

TTS Foundations – Session Fifteen: “He Ascended Into Heaven... And His Kingdom Will Have No End” – NOTES

Welcome to TTS!

Thanks for coming and to FC for hosting.

Let’s get the boring stuff out the way first!

- **FIRST:** About TTS itself.
 - **Remember the website:**
 - Notes are provided every Monday.
 - Term details, directions, etc.
 - **SECOND:** Looking ahead...
 - **The Sunday Foundations Sessions:**
 - SUMMER BREAK – next session: Sun 1st Sept 2019.
 - Keep an eye on the website + FB page for more info.
 - **TTS Essentials:**
 - Wed 3rd July – here at Freedom. (THEN SUMMER!)
 - **TTS Virtues:**
 - Sun 7th July – at Gill’s house. (THEN SUMMER!)
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[1] A New Term – A Foundations Refresh

“We believe”

- **DISCUSS:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - That God is a theologian.
 - That theological study should be worshipful.

“In One God, the Father, the Almighty”

- **DISCUSS:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - That God is God, and we are not.
 - That God is good, sovereign, and majestic.
 - That God is Triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Maker of Heaven and Earth, of All That Is, Seen and Unseen”

- **DISCUSS:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - That God chose to be a Creator God.
 - For his glory, by his grace.
 - That God created all things *ex nihilo* – through Christ.
 - That God created the heavenly host.
 - That God created animals.
 - That God created man under Adam.
 - That God has now recreated man under Christ.

“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God”

- **DISCUSS:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - That Christ is the centre of our faith.
 - Any discourse in which his name is not mentioned lacks all savour.
 - That God’s MO is to exalt the Son.

“Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light”

- **DISCUSS:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - That the Son of God added to himself human nature and became flesh.
 - That the Incarnation fulfils OT expectation.
 - That the NT witness is clear.

“For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again”

- **DISCUSS:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - That God chose to be a Saviour God, on the Cross.
 - That Christ won our salvation by:
 - Rescuing us from Satan;
 - By being the God-Man;
 - By becoming our substitute.
 - That Christ was raised for our justification.
 - That the Spirit now applies God’s work of redemption.
 - Creating a new humanity, in and for Jesus.

Our (one-off) focus today:

“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end”

- **Today is the Coronation of the King, and the inauguration of his Kingdom!**
 - This session like a door that swings us into last chapter.
 - FROM HERE: the Spirit → the Scriptures → the Church → the End.
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[2] On the Ascension of Christ

DISCUSS: What do we know about the Ascension?

- **Described in numerous places, and in a number of ways:**
 - John 20:17 – “*ascended*”.
 - Acts 1:9 – “*lifted*”.
 - Acts 2:32-33 – “*exalted*”.
 - Thereby included with the Resurrection, as part of Christ’s vindication.
- **Where is it described? Properly speaking, in three places:**
 - Luke gives us two accounts:
 - **LOOK:** Luke 24:50-53 / Acts 1 (we’ll read shortly!)
 - Mark gives us one account:
 - **LOOK:** Mark 16:19-20
 - As for John – no full account, but several allusions.
 - E.g. “*What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*” [John 6:62]
- **LOOK:** Acts 1:1-11
 - **DISCUSS:** What are your impressions?
 - The Ascension can seem strange to modern readers.
 - What’s going on? (A vision? Superman Jesus?!)
 - AND YET – **LOOK:** Acts 5:30-31
 - The Ascension served a purpose in God’s redemption.
 - We have to make sense of this somehow.
 - **DISCUSS:** What do you think?

The Ascension of Jesus shows us three important things...

[2A] It reveals the great 'reach' of God's plan for redemption in Christ.

- **LOOK:** Acts 1:9 – a very important cloud... / **LOOK:** Eph 2:5-6
 - **DISCUSS:** Why do you think this is important?
- **In short – there is a physical man in heaven!**
 - The new man, the new humanity – with new flesh!
 - God has received + redeemed this physical flesh in X.
 - As in the old creation, now God declares it 'good'.
 - Remember, we are found in Christ.
 - His resurrected body in *heaven* is a guarantee of our resurrected bodies when he *returns*.
 - Hugely important for ancient Christians (re: Gnosticism):
 - “Thus, they learned that there is a Son of God, and that God has a Son equal with himself in dignity; they learned that there will be a resurrection; that when he ascended he sat on the right hand of God; and what is still more stupendous, that Flesh is seated in heaven, and adored by Angels, and that he will come again” [Chrysostom – Homily II on Acts 1:6ff]
 - “Do you see then to what height of glory human nature has been raised? Is it not from earth to heaven? Is it not from corruption to incorruption? How hard would not someone toil in order to become the intimate friend of a corruptible king here below? But we, although we were alienated and hostile in our intent by evil deeds, have not only been reconciled to God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, but we have also soared aloft to sonship, and now our nature is worshipped in the heavens by every creature, seen and unseen” [Ephrem the Syrian – Catechesis 7]
 - “[In] coming to the world he came forth in such a sense from the Father that he did not leave the Father behind; and, on leaving the world, he goes to the Father in such a sense that he does not actually forsake the world.” [Augustine – *Tractata CII* on John 16:23-28]

[2B] It serves to magnify Christ's work as Prophet, Priest and King.

- **Take your minds back all the way to S7 – on Christology!**
 - **LOOK:** Matt 5:17-18 / **DISCUSS:** How is Jesus presented?
 - As a Mosaic prophet – re: Deut 18.
 - **LOOK:** Matt 22:41-46 / **DISCUSS:** How is Jesus presented?
 - As a Davidic Priest-King – re: Ps 110.
 - This is the so-called *Munus Triplex* – the ‘threefold office’.
 - I.e. Prophet/Priest/King.

- **“Hang on, Nathan – why is this relevant to the Ascension?!”**
 - The NT Christians understood the Ascension NOT as Jesus’ ‘superman’ moment...
 - BUT as his Prophet/Priest-King moment!
- **The Ascension was Jesus’ vindication as God’s holy prophet.**
 - **LOOK:** 2 Kings 2:11-12
 - **DISCUSS:** Any thoughts / impressions?
 - (Cf. Transfiguration [Lk 9] – Elijah appears.)
- **The Ascension fulfils Jesus’ work as the Davidic Priest-King.**
 - **LOOK:** Heb 7:23-28 – re: Ps 110 again!
 - **DISCUSS:** Any thoughts / impressions?
 - *“For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” [v26]*
 - He is our High Priest in heaven – the one mediator!
 - **LOOK:** Heb 9:24 – cf. 1 Tim 2:5
 - *“I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” [John 14:2-3]*
 - Our perseverance is guaranteed because of this:
 - *“He is able to save completely those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” [Heb 7:25]*
 - *“Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea / A great High Priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me / My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart / I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can be bid me thence depart” [Before the Throne]*

[2C] It also dovetails with a much bigger theme – not just NT, but OT!

- **DISCUSS:** What were the disciples talking about just before the Ascension?
 - *“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?” [Acts 1:6]*
 - They were still expecting a worldly Kingdom.
 - BUT – Luke frames the Ascension with this in mind.
 - **LOOK:** Acts 2:32-36
 - **DISCUSS:** What do you notice?
 - *“The right hand of God” [v33] – cf. Ps 89/110.*
 - **ALSO – once coronated as King, the Spirit is given!**

The ascension is therefore a promise of God's great redemption plan for all creation, and it is a revelation of Christ as Prophet, Priest + King – but the ascension of Jesus (and the subsequent outpouring of the HS) is also the consummation of all he's preached on the Kingdom of God.

- Cf. the Nicene Creed putting this together!
 - *"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end"*

[3] Kingdom of God – Introduction

DISCUSS: What do we know / understand about the Kingdom of God?

- Perhaps THE most surprising session first time round:
 - I'd assumed it was clear – far from it!
 - [1] Spiritualised / [2] Charismatic / [3] Charitable.
 - To my surprise, there's no consensus amongst Evang.

And yet the Kingdom of God is at the centre of Jesus' own theology:

- **ASK:** What is the first thing Jesus preaches? / **LOOK:** Matt 4:23
 - *"The Gospel of the Kingdom"*!
- **As for the term itself:**
 - βασιλεία (*basileia* [bassi-lie-ah]).
 - Often translated 'kingdom'.
 - More dynamically – 'reign' or 'rule'.
 - Used repeatedly in the Gospels to refer to God's Kingdom:
 - 50 times in Matthew's Gospel / 15 times in Mark's Gospel / 39 times in Luke's Gospel / 3 times in John's Gospel.
- **Described variously throughout the NT:**
 - Mark, Luke + John favour 'KoG'.
 - Matthew generally favours 'Kingdom of Heaven'.
 - In Paul:
 - KoG and *"Kingdom of his beloved Son"* [Col 1:13]
 - In Peter:
 - *"Eternal kingdom of our Lord+Saviour JC"* [2 Pet 1:11]
 - In Revelation:
 - *"The Kingdom of our Lord + of his Christ"* [Rev 11:15]

R.T. France describes the situation very well:

“Of the very few subjects on which there is near unanimity among NT scholars is the importance of [the kingdom of God] for an understanding of the teaching of Jesus, as it is recorded for us in the synoptic Gospels. Few would doubt that this term... was a striking and distinctive feature of the teaching of the historical Jesus. ... While scholars debate the background and meaning of the phrase, ordinary Christians (and indeed even non-Christians) deploy it with great assurance and enthusiasm, as a convenient catch-phrase to sum up what they take to be the main thrust of God’s work in his work. It is even commonly abbreviated into ‘the kingdom’, which is assumed to be something to which all Christians look forward and for which they live and work.

But *what is it?* If you press for a definition of what ‘the kingdom [of God]’ means, you are likely to be offered a variety of different answers, by scholars no less than by lay Christians. Some will use ‘kingdom’ language to promote world evangelization, some to demand a distinctively radical Christian lifestyle, some to campaign for social justice, some to challenge secular power politics, some to commend the rediscovery of charismatic gifts in the Church. And for many ordinary Christians the phrase, particularly in its Matthean form ‘the kingdom of heaven’, does not relate to any situation on earth, whether present or future, but rather to the world to come. So language about ‘the kingdom’ is something of a rubber nose, capable of being twisted in any direction to suit the interests of the one who uses it.”

– R.T. France [*Divine Government*, pp. 1-2]

Today, more than ever, we need a *crisp* and *clear* understanding of the Kingdom of God – closely following the contours of Scripture.

DISCUSS: What is the end of salvation? What’s the purpose of it all?

- *To glorify himself* –
 - Immeasurable in power and splendour.
- *To conquer the rebellion* –
 - Satan, sin, death, and hell.
- *To be a Bridegroom for a Bride* –
 - A new humanity, under new stars.
 - The Father all in all, through Christ, by the Spirit.

[3A] This is nothing less than a vision of the Kingdom of God.

- Where God is truly God.
 - Where man is truly man.
 - Justice, peace + joy in the HS.
 - Hence: “*The Gospel of the Kingdom*”! [Matt 4:23]
- **So here’s our working definition of the KoG:**
 - It’s not a physical, temporal location.
 - Nor is it a cloudy afterlife.
 - INSTEAD:
 - “*The ‘Kingdom of God’ refers to God’s sovereign claim OVER – and his sovereign plan FOR – all of creation, visible and invisible; in Christ, for us and for our salvation.*”

[3B] So what does this Kingdom actually look like?

- **Three important OT background details:**
 - **LOOK:** Ps 99:1-5 / Ps 145:10-13
 - [1] YHWH is worshipped as the King of Israel
 - *“The LORD their God is with them, acclaimed as a king among them”* [Num 23:21]¹
 - **LOOK:** Exo 19:5-6
 - [2] YHWH promises to make his people a Kingdom
 - Massively significant in NT – as we’ll see!
 - **LOOK:** 1 Chron 29:10-11
 - [3] The Kingdom is inextricably Davidic in form
 - Cf. Ps 89 – *“I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth”* [v27]
- **What would we expect? What would the flesh prefer?**
 - **LOOK:** Matt 20:20-21
 - Greatness and fame.
 - **LOOK:** Luke 4:9-12
 - Undeniable in the sight of all men.
 - **LOOK:** Acts 1:6
 - A political solution to social problems.
- **What did Jesus teach?**
 - [A] The KoG is about GOD, enjoyed + hallowed!
 - **LOOK:** Matt 13:44 – cf. Ps 47:1-2.
 - [B] He is at the centre of the KoG.
 - **LOOK:** Luke 1:32-33 – cf. Lord’s Prayer + 1 Chron 29.
 - [C] This Kingdom is ‘now’ & powerful.
 - **LOOK:** Luke 10:8-9 – it’s breaking in with power.
 - [D] This Kingdom is ‘not yet’ & hidden from some.
 - **LOOK:** Luke 17:20-21 – cf. Lk 8:10 + parables.
 - [E] The KoG is ‘vertical’ – i.e. it’s about God’s salvation.
 - **LOOK:** Matt 13:47-50.
 - [F] The KoG is ‘horizontal’ – i.e. about human flourishing.
 - **LOOK:** Matt 5:3-10.

¹ A theme expanded upon in the inter-testamental period: e.g. *“Blessed be God who lives forever, because his kingdom lasts throughout all ages... As for me, I exalt my God, and my soul rejoices in the King of heaven”* [Tobit 13:1+7]. Also: *“O Lord, thou art our King forever and ever... [We] hope in God, our deliverer; for the might of our God is forever with mercy, and the kingdom of our God is forever over the nations in judgement”* [Psalms of Solomon 17:1+3-4]

IN THIS KINGDOM: God is God, and God is Christlike.

THERE IS: righteousness, peace + joy (Rom 14) – in God, among men.

FOR NOW: cracks in the universe – and God will pry them open.

BUT ALSO... →→

[3C] The Kingdom of God belongs to the Church

- **LOOK:** Luke 12:32 / Matt 25:34 / Rev 1:5-6
 - **The great fulfilment of OT promise!**
 - *“Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation”* [Exo 19:5-6]
- **This is the Father’s joy – our first proper glimpse at the Church as it really is...!**
 - There’s nothing like it in the world.
 - It’s not a political party, nor a charitable coop.
 - It’s not a fraternity, nor a civic institution.
 - The Church is at the centre of the Kingdom of God.
 - **LOOK:** Matt 5:14-16 – (re: Matt 16 + keys)
 - A new humanity, a new society.
 - The City of Zion to rival the City of Rome.
 - *“That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world”* [Phil 2:15]

How has God made the Church the centre of the KoG?

The Cross – the true King submits to death. (Re: hiddenness.)

The Resurrection – the true King is vindicated.

The Ascension – the true King is coronated.

AND THEN – **LOOK:** Eph 4:8-9

“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear” [Acts 2:33]

- **Now the City of Zion can get to work.**
 - Now Rom 14:18 can be fulfilled.
 - All because the King has been coronated.
 - And his coronation gift? The Holy Spirit.
 - For now? **“MAKE A HIGHWAY!”** – re: Isa 25, Fugitive