

## **The Kingdom of God Session 10**

### **Kingdoms in Conflict – God’s Kingdom Over All**

Well, over the past 9 sessions, we’ve looked at the kingdom of God from all kinds of aspects. Of course it’s a huge subject and in many ways we’ve only scratched the surface of it. But we have made a good introduction. We’ve looked at What the kingdom of heaven is, the truly universal rule of God over all of creation (even including this earth where Satan rules but subject to God’s overarching power) and how God exercises that power as absolute ruler, our King. We looked at how Jesus proclaims the kingdom and teaches about it, especially through parables. We’ve looked at how we can gain entrance to the kingdom and what that means. We looked at how the kingdom is both for us here and now and yet also in the future. We’ve looked at how we should live in the light of the kingdom and we’ve looked at the nature of our King.

As we finish our series on the kingdom of God today, let’s think of the kingdom of God from the perspective of good and evil in conflict. We looked at this from one aspect in Session 2 but now I’m going to approach it from another perspective.

Satan and his angels rebelled against God and were removed from their positions of authority. They are now destined for judgement.

“12 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! 13 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." 15 But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.” (Isaiah 14:12-15 NIV)

and

“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” (Jude 1:6 NIV)

and

“He [Jesus] replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:18 NIV)

and

“7 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” (Revelations 12:7-9 NIV)

and

“Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” (Revelations 12:12 NIV)

So Satan was cast down to earth, that part of God’s kingdom we inhabit, and for the present, until his final destruction, Satan tries to mislead mankind and frustrate God’s work and purposes. He was responsible for the original rebellion of mankind against God:

“1 ¶ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and

you must not touch it, or you will die.” 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 ¶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3:1-7 NIV)

Satan continues to mislead us and draw us away from God, often by disguising himself as something good:

“13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NIV)

In spite of his apparent power, I believe that Satan is under the ultimate control of God – surely the book of Job makes this clear. Satan is forced to seek God’s permission for each evil act:

“8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.” (Job 1:8-12 NIV)

and

“3 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." 4 "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. 5 But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." 6 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”” (Job 2:3-6 NIV)

Of course, Satan is utterly evil and completely opposed to God’s will and laws, but he is subject to the ultimate will of God and, as we just saw, operates under what we might refer to as God’s sufferance – and God uses him to achieve his purposes – as in the book of Job. Satan is called the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the prince of this world (John 12:31). Yet, however powerful, Satan is never viewed as more than a created being. Satan can only operate within divinely prescribed limits. He cannot destroy the purpose of God nor undermine the unity of God. Biblical eschatology leaves no doubt, moreover, of Satan’s final doom; his rebellion ends in sure defeat and unmitigated judgment.

Satan is never presented as a principle of primordial evil. He is neither a wholly independent force nor in any sense eternally coexistent with God. The titles “god” and “prince of this world” depict Satan’s relationship to the cosmos only insofar as it is ethically separated from Christ. Evil breeds its own suffering, and moves the world inexorably toward chaos. God uses Satan’s acts to advance his own purposes and to destroy the demonic powers; the demons themselves know that God is one, and tremble before him (James 2:19).

Pride precipitated Satan's fall, he was jealous of God and wanted to be like him and take his place and so was cast down to earth. Since Satan was cast down to earth, this part of God's kingdom has taken on some of Satan's character it's become actively anti-God, beginning with the Fall that we already considered.

But Christ fully and decisively defeated Satan on the cross. This conquest was begun in the incarnation of Christ. Recognising him as a future conqueror Satan made many attempts to get rid of him or divert him, for example through Herod's murder of the Bethlehem children, through the wilderness temptations, through the crowd's resolve to make him a political and military king, and through Peter's contradiction of the necessity of the cross. However, Jesus resisted all these attempts to divert him and throughout the incarnation we see the kingdom of God advancing and the kingdom of Satan retreating as demons are cast out (e.g. Mark 1:24), sickness cured (e.g. Matthew 4:23) and disordered nature submits to Jesus' command (e.g. Mark 4:39). Indeed Jesus even trained his disciples to 'do these things' (Luke 10:17-19).

But, the conquest was not completed until the final decisive stage, the conquest achieved at the cross. In his preparation for his passion Jesus three times referred to Satan as 'the prince of this world' and made it clear that Satan would be driven out and condemned when he was lifted up – that is when he was crucified (John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11). It was by his death that he would 'destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil –' and so set Satan's captives free (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Perhaps the most important NT passage proclaiming the victory of Christ is found in Colossians:

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:13-15)

Yet, that triumph remains incomplete until the second coming. Only the redemption and rescue brought through Christ shelters the people of God from abject defeat in this place and time, in this world. Christ came and conquered sin and death through the cross. The Holy Spirit testifies of him and reproves the sinful world-order:

"When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:" (John 16:8 NIV)

Believers are "not of this world" (John 17:14). Every hostile agency that would have destroyed Christ's cause is doomed by the Redeemer's triumph over sin and death and Satan. Satan is decisively vanquished by the crucified and risen Jesus:

"14 having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Colossians 2:14-15 NIV)

and

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—" (Heb 2:14 NIV)

The explicit teaching of the Bible, Chafer says, “reiterates the truth that Satan and his hosts came to judgment, even being spoiled, unveiled, triumphed over, judged and cast out by Christ in his death”.

With his first coming to this earth, the Lord Jesus conquered and defeated Satan by the cross, but did not completely and finally destroy him. As I’ve already said, the destruction of all evil forces only takes place at the return of Christ, apparently with some kind of final battle as the Book of Revelation tells us in chapter 19. I suggest that you read this for yourselves later. What Christ did indeed do, was to conquer the Evil One (as we saw in Colossians 2:15) and destroy his works. This victory concerns the binding of Satan and the constraint imposed on his influence over mankind.

In Matthew 12:29, the Lord Jesus compares himself with the One who binds the strong man (Satan) and then plunders his house:

““Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.” (Matthew 12:29 NIV)

Robbing his house refers to the liberation of those held captive by the Evil One. Christ not only showed his supreme power over the Evil One by setting people free from his power; every evil power had to leave people at his word. In this way, He demonstrated the establishment of his kingdom here on earth.

He even enabled believers to conquer the temptations of the Evil One in their lives (1 John 2:13), to resist the devil, put him to flight (Jas 4:7) and drive him out (Acts 16:18). Christ’s victory through his death, resurrection and ascension made it possible for us all to be transferred from the power of the Evil One to the power of the kingdom of God, and absolutely nothing can prevent this. This also implies that his church has been established here on earth and no power can prevail against it (Matt 16:18). The church will remain until the return of Christ

The victory over Satan and his binding is, therefore, not an event that only takes place at the final end. The victory of Christ over Satan, wrought by his redemptive work, is not merely theoretical and for the future, but a reality which is already valid.

At the second coming, Satan’s Influence Through the Powers of Evil Will Be Utterly Destroyed. Although the influence of Satan, which he exercises through the powers (the structures of this world), has been overcome through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the final blow to Satan will not occur until the consummation of Christ’s work in his second coming. Jesus spoke of an “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”:  
““Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41 NIV)

Paul elaborates on this:

“24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25 NIV)

In Paul’s classic statement on the power of the resurrection over death (and the disintegration of the created order implied in the symbol of death), he reminds his readers that the end will come “after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Moreover, the apostle John, in his vision of the end times recorded in the book of Revelation, declares that “the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown” (Revelation 20:10).

So both Paul and the apostle John affirm the total destruction of Satanic forces and assure us that the work of Christ as regards Satan is concluded by the consummation of the final defeat of Satan.

Between the Resurrection and the Consummation in Christ’s second coming, the Power of Satan Is Limited. It would be naive to conclude that Satan no longer has power in the world. He is still the master of deception. He still blinds the eyes of people to the truth. He still masterminds faith in false gods and creates messianic illusions which people follow to their own destruction. Yet his influence is limited, for Jesus has overcome him. Jesus said: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NIV)

In his first epistle, John ascribes this capacity to overcome to those who believe in Jesus: “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4–5).

Yet the overcoming is still not an established reality, as Paul indicates when he uses two words that mean “coming to nothing” and “expectation.”:

“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” (1 Corinthians 2:6 NIV)

The force of the word translated “coming to nothing” is “being put out of action.” In the military sense, it means the war is over; now the cleaning up of the final matters must occur. Guerrilla pockets may still exist, confrontation may still occur here and there; but the tide has been turned, the oppressor has been definitely routed, and it is only a matter of time until the end. It’s a bit like the condition of Nazi Germany after its defeat in the Battle of the Bulge.

The second word, “expectation,” describes the state of those who are to be released from the ravages of war. Paul uses this word in the Epistle to the Romans:

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” (Romans 8:19 NIV)

This passage suggests a cosmic victory over a cosmic bondage. Satan has brought the entire creation under his dominion and influence, but that pervasive power has been so thoroughly broken that the entire creation—all the structures of existence—now experience an expectation of their release.

These passages point to the importance of preaching as the means by which Satan continues to be exposed to his defeat. For it is through faith in Jesus Christ (as the one who has defeated Satan and all his attempts to distort the creation) that the extent of Satan’s activity is limited. Satan may continue to deceive some, perhaps many, but not all. Preaching Christ continually unmask the power of Satan, for faith in Christ opens a person’s eyes to the reality of Satan’s deception. Whenever anyone believes in Christ, the limitation of Satan’s power is unmasked.

Creation Will Ultimately Be Reconciled to God. It is a comfort to know that the contest between Satan and Christ will have an end, even as it had a beginning. Furthermore, as Paul

states, the course of this cosmic conflict is under “the mystery of his will” and “according to his good pleasure.”:

“9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” (Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV)

Paul mentions this same theme in his first letter to the Corinthians:

“When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28 NIV)

For Paul, this means nothing less than the re-creation of the entire universe, including the structures of existence. Restoration of the structures is made more clear in his letter to the Colossians, when he tells his readers that it is God’s purpose through Christ: “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20).

In these passages, Paul does not imply that Satan and the fallen hosts which represent the demonic in this world will be reconciled to God. They are defeated and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:1). What is redeemed, restored, and recreated is God’s work of creation. In this sense, the new heavens and the new earth will be a restored paradise—the world as it was before the fall into sin.

It is this world view that lies behind a renewal of worship. The victory of Christ over the powers of evil, and all that is implied by that victory, are expressed in song, preaching, the Eucharistic prayer, and the act of healing.

So, we’re living in the time of a mopping up operation. Satan and his angelic forces were finally and decisively defeated by Christ on the cross, but they have not yet completely surrendered. Christ’s work on the cross substantially, but not completely, protects us from Satan. As Jesus said:

““I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”” (John 16:33 NIV)

We need to face these troubles secure in the knowledge that Christ is victorious already and that at his second coming Satan will be condemned and those of us who have turned to Christ in true faith will go to be with the Father in a new heavenly creation. We’re on the winning side, as we’ve already seen. The world is only under Satan’s influence for a limited time. God will fully and finally establish his kingdom at the second coming of Christ. Maranatha – come Lord Jesus come.