do, but rather it's a reality that all human beings are.

And you see that in the narrative. All humanity as a whole is given this task to rule and reign. It's all humanity. Which is why in Genesis 9, image of God is connected to the sacredness of all human life. So if someone murders another human, if you shed blood, your blood shall be shed because humans are made in the image of God. So the point is that all humans are the—

Jon: There isn't classes.

Tim: There's the classes within the narrative world of the Bible. There's just humans who image God. And humans have this royal task.

Jon: And I guess that's not very scandalous for modern Westerners.

Tim: No. What scandalous is that this is a biblical idea. Like that's where the idea comes from.

Jon: Right.

Tim: It's not something that we have received from—

Jon: It wasn't a Greek idea?

Tim: Not a Greek idea and certainly wasn't an Eastern idea. It's a Jewish Christian idea that humans are sacred because they are made in the—

Jon: And in this moment it was a very revolutionary idea.

Tim: Yeah. Wrapping all this together, I think Genesis 1, the first time the idea of reigning or ruling or of God reigning or ruling in the Bible...no, of anybody. Actually, God reigning, that's the other trivia question. So the first time the word or the concept of

ruling and reigning appears it humans ruling and reigning over creation and it's tied to their nature as made in God's image.

So God's the king, He reigns, but the Bible begins with God sharing that rule and asking humans to embody that rule and reign over creation. So it's tied to the human project of humans managing and ruling the world on God's behalf.

Jon: The video for the Kingdom of God will be up on YouTube before the end of the year, December 2015. That's what we're shooting for. The rest of this conversation will be in the next two episodes. In the next episode, we talk about what went wrong with the Kingdom of God and then God's plan to fix it.

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