

THE
KINGDOM
OF GOD

AND THE WORK of CHRIST



BRANDON D. CROWE

“Far too often, we parrot biblical words without really knowing what they mean. Dr. Crowe has given the church an excellent summary of what the Gospels mean by the phrase ‘kingdom of God,’ but he has also given us more—a practical handbook to understand how to read the Gospels well, seeing their central point, Jesus Christ and His kingdom. Highly recommended for both church leaders and laity who want to know the Gospels more deeply.”

—DR. WILLIAM B. FULLILOVE
Professor of Old Testament
Reformed Theological Seminary

“The Gospels sum up Jesus’ preaching: ‘The kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent, and believe the good news.’ The coming of God’s kingdom was the heart of Jesus’ message, and it was the purpose of His mission. God’s eternal Son entered human history as the messianic Son, the royal Rescuer promised to Israel and the hope of salvation for all peoples. Exploring both the Gospels and the whole New Testament (with its Old Testament backstory), *The Kingdom of God and the Work of Christ* traces the tapestry that interweaves the kingdom’s paradoxical power with the King’s identity and redemptive achievement. This study is clear, concise, and comprehensive—a challenging blend to achieve for so rich a theme! Moreover, it is convicting: each chapter concludes with ‘practical takeaways’ that challenge us to trust humbly and submit eagerly to the King who has come and who reigns today at God’s right hand.”

—DR. DENNIS E. JOHNSON
Emeritus Professor of Practical Theology
Westminster Seminary California

“The gospel of the kingdom of God stands at the center of the Scriptures and at the heart of the Christian faith. This gospel is, however, often misunderstood. In *The Kingdom of God and the Work of Christ*, Brandon Crowe provides a sure guide to this crucial topic. He shows from the four Gospels that God’s saving kingdom was promised in the Old Testament, was inaugurated by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and will reach its consummation when Jesus returns. In God’s kingdom, sinners find forgiveness, enemies become citizens, God’s people find fullness of life, and God Himself is glorified. This is good news indeed! Whether you are new to the topic, or coming to it again afresh, you will find here treasure both new and old (Matt. 13:52).”

—DR. MURRAY SMITH
Lecturer in Biblical Theology and Exegesis
Christ College, Australia

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the Work of Christ

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BRANDON D. CROWE



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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For Cherilyn and Brian

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Preface

The kingdom of God has been widely invoked in the modern world, but I suspect that it has been widely misunderstood. This book looks particularly at the Gospels to understand the message of Jesus about the kingdom of God (and the kingdom of heaven). The kingdom is crucial to Jesus' teaching, and it's therefore crucial that we understand it faithfully. Since the kingdom is closely related to the gospel message, this is also a book about how the gospel message is found in the four Gospels.

My primary focus in what follows is to address this question: What is the meaning of the kingdom of God in the Gospels, and how does this relate to Christ and what He has done for us? I give most attention to explaining Gospel texts, especially in the light of the Old Testament. I also include practical points at the end of each chapter, though readers may think of other application points in addition to these.

Thanks to Aaron Garriott for the invitation to write this volume and to everyone behind the scenes who helped this book see the light of day. I have benefited over the years as a professor of courses on the Gospels, where much of this material has been taught and engaged by capable students. I received helpful feedback from James Beevers, Caleb Burkhardt, Iain Duguid, and Jonny Gibson. A special thanks to my wife for all she does to love and serve our family. I dedicate this

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE WORK OF CHRIST

book to my sister and brother-in-law, with the hope that it will be of use to them as they seek to live faithful, kingdom-centered lives in their various callings.

The Kingdom and the Four Gospels

When I was a child, my grandfather had on his mantel a small piece of wood shaped like a tiny porch with a roof. Underneath that roof were two small nails. He asked me if I knew what it was. I didn't. He would chuckle and say, "It's a 'tacks shelter.'" I was supposed to find this funny, but I had no idea what he was talking about. I didn't know what a tax shelter was, so I didn't know why "tacks shelter" was such a clever joke.

Sometimes trying to understand the Bible is like this. We come across a term or a concept, and we nod as though we know what it means, but we really don't. I was a college student when I realized one day that I didn't know what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God." At this point, I was familiar with the Gospels and had read them many times. But honestly, I didn't know how to explain the kingdom of God. I had a vague idea, but I shuffled past the phrase without really digging down into it. I was comfortable with a vague idea of what it probably meant, but I would not have been able to

articulate a thorough definition. I had the same lingering question in my early days of seminary. It wasn't until I began to learn from class and reading about the kingdom that I started to feel confident in my understanding of it. It was one of those topics that I didn't understand as well as I needed to.

What about you? Regardless of how much or how little you've read the Bible, do you really understand what Jesus means by "the kingdom"? Do you labor over it? Do you perhaps read right past it? Do you intuit the meaning from context? Does it refer to the church? To a principle for how we live? To some future reality?

How about the phrase *kingdom of heaven*? Is this the same thing as the kingdom of God? Does it simply mean "heaven"? Or something else?

These are not trivial questions. The kingdom was central to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, and we need to be sure we're interpreting this concept well if we want to interpret the Gospels well.

Since this is such a key concept in the Gospels, as its frequency indicates, it will not do to shuffle past or skim over something so central to the message of Jesus. Everything Jesus said is important. We can be doubly sure that repeated elements in His teaching are worthy of our study and reflection.

Jesus did not explain where the concept of the kingdom came from. But this is because it was so commonly understood that its background would have been obvious to the original audience. The same may not be true for us today. Therefore, we need to consider its background to appreciate what Jesus meant by the phrasing.

Yet in another sense, Jesus explained what the kingdom is every time He mentioned the concept. Though He wasn't the first to speak about the kingdom, He recalibrated and redefined what many

people expected the kingdom of God to be. Jesus' teaching and His kingdom are full of surprises.

Back to my question: How would you define the kingdom of God? This is not an insignificant question; it relates quite centrally to what you believe about theology and the gospel message. It makes a big difference. Getting this right will help us stay oriented to theological true north; getting this wrong threatens to lead us off the straight path into a theological ditch.

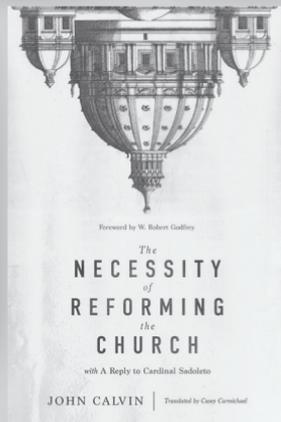
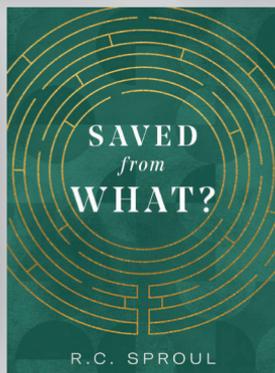
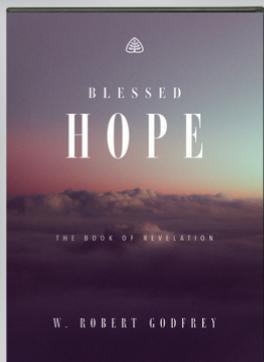
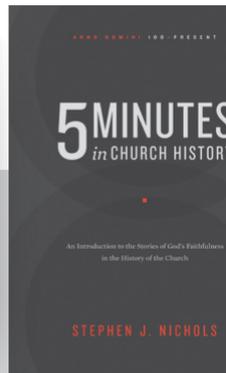
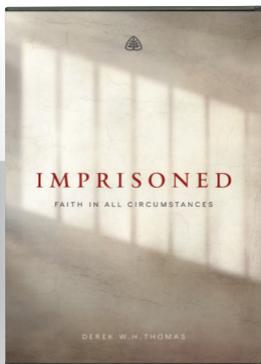
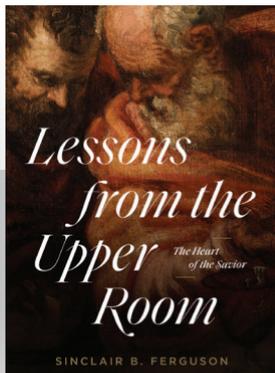
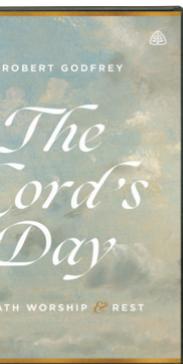
So I invite you on the journey of this book. If you do not know what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God," this is a good place to start. If you think you have some idea, then I hope to help you gain more clarity in your understanding. And even if you're already confident you know what it means, I hope to illumine that answer even further by unpacking the kingdom message of the Gospels.

Our goal in this study is to understand what Jesus means by "the kingdom of God" (and related terms) and to contextualize it in the light of its Old Testament background. This will require us to use both a broad lens and a narrow lens: a broad lens to look at all of Scripture, and a narrow lens to focus on specific texts in the Gospels. We will look both at Christ's kingdom *teaching* and at His kingdom *work* in relation to our salvation. We will therefore also embark on this journey with an eye to practical living: Why does it matter? As we will see, the message of the kingdom is not ultimately different from the message of the gospel.

Following the Map: How to Read the Gospels

This is a book on the kingdom and the Gospels. To prepare for the journey of this study, we need to follow the proper map. Simply put, we need to interpret the Gospels in the right way. Yet if we look at

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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