

# ROUTE 66: THE CHRISTIAN WAY

## WEEK 12: THE KINGDOM INAUGURATED

Stage 12 of Route 66, I think you would agree, takes us into more familiar territory. Most people are familiar with the stories of Jesus and His twelve disciples, the history and mission of the early church in Acts, the letters, and the enigma of the apocalyptic visions in Revelation. Somehow, it seems the New Testament gives us a more manageable ‘package’ of information. But that impression is very deceptive. The high degree of scholarly divergence over many aspects of the NT writings testify to the complexity of the accounts.

The slide stating that the “the Old Testament informs the New, the New Testament interprets the Old” was illustrated last week by the book of James. And, each landmark as we travel towards Revelation will demonstrate the truth of that statement. It could even be said that the New Testament is manageable only because the writers knew or assumed that their hearers/readers were already familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, which meant they didn’t have to include that information in their own works. Given the consensus that all the NT writers, with the definite exception of Luke, were Jews, this is a perfectly reasonable assumption. Yet, even in Luke we find around 70 references to the OT in the 80 verses of the first chapter of his gospel. The dependence of the interpretation of the NT on God’s past revelations is indisputable evidence that the books of our Bibles record one continuous revelation of God and His plans for this world. And the New Testament takes us into a world view that encompasses the past, the present and the future.

Given that stance we then have to ask a fundamental question, the answer to which may change your perception of what the NT is about. For an answer we go to our first landmark. Evangelicals, with justification, do perceive the writings of the NT in terms of salvation through Jesus’ atonement for sin on the cross. But the overarching theme of the NT is God once more intervening in human affairs through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the One who would inaugurate the kingdom and establish the basis upon which God’s supreme control of human history and His sovereign rule over His creation would be manifested. From this perspective of God’s plans for humanity, the New Testament becomes much more than a collection of stories about Jesus, or matters for doctrinal debate, or theories about the end times. As God’s appointed Messiah and Saviour, Jesus is the means by which God’s sovereignty will be eternally instituted in the here and now, reaching its culmination when God decides to bring this world to an end. Everything connected to Jesus’ birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, what I will call the ‘Christ event’, was directed to that one end. Here, then, is the overarching purpose of the coming of Christ – nothing less than the inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth destined for, and certain to become, a reality for all eternity. That means when we come to the landmarks in the Gospels in our Bibles, we approach them with a sense of something reaching a decisive point in God’s working out of His plans and purposes, that literally amount to a life and death situation. It is the point, if you like, where the rubber hits the road; when there will no longer be any uncertainties about a person’s relationship with God, because a person’s positive or negative response to His Christ will make his/her position indisputable and, sadly, irrevocable at death.

The Gospels tell us the process by which the kingdom was inaugurated and the means by which God has gone about establishing sovereignty over His creation. They give us the record of what Jesus said and did, all of which contributed to making the sovereignty of God a reality in this world and for all future time.

God started by re-establishing the Old Testament three-fold government structure of prophet, priest and king embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ. Of those three offices, those of prophet

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and priest were the most important because they involved specific ways of communication with God. God spoke through the prophet to the rebellious people and warned them of retribution should they fail to repent. Repentance took them to the priest who sacrificed on their behalf for forgiveness of sin, whereby they were restored to fellowship with God.

**Mark 6:14-15 (NIV) King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."**

**Luke 4:24 (NIV) "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown."**

**Luke 24:19(NIV).... About Jesus of Nazareth," they (Emmaus Road disciples) replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people."**

So, our second landmark takes us to how Jesus fulfilled these roles in His lifetime, starting with the office of prophet. When Jesus came to be well known, Herod even thought He was John the Baptist come back from the dead. Prophecy had returned to Judah with John the Baptist, but he was only the herald of the coming of God's prophet in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the last prophet God would send to proclaim the means by which a rebellious people could, through repentance and faith in His Christ, be restored to fellowship with Him in His kingdom, and avoid the retribution that would ensue for those who refused His offer. Born of God's Spirit and commissioned by that same Spirit at His baptism Jesus assumed the role of the prophets of old, that of forth-telling what God was doing through Him in the present and foretelling how that would affect the future destiny and destination of every human being. His words took on a sense of urgency because the presence of Jesus on earth was God's last word to its inhabitants.

**Mark 1:14-15 (NIV) After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"**

**Luke 4:43-44 (NIV) But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." 44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.**

**Luke 12:4-9 (NIV) "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ....8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God."**

In response to this fact, Jesus, continued John the Baptist's clarion call to 'Repent'. Repentance had now become a matter of urgency because the inauguration of the Kingdom was giving humanity its last chance to get right with God. That would only become possible if people responded positively to the Person, the words and the deeds of Jesus Christ. And people could not say they had not been warned about the consequences of ignoring the divine Prophet. Luke 12:4-9 could not be more stark. Only those who acknowledged and accepted

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Jesus in this world would be acknowledged by Him before God. From the time of Jesus people would have no excuse for not knowing what God required of them.

His words in Luke are very explicit. His Person and His ministry would be the touchstone by which all humanity from that time forward would be judged.

But what did Jesus mean when He said the kingdom of God was near?

**Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV) This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

**Luke 17:20-21 (NIV) Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”**

**Luke 8:15 (NIV) But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.**

**Matthew 6:9-10 (NIV) Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

Both explicitly in answer to the Pharisees, and in graphic parable form, Jesus proclaimed restoration to God’s favour no longer was dependent on outward conformity to the Law. It was dependent on a radical change of the inner disposition at the core of one’s being. As Jeremiah had prophesied, Jesus made clear that the coming of the kingdom meant God’s law, in other words, God’s rule, governing the heart and mind of each individual. God’s kingdom sovereignty on earth is extended every time this inner change takes place through faith and belief in the words of His prophet, who Himself is the Word become flesh. That is why the seeking of the kingdom of God was to be person’s priority in life.

Added to the concept of the kingdom was righteousness, which meant they also had to seek to be like Jesus, the inaugurator of the kingdom, in personality and character. Perfect righteousness was the hallmark of the ultra-sacred holiness of God, and a chief characteristic of His kingdom comprising of the people, who through faith in the atoning work of Christ would be accredited with His righteousness.

Another reason why Jesus was accepted as a prophet during His lifetime, was because, like many of the Old Testament prophets, He performed miracles.?

**Luke 7:15-17 (NIV) he dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.**

**Luke 4:24-30 (NIV) Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, ..... 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”**

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**Matthew 8:28-29 (NIV) When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 29 “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”**

**Luke 11:20 (NIV) But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

Luke 4:26 clearly implies He is following in the footsteps of Elijah and Elisha. Yet the most outstanding miracles which demonstrated God’s reassertion of His sovereignty were the exorcisms of demonic possession. Here was a direct confrontation between the power of God and the power of Satan – and God showed through Jesus, He had the upper hand. The demons recognised who Jesus was. They also revealed through these reported words that they knew God had ordained a time when He would bring their activity, and that of their master, to an end. The miracles of raising the dead also indicated Satan’s power over death as well was coming to an end.

Jesus’ forth-telling of the arrival of the kingdom of God and the emphasis on the foretelling, of its future reality is the primary teaching of the New Testament. And the foretelling of the most significant event in the establishment of that kingdom and the credentials needed for entry into it, was His own death and resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father.

At that point He would assume the role of High Priest, a role which He had already exercised during His earthly ministry. This landmark, too, is highly significant. Kingdom repentance now involved not just the recognition of sin, but the recognition that faith and belief in who Jesus was and all that His earthly ministry entailed. It is in His ‘priestly’ activity that we come face to face with this.

**Leviticus 10:8-11 (NIV) Then the Lord said to Aaron, 9 “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the tent of meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, 10 so that you can distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, 11 and so you can teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses.”**

**Malachi 2:7-9 (NIV) “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.**

**Matthew 7:28-29 (NIV) When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.**

The most prominent activity was following the commission God had given priests, from the institution of Israel’s priesthood in the wilderness - teaching the people about God, the ways of God and the responses God required from them. The primary teaching was the law in a nutshell – Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your mind and soul and strength and your neighbour as yourself. Jesus endorsed this teaching when the expert in the law asked Him what was the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-40). This was the only acceptable response to what He taught about God’s love, compassion, mercy and longing to forgive and to save the lost. He taught about the priority of seeking the kingdom of God in the parables

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because it was where true peace, righteousness, justice and every goodness was to be found. All of those He illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount which portrayed the ideal of the Godly ethics and characteristics of the kingdom. The first of these – blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God - sets the tone of the rest. He warned about retribution for failure to respond to God's offer of salvation through Him. In fact, if we only had Jesus' teaching, it would have been comprehensive enough to convince a true seeker of God that accepting what Jesus taught and following His life's example would have provided access to God's kingdom.

That becomes a bit more certain when we find that, like the priests of old, Jesus interceded with God on behalf of both the people and individuals.

**Matthew 19:13-15 & Mark 10:15 (NIV) Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."**

**Mark 10:15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.**

**Luke 22:31-32 (NIV) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."**

**John 17:20-23 (NIV) My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

The gospels reveal Jesus as a man of prayer. Matthew 19 and Mark 10 record children being brought to Jesus. We do not know why children were brought so that Jesus could lay hands on them and pray for them. But it is clear that people's perception of Jesus led them to believe that He had a special relationship with God and was therefore in a position to intercede with God on their behalf. Jesus uses this incident to point out that this unambiguous child-like perception and acceptance of Jesus as God's agent was a prerequisite for entry into the kingdom of God. In Luke 22, Jesus tells Peter He has prayed for him, because Satan wants to attack him and the other disciples. This shows the extent to which Jesus is aware of the enemy we face and how vulnerable we are to his attacks. Peter's attempt to stop Jesus going to the cross was met by the response Get thee behind me Satan. So, in spite of this indication of Peter's future denial, we see Jesus interceding on behalf of a sinner who would, at the very least, hurt Jesus emotionally and let Him down at the time of His greatest need for support. Then in John 17, there is the record of what has been termed Jesus' 'high priestly prayer'. In its entirety it is an exemplary, wide-ranging prayer of intercession. Verses 22 and 23 especially, have a direct bearing on the kingdom of God for this is the description of the perfect relationship that citizens of that kingdom will enjoy with God the Father and with God the Son when His eternal kingdom comes.

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These prayers, together with the contexts of the many other times we are told Jesus spent time in prayer, including the one He taught the disciples to pray, fulfilled in His earthly ministry the role of a priest in terms of intercession and the kind of prayer heard by and acceptable to God. The greatest manifestation, however, of that role was in the realm of sacrifice.

**Leviticus 9:7-8 (NIV) & Leviticus 14:19** Moses said to Aaron, “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded.” 8 So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering for himself..... “Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from their uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering

**Mark 14:22-25 (NIV)** While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” 23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 25 “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:15-20).

The first sacrifices instituted by God when the tabernacle was built and the priesthood appointed were those for the atonement of sin. In the Leviticus texts we see both the priests and people needed to offer these sacrifices to God to be cleansed of their sin. Jesus did not have to offer a sacrifice for His own sin because He had perfectly fulfilled the law through His blameless earthly life and ministry. Instead, He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the atonement for the sins of the whole world, from that time forward. The sacrifice of God’s Son on the cross was the ultimate priestly act of Jesus. And because that sacrifice was acceptable to God as an atonement for sin, entry into the kingdom of God was completely dependent upon repentance and reliance on the fact that Jesus died on behalf of sinners.

Jesus’ earthly ministry proclaimed and enacted through His roles of prophet and priest established the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth, open to all who would accept His Christ as their Messiah and Saviour. That brings us to our final landmark of Jesus the King. There is much less emphasis on this role simply because at that point in time Jesus was only announcing the coming of the kingdom. Nevertheless, although the references to Jesus’ kingship are varied and hard to classify, they leave the gospel readers in no doubt He will fulfil that role as well. Kingship was inferred both at the beginning and end of His life.

**2 Samuel 7:16** Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

**Micah 5:2.**

**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old from ancient times.**

**Luke 1:26-27 (NIV)** In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

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**Matthew 2:1-2 (NIV)** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

**John 1:49 (NIV)** Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

**Luke 22:28-30 (NIV)** You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Mark 15:2-5 & John 18:36 (NIV)** Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” Jesus replied.....Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

**Matthew 27:37 (NIV)** Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

It is clear the gospel writers believed that Jesus fulfilled the covenant with David and the Old Testament messianic prophecies. Jesus’ ancestry in both Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts are traced back to David with whom God made a covenant promising an everlasting kingdom. The specific mention of a virgin birth goes back to the prophecy of Isaiah quoted in Matthew 1:22-23. Matthew is also the only writer to mention the visit of the magi, clearly indicating by their words and their gifts that they believed a king had been born.

During Jesus’ ministry only one disciple explicitly referred to Jesus as king of Israel, but towards the end of the ministry, other references clearly indicate kingship. Jesus refers to His kingdom when speaking to both His disciples and Pilate. Scholars believe Pilate deliberately insisted on putting the inscription describing Jesus as king of the Jews in retaliation for being pressurised and blackmailed into having Jesus crucified. Whatever, the motive, Pilate’s final word about Jesus was the truth he was oblivious to. Jesus’ kingship was no longer in doubt.

**John 14:6 (NIV)** Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus, as prophet and priest and ultimate king, had proclaimed in word and deed the coming of the kingdom of God. Through the miracles of healing, raising from the dead and especially exorcisms, He demonstrated the power of God to reassert His sovereign control over His creation. Jesus’ priestly role provided the means by which people once more had direct access to God through acceptance of Jesus, teaching, intercession and sacrifice. The kingdom had been inaugurated through the people of Jesus’ time, like His disciples, who accepted everything He was in Person, word and deed. He would take His rightful position as King of that kingdom as it was extended throughout the world after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit to commission and empower the preaching and teaching of the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God. And, since Jesus completed perfectly the task God had given Him, God gave Him the honour of making His Son, the only channel through which humanity could be saved and be given the gift of eternal life.

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