

*Isaiah 43:18-19*

<sup>18</sup>Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
<sup>19</sup>I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

*Mark 1:14-15 (NRSV)*

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

*Luke 17:20-21 (NRSV)*

<sup>20</sup>Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; <sup>21</sup>nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

*2 Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV)*

<sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

### The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is a matter of geography. It is the place where God is king. The Jews of Jesus' day waited for the coming of this kingdom. When God reigned, there would be no war, no hunger, no hatred, no sick, no crippled, no blind . . . And the Jews had waited for a long time.

Jesus brings the news that the wait is over, that God is doing great things, that God's kingdom is at hand, that the Day of the Lord has come . . . that all of this is breaking in upon Israel through the ministry of Jesus himself. God's glory had shone on them all and the world would never be the same. And the resurrection of Jesus was the evidence that Jesus was right: the kingdom of God had arrived in and through him.

*Indeed, the old has gone and the new has come.*

One of the most respected New Testament scholars of the last half-century is a man named Gordon Fee. Dr. Fee, now retired, wrote some massive works on Paul's writings, including in-depth treatments on the Holy Spirit in Paul's letters and on Paul's Christology. In a book for laypeople, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, (highly recommended), Dr. Fee tells this story:

"At a recent coffee hour with students in the Regent College atrium, one student asked, 'If you were to return to the pastoral ministry, what would you do [meaning, How would you go about it? What would you emphasize?]' My answer was immediate: 'No matter how long it might take, I would set about with a single passion to help a local body of believers recapture the New Testament church's understanding of itself as an eschatological community.' I then set about to explain why, and what that might look like in the present day. I have no illusions that it would be easy, I further explained."<sup>1</sup>

In his book, Dr. Fee went on to explain that:

"The one feature that probably more than any other distances the New Testament church from us is the thoroughgoing *eschatological* perspective from which believers viewed everything that God had wrought through Christ and the Spirit. *Eschatology* has to do with the time of the End, and refers first of all to Jewish expectations that God through his Messiah would bring a dramatic end to the "present age." This in turn would be followed by the "coming age," signaled by the resurrection of the dead and the gift of the promised Holy Spirit.

My experience over the last fifteen years at St. Andrew certainly bears out the truth of Dr. Fee's claims. My classes can certainly testify that the eschatological "already/not yet" perspective is inescapable throughout our study of the New Testament. So, this week our goal is simply understanding. Not application, not devotion . . . just understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Fee, Gordon D. *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (pp. 49-50). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

*“A new thing”*

Isaiah writes of God doing “a new thing” that “springs forth” (v. 19 above). Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth, Greece, that if “anyone is in Christ – new creation! – everything old has passed away, everything has become new” (v. 17). Such phrases are exciting and comforting but many Christians don’t quite know what to make of them – what is all this talk about the *old* going and the *new* coming?

These aren’t sentimental words. Paul is not speaking metaphorically or figuratively. Instead, Paul writes about the way the world really is, the way it really works. This is concrete language grounded in things as they are. Understanding Paul and the rest of the NT writers on this will take a little effort, but I promise that the effort is worth it.

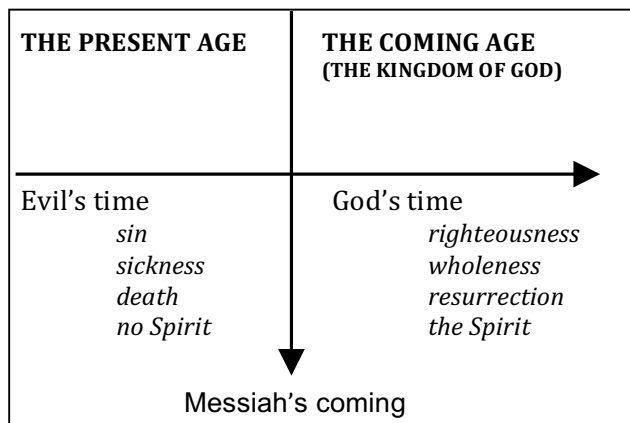
*“The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15)*

These are Jesus’ first words in Mark’s Gospel. What is he talking about? What time? What is to be fulfilled? What does it have to do with the kingdom of God?

Jesus and his fellow Jews shared a common perspective on the world. They believed in a God who had created everything there is and pronounced it good. But they also knew that God’s world was not as he had intended it to be. Creation was broken. Humans, despite being made in God’s image, were estranged from God. The Jews knew that God had chosen them to be the ones through whom creation would be healed. Indeed, as depicted in Figure 1, they awaited the arrival of the Messiah, the anointed of God, who would bring about God’s kingdom, healing creation and restoring everyone to a right relationship with God. The coming of the Messiah would be the climax of history. It would be the time to which God’s people had been pointing for nearly 2000 years. This would be Isaiah’s “new thing.” Exile would be ended. Sins would be forgiven. Evil would be banished. It would be God’s time. It would be God’s kingdom. God would give his people “a new Spirit.” Everyone would know God in their own hearts (see Jeremiah 31:31-34).

*Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah*

Jesus came talking about the fulfillment of this Jewish hope and demonstrating the reality of God’s kingdom. In God’s kingdom there are no blind or lame, so Jesus made the blind



see and the lame walk. In the kingdom of God there would be plenty of food for everyone, so Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes.

Though most Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, some did. In the months and years immediately after Jesus’ resurrection, these followers of Jesus, all of whom were Jewish, had a problem. They proclaimed to all who would listen that

*Figure 1. Jewish expectations in Jesus’ day*  
(figures from Fee’s *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*)

Jesus truly was the long-expected Messiah, but it was also clear that evil and tragedy and suffering were still present in the world. Using Figure 1 as a guide, it’s as if the Messiah had come, but the Kingdom of God had not! To the average Jew, the answer was simple – Jesus wasn’t really the Messiah, hence the world still awaited the coming of the Kingdom of God.

*Already/Not yet*

But Jesus’ disciples had seen, touched, and eaten with the risen Christ. They knew that God’s anointed had indeed come. Thus, the problem was not with Jesus but with the Jewish perspective depicted in Figure 1. In the writings of the New Testament, we see a new perspective emerging, as depicted in Figure 2.

Yes, Jesus was the Messiah. Yes, God's kingdom had come -- but not yet in all its fullness! The time of renewal had begun with the Messiah's coming but the consummation of this transformation would await his return. The Christians came to understand that they lived

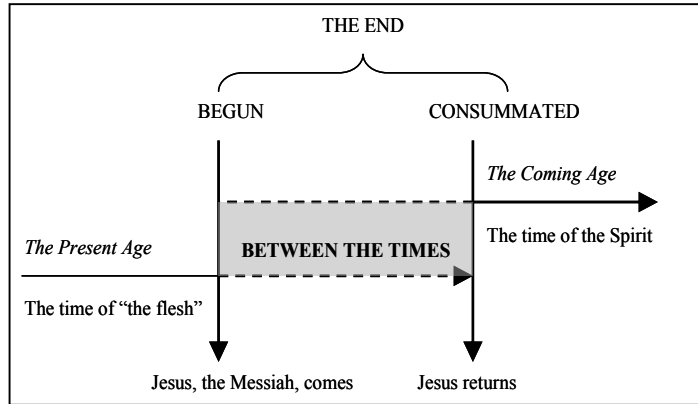


Figure 2. The Christians' new perspective: already/not yet

"between the times" when God's kingdom had come *already*, but *not yet*. I really can't overemphasize how important to our reading of the NT is our understanding of this "already/not yet" perspective. When Paul writes that Christians are the ones on whom the "ends of the ages

have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11), he means exactly that! This framework determined everything about the early Christians – how they lived, how they thought, what they wrote, how they worshipped . . . everything. The new order had begun. They were new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). They were now the people of the Spirit. . . . and, truly, so are we!

As Gordon Fee writes, we are empowered by God's Spirit to live the life of the future, of God's kingdom, in the present age. We are to be, in Paul's phrase, "ambassadors for Christ," carrying God's message of reconciliation and hope to the world, in what we do and say every day. We are new creations not just for our own sakes but for the sake of all the world. Paul understood that in his journeys he was crisscrossing the Mediterranean founding colonies of a new human race, a people born from above, born of the Spirit (John 3). St. Andrew is just such a colony. It can be hard for us to think of ourselves this way . . . but that is the nature of transformation. It may take the butterfly awhile to comprehend its own rebirth. We may not always feel like new creations. We certainly don't always act like new creations. But we are. *This is the real world*. Glory be to God!

#### *Building for the kingdom of God*

God has ushered in his kingdom . . . already (but not yet). Thus, you and I will never build this kingdom. That is God's work. Jesus will return and the kingdom will be seen in all its fullness upon God's initiative and in God's good time. The mission is God's! What we do, as part of God's work, is to build *for* his kingdom.

Jesus asked his disciples how they could possibly be the light to the world if they kept the light hidden from others. He told them to go out and make disciples across the entire planet. As selfish, prideful, and weak as we humans tend to be, God, in his wisdom, sends us out to do build *for* his kingdom. And he has sent his Holy Spirit to guide us and strengthen us, so that we will not insist upon turning inward to our own needs, but will turn outward, serving the needs of others. When we help someone to find the "pearl of great price" (Matt 13:46), we are building *for* the kingdom. When we do "for the least of these" (Matt 25:40), we *are* building for the kingdom. It is in such things that we are the light to the world.

#### *Finally*

The kingdom of God is not just about the future but it is also about the present. It is still coming, but it is present now. In his book, *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey urges us to see this as much like two "parallel universes" that, even now, do overlap from time to time and place to place. So . . . when you look at St. Andrew right now, what do you see? Do you at all see God's kingdom present here? In what ways? When? What are some concrete examples? See if you can come up with a list of ten. For example, when our youth go on mission trips, are they not stepping into God's kingdom, even if just for awhile? What are some other examples? When have you felt like you've stepped into God's kingdom? When have you felt like you built *for* God's kingdom?

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The discussion questions for this series are drawn from the curriculum for our Connection Groups, which will be meeting throughout the series. The questions were written by Rev. Allison Jean.

1. Share about a time when you met God in the world, in a place you didn't expect. How did God surprise you? How did your relationship with God change because of this experience?
2. What are things that you are interested in or passionate about that you think God gave to you for a purpose? How have you seen God use your passions and dreams as a form of ministry? How do you think God might want to use these things for ministry in the future?
3. How does this scripture broaden your understanding of the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God?
4. This study shows us that the Kingdom or Reign of God is an "already and not yet" concept. When do you struggle with this idea? How does the Kingdom or Reign of God have an impact on your daily life?

## Daily Bible Readings

**This week:** *More on the "already" and the "not yet"*

**Monday, Isaiah 11:1-9** The future peaceful kingdom

**Tuesday, Joel 2:28-30; Jeremiah 31:31-34** The Spirit is poured out in the new age of the new covenant.

**Wednesday, Luke 3:7-17** John the Baptist announces that the Messiah is at hand and will usher in the age of the Spirit.

**Thursday, John 3** Jesus teaches Nicodemus about the new birth.

**Friday, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21** New Creation!!

**Saturday, Philippians 3:7-14** Already they know forgiveness, but the Christians are not yet perfected.

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of James. We will begin the book of Samuel very soon.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *The Old Testament: Sacred and Strange*