

Above Our Pay Grade

Acts 1:1-11

Introduction

Just before His ascension, Jesus was talking to His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God had long been associated with the coming of the kingdom of God. We read in **Joel 2** (read **Joel 2:28-29**). That, coupled with the resurrection, had stirred within them the fires that Jesus would be the one who would bring about the kingdom of God. So, they asked Him, *“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (**Acts 1:6**). Jesus’ reply was sort of like saying, “Sorry, boys, that’s above your pay grade” when He said, *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that My Father has fixed by His own authority”* (**Acts 1:7**). Let’s take a closer look at that exchange.

Misconceptions

The disciples’ question shows they didn’t understand the kingdom of God. Jesus’ reply is not dismissive, but corrective.

A Temporal Error

“At this time ...” The disciples wanted to know about the future. They were hoping it would be sooner, rather than later. *“At this time ...”* How long were they going to have to wait? We want to know about the future, too. I check the weather app on my phone frequently when I am making plans, especially for outdoor events. We’d like to know what the future holds. Look at the millions of dollars paid each year to fortune-tellers, soothsayers, palm readers, etc. Maybe it’s a good thing we don’t know. I was watching a show this week where an adult was talking to a teenager in trouble with the law and told him a story about his own life to illustrate how important the choices we make as kids are, because we don’t know what life holds for us. Today, we can get sidetracked into dwelling on when Christ will return. When will Jesus finally come back and get us out of this mess? Maranatha, Lord, come quickly. We’re looking for a light at the end of the tunnel.

An Error of Type

“Restore the kingdom to Israel.” The second mistake they make is that they are still thinking about a physical, political kingdom. This is not as big an issue for us today as it has been in the past. There was a time when most American theologians taught that the United States was God’s favored nation, seeing it almost as a “New Israel.” As we have become more pluralistic and fallen further away from the teachings of Scripture, it’s obvious that this isn’t true. Actually, it never was. Today, the popular notion is that the church is the “New Israel”, and it is considered by many to be equated with the kingdom of God. Jesus said, *“If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”* (**Luke 11:20**). Jesus was saying that the kingdom of God is not territorial; it is wherever God’s will and work is being done by the power of God, or as we have seen, wherever the Spirit of God is at work.

The Corrective

So, we see that the kingdom of God is now and not yet. Wherever the Spirit of God is at work in the world, this is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of grace. When Jesus returns, *He will make all things*

new (Revelation 21:5). This will be the kingdom of glory, where the will of God will be universal. This is what we long for, the light at the end of the tunnel.

Times and Seasons

Jesus said, *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7)*. Many things in life are above our pay grade. This includes the ‘hidden’ will of God. God has revealed what He wants us to know of His will for us in Scripture. Anything not covered plainly in Scripture is His hidden will. It is above our pay grade. The private isn’t privy to all the information the general has. Not knowing the future means that we plan for a possible future but live each day with the intensity that it could be our last. Not knowing when Jesus’ Second Coming will be enables each generation to long for it.

Wait for it

But as we wait for it, Jesus doesn’t just leave us hanging. He says that we will receive power to live this life. That is all that is required and expected of us. He tells us not to worry about the future but to live in the present. We have a job to do in the kingdom of grace. Our job is to spread the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ by His grace. That is our focus.

Means of Grace

In this kingdom of grace, God has given us His means of grace—Word and Sacrament. When we receive His body and blood, we proclaim His death until He comes, saying, “Maranatha, Lord come quickly!” At the same time, our faith is strengthened by His Spirit to live the life He has given us in this world.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
