

TTS Foundations 2023/24: **[S14] “He Ascended + His Kingdom Will Have No End”**

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[1] A Key Pivot in Our Foundations Study

We started this TTS course in February 2023! Over a year ago.

- We've been using the Nicene Creed as our skeleton.
 - **READ:** *We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty – maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the [only-begotten] Son of God, [eternally] begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down [from heaven] and was incarnate [from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary] and was made man. He suffered [For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.] and on the third day he rose again [in accordance with the Scriptures;] 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.] [We believe in] ~~And in~~ the Holy Spirit. [the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.] Amen.*

"We believe"

- **REFLECT:** 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"

- **REFLECT:** 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"

- **REFLECT:** 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 great 'chain of being'.
 - That God created man *under Adam*.
 - That God has now recreated man *in Christ*.

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

- **REFLECT:** 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. God's MO is to exalt him.
 - The Son of God became incarnate at right time of history.

"Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light"

- **REFLECT:** When we repeat these words, what are we saying?
 - The Son added to himself a human nature + 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"

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

[2A] Introducing the Ascension

- **Described 'in sundry places', and in various ways.**
 - John 20:17 – “*ascended*”.
 - Acts 1:9 – “*lifted*”.
 - Acts 2:32-33 – “*exalted*”.
 - In this way the NT authors connect the Ascension to 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 must make sense of this somehow.

The Ascension of Jesus shows us three important things.

[2B] The Ascension Reveals the Great Reach of God’s Redemption

- **LOOK:** Acts 1:9 / Eph 2:5-6
 - **The Ascension of X wasn’t a vision or hallucination.**
 - I.e. it happened in physical space – a *cloud* covered him. (Re: cosmology.) It wasn’t just a spiritual event.
- **Why is this important? IN SHORT – because there is now a 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’.
 - This in turn connects to our Union with Christ.
 - I.e. 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 (d.407AD) – 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 (c.306-373AD) – Catech. 7]

- **READ:** "[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]

[2C] The Ascension as the Confirmation of the 'Munus Triplex'

- **Take your minds back all the way to S7 – on Christology.**
 - **LOOK:** Matt 5:17-18 – how is Jesus presented?
 - As a Mosaic prophet – re: Deut 18.
 - **LOOK:** Matt 22:41-46 – how is Jesus presented?
 - As a Davidic Priest-King – re: Ps 110.
- **This is the so-called *Munus Triplex* – the 'threefold office'.**
 - Christ is the great Prophet/Priest/King.
 - ('Wait, why is this relevant to the Ascension?!')
 - KEY: 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]
 - A couple of things follow from this passage.
 - He is our High Priest in heaven – the one mediator.
 - **LOOK:** Heb 9:24 (re: 1 Tim 2:5 – "one mediator").
 - *"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 his Ascension.
 - *"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]

KEY POINT: Christ Ascends as the Better Elijah – he is Crowned as the Better David – and now he Intercedes as the Better High Priest.

[2D] The Ascension as the Coronation of Christ as King

- **BUT – there's one more component to the Ascension.**
 - **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]. A worldly kingdom.
 - **KEY:** Luke frames the Ascension w/Kingdom in mind.
- **LOOK:** Acts 2:32-36 – **DISCUSS:** What do you notice?
 - *"The right hand of God"* [v33] – cf. Ps 89/110.
 - **The ascension was the coronation of Christ –and once coronated as King, the gifts of HS are given!**
 - (Re: William Cavendish's 'Heaven' painting in Bolsover Castle – in which the ascending Jesus is depicted entering heaven, dancing!)



"The LORD, God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts... who builds his upper chambers in the heavens, and finds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the water of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth – the LORD is his name" [Amos 9:5-6]¹

The ascension is the promise of God's great redemption plan for all creation – and the confirmation of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. BUT IN THE SAME MOMENT – the ascension of Jesus (and the subsequent outpouring of the HS) is 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"*

¹ On this point, cf. the Heidelberg Catechism [Q49] – which gives a threefold account of the Ascension.

[3] On the Kingdom of God

In my experience, teaching this subject of the Kingdom of God has been one of the most surprising experiences.

[3A] Challenges of Discussing the Kingdom

- **Three immediate challenges for us when discussing the Kingdom of God.**
 - **FIRST:** the people talking about the Kingdom today tend to be more progressive than conservative. (E.g. McKnight.)
 - There are reasons for this – re: 19th Cent rediscovery.
 - **SECOND:** the KOG is partly what Calvin called 'accommodation language'.²
 - I.e. it is approximate + analogical; God is LIKE a King.
 - It's designed to describe something about God's rule, authority, and economy, in a manner we understand.
 - **THIRD:** there are all sorts of definitions in the literature.
 - "[The] sovereign rule of God manifested in Christ to defeat his enemies, creating a people over whom he reigns and issuing in a realm or realms in which the power of his reign is experienced" [Zondervan Topical Bible]
 - "The Kingdom of God is the sphere of God's rule and the sphere in which, at any given time, his rule is acknowledged" [Vines Expository Dictionary]
 - "God's own Kingdom or rule is the range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done" [Dallas Willard – *The Spirit of the Disciplines*]
 - "The Kingdom of God is humanity organised according to the will of God" [Walter Rauschenbusch – *A Theology for a Social Gospel*]
- **I'd always assumed it was clear – the reality? Far from it!**
 - [1] Spiritualised / [2] Charismatic / [3] Charitable.
 - To my surprise, there's no consensus amongst Evang.
 - (BUT ALSO: there's perhaps more at stake *here*, in *this* kind of Church – re: 'canon within a canon'.)

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

² "For when does God not reign, or when does that begin with him which both always has been, and never ceases to be?" [Cyprian of Carthage (c.200-258AD) – Treatise IV.XIII, *On the Lord's Prayer*]

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]

[3B] Introducing the Kingdom of God

- **AND YET – we *cannot* afford to miss this, because the KoG is indeed at the centre of Jesus' own theology.**
 - **DISCUSS:** What is the first thing Jesus preaches?
 - **LOOK:** Matt 4:23 – "*The Gospel of the Kingdom*"!
 - As for the term itself – βασιλεία (*basileia*).
 - 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.
- **Different NT authors employ diff terms for the Kingdom.**
 - Mark, Luke + John favour 'Kingdom of God' (βασιλεία του θεου)
 - Matthew generally favours 'Kingdom of Heaven' (βασιλεία των ουρανων).
 - In Paul:
 - KoG and "*Kingdom of his beloved Son*" [Col 1:13]
 - In Peter:
 - "*Eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour JC*" [2 Pet 1:11]
 - In Revelation:
 - "*The Kingdom of our Lord + of his Christ*" [Rev 11:15]

We need a *crisp* and *clear* understanding of the Kingdom of God – one that closely follows the contours of Scripture. In many ways, we already have a frame for such an understanding. **THINK:** What is the end of salvation?

- *To glorify himself, to conquer the rebellion, and forever to be a Bridegroom for a Bride.*
 - Immeasurable in power and splendour.
 - Victorious over Satan, sin, death, and hell.
 - Dwelling with a new humanity, under new starlight.
 - The Father all in all, through Christ, by the Spirit.

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 Holy Spirit. (Hence: "*The Gospel of the Kingdom*"! [Matt 4:23])

So, here's our working definition of the Kingdom of God. It's not a physical, temporal location.³ Nor is it a cloudy afterlife.

³ This becomes significant especially in Lutheran understanding – re: the idea of 'two kingdoms'.

"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."

[3C] The OT Background of the Kingdom of God

- **Three important OT background details:**
 - **LOOK:** Ps 99:1-5 / Ps 145:10-13
 - [1] YHWH is worshipped as King of Israel. (Re: Saul)
 - *"The LORD their God is with them, acclaimed as a king among them" [Num 23:21]⁴*
 - **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]*

[3D] On Man's Preferred Kingdom & the Real Kingdom of Jesus

- **If God is to have a Kingdom, what would we expect? What would our flesh prefer?**
 - *"20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him. 21 And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom'" [Matt 20:20-21]*
 - A Kingdom of greatness and fame.
 - *"9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", 11 and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' [Luke 4:9-11]*
 - A Kingdom that is undeniable in the sight of all men.
 - *"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?'" [Acts 1:6]*
 - A purely political Kingdom w/solutions to problems.
- **BUT – what did Jesus actually teach?**
 - [A] The Kingdom of God is about GOD, enjoyed + hallowed!
 - **LOOK:** Matt 13:44 – **READ:** Ps 47:1-2.
 - [B] The Kingdom of God is about CHRIST, at the very centre.
 - **LOOK:** Luke 1:32-33 – cf. Lord's Prayer + 1 Chron 29.

⁴ 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]*

- [C] This Kingdom is 'now' – powerful, not of this world.⁵ ←
 - **LOOK:** Matt 10:7-8 – 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 Kingdom of God is 'vertical' – i.e. it's about God's salvation. ←
 - **LOOK:** Matt 13:47-50.
- [F] The Kingdom of God is 'horizontal' – i.e. about human flourishing.
 - **READ:** Matt 5:3-10. (NOT JUST spiritualised.)

IN THIS KINGDOM: God is God, and God is Christlike. Here there is righteousness, peace + joy (Rom 14) – in God, among men.

BUT ALSO: there is one more component.

It is critical – but often dismissed by modern Evangelicals.

However, it is critical for us – especially when we come to ecclesiology.

It is this: ***the Kingdom of God belongs to the Church.***

[3E] 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]
 - *("Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above'"* [John 3:3])
- **This is the Father's joy – our first proper glimpse at the Church as she really is.**
 - There's nothing like the Church in all the world.
 - It's not a political party, nor a charitable coop.
 - It's not a fraternity, nor a civic institution.
 - The Church is the very centre of the Kingdom of God.
 - **LOOK:** Matt 5:14-16 – (re: Matt 16 + keys, John 20:23 and forgiving / retaining sins).
 - We are a new humanity, a new society.
 - The City of God which conquers 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]

⁵ "How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom" [Dan 4:3] / "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" [Matt 12:28] / "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you'" [Luke 10:9]

"The Church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. Thus, even now the saints of Christ reign with him, though not in the same way as they will reign hereafter. But the tares do not reign with him, even though they are growing in the Church alongside the wheat." [Augustine - *COG XX.9*]

How has God made the Church the centre of the Kingdom of God? All about Christ.

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 can be built - now Rom 14:18 can be fulfilled.**
 - All because the King has been coronated.
 - And his coronation gift? The Holy Spirit.
 - For now? **LOOK:** Heb 12:28-29 - we 'make a highway'.
 - We swallow up all that won't remain.
 - All the good you see is a just mirror to what will be.