

On His Shoulders

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on his shoulders; and his name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace.”
Isaiah 9:6-7.

A familiar passage, but perhaps little understood. Who is it talking about? Most of us would answer correctly, “Jesus”. But what is all this talk about government? What do we know about **that**? Let’s do a little investigating!

After a well-known passage, some less often quoted ones in **Daniel 7 – verses 13-14, 18, 21-22, 27**. Who is this ‘Son of Man’ coming ‘with the clouds of heaven’? When Jesus quoted it (in **Matthew 26:64**), the Jewish high priest and religious council seemed quite certain that it was a reference to the Messiah, the Christ. And what is this ‘kingdom’ and ‘everlasting dominion’? What about ‘the saints of the Highest One’ receiving the kingdom? Could it have something to do with the first public proclamations of both John the Baptist and Jesus himself? (See **Matthew 3:2 & 4:17**) What about all Jesus’ ‘parables of the kingdom’? How would the Jews have understood those? The same way as we often do? I doubt it!

Back to another passage we often hear quoted, **Isaiah 11:1-9**. Some people say that this a picture of ‘heaven’, but it clearly says that it will be fulfilled on earth – it speaks of the righteousness and fairness of the rule on earth of one of Jesse’s descendants, and that the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Have we missed a point somewhere?

Psalm 2:7-9 is also quoted in **Hebrews 1:5** (along with many other Old Testament references - try looking them up). The writer of Hebrews certainly had no doubts about who this referred to! Again, the psalm speaks of the Son ruling the nations on earth with a rod of iron, and having them as his inheritance and possession.

Have a look at **Revelation 2:26-27**. Here is something different - a passage referring to the Son (**Psalm 2** quoted again) but being applied to some of his followers, called ‘overcomers’! But who is

extending the promise? Jesus, the Son, the one to whom it was first given, extending it to those who follow him and overcome. (See **Revelation 12:11** for the way to overcome!) Here is another example of what we have read in **Daniel 7:18 & 22**. The kingdom is the Son's, but he opens it up to his 'saints'. ('Saints', by the way, means all those who have been 'set apart' for him, all those who belong to Jesus, not a special group of 'super-disciples'. Anyone who has put their trust in Jesus is a 'saint' according to the New Testament!)

Most of the passages we have looked at so far are either Old Testament passages or contain quotes from the Old Testament. So was it so surprising that the Jews in Jesus' time were expecting an earthly reign of their Messiah? Sometimes some Christians say that the Jews got it badly wrong because they missed the point of Jesus' message. True, they were looking for a political solution and missed out on their own need for forgiveness, new birth and salvation.

We too can easily miss out, but this time on the message of the kingdom of God. We see personal salvation and reconciliation to God as the central core of Jesus' message, and quite rightly. But Jesus linked the two very clearly: '*Unless one is born again (or 'from above') he cannot see the kingdom of God*' (**John 3:3**). The purpose of being born again is in order to see (and be part of) the kingdom rule of God.

Personal salvation, restored relationship to God, all the spiritual crises and processes that we need to go through – yes, they are vital and essential – yes, they meet our needs for personal development – yes, they are the very foundation of our new life in Christ and our life together in his church – BUT God's purpose for the earth, and us on it, remains the establishment of the kingdom of his Son. Let's read on and see a bit more of how it fits together!

1 Corinthians 15 is well-known as a chapter that says much about resurrection. In writing about the physical resurrection of Jesus, Paul also writes about the physical resurrection of 'those who are Christ's' at the time when he returns, and we get a glimpse of the order in which things will happen (see **verses 20-28**). **Verse 25** says that '*he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*'. When Jesus comes back, he is coming to reign, but that reign will be a process of bringing down all opposition against him, until it is all 'under his feet'. Where is all this going to happen? On the earth!

Incidentally, Jesus himself refers to this process in the course of one of his discussions with the Pharisees in **Matthew 22:41-46**. He quotes **Psalms 110:1** and makes it clear that both he and the Pharisees acknowledge that the psalm is written about the Messiah, God's Anointed One. (If we were in any doubt about that, it is underlined for us in **Hebrews 5:5 & 7:21**, where more of the same psalm is quoted and is clearly applied to Jesus as the Messiah.)

Where is Jesus right now? At the right hand of the Father (see **Acts 2:32-36** – the same psalm quoted again!) How long will he remain there? Until the time comes for him to make his enemies 'a footstool for his feet'. Isn't it amazing how it all begins to fit together?

So, a time is coming, some time in the future, when Jesus will reign on this earth. The various scriptural passages we have read leave no room for doubt, if we will believe what they say. **Revelation 11:15-18** records a vision of that future time – an amazing time when the earth will at last be ruled by 'our Lord and his Christ'.

"But", you say, "I thought God was already ruling the world. Why all this talk about Jesus coming back to judge and to rule, to overcome his enemies and then hand all rule over to the Father? I thought it was all done already!"

Really? What world do you live in? The world I see around me certainly has some of the beauty of God's creation in it, even the shadowy remnants of the 'image of God' visible in the people I meet, but there is little doubt who is really 'calling the shots' – the one Jesus called 'the ruler of this world' and Paul called 'the god of this world' and 'the prince of the power of the air', Satan himself! (**John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2**) John says clearly that the whole world lies in his power (**1 John 5:19**).

Yes, this is the world that God made and these are the people that he created to live on it, but the whole thing went desperately wrong as soon as mankind rebelled against God. Right from the start, God had planned that the whole of creation would be under mankind's control and authority, so when man rebelled, he took the whole of creation with him – unwillingly, it seems, according to **Romans 8:19-21**!

The whole of creation waiting, waiting for the time when it will be under the rule of redeemed mankind – the glorious freedom of the children of God! **Isaiah 35:1-2 & 55:12-13** are two Old Testament examples of the same promise. If we think creation is beautiful now

(and it is), just wait till that time to see it as it was originally meant to be – the present will seem like a poor shadow of it!

All creation has been waiting all this time, and God the Father has been waiting too. His passionate desire is to see the whole creation summed up in Christ, as Paul describes in ***Ephesians 1:9-11***. And, writes Paul, to be a follower of Jesus means that we have an inheritance with him – part of that amazing future kingdom.

Which leaves each of us with a final and important question – Are we part of the kingdom of God? Have we been ‘rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved Son’? (***Colossians 1:13-14***) Have we come to the point of turning away from our rebellion against God, of accepting the forgiveness offered through the blood of Jesus and receiving the new quality of life described as being ‘born from above’?

If we have, then the things we have looked at today may open our eyes to more of God’s purpose for us, and hopefully lead us on to discover more and more. It is really exciting to realise that the gradual transformation of our lives by the work of God the Holy Spirit has an ultimate purpose – so that we can be the people he wants us to be and function to our full potential in his kingdom!

If not, then why not? Does it make sense to read and talk and sing about the One who came to take the government upon his shoulders, and yet refuse to accept his invitation to become part of his kingdom NOW? - as well as looking forward to the full realisation of it when he comes back!

***“For the promise is for you
and your children
and for all who are far off,
as many as the Lord our God
will call to himself”
(Acts 2:39)***

Dave Taylor

December 2002

Further copies can be downloaded from
www.justonecandle.uk