

Life in the Future, Now

“Let us live up to what we have already attained” (Philippians 3:16)

There are three aspects of time in the Bible for creatures in the physical world. They are the Old (the past), the Now (the present, the Church age), and the New (the future). We’re in the Now, which is a bespoke temporary era made necessary by the rejection of Israel’s Messiah/King. The Now, what we’re in, is a hybrid time; it’s when the Old and the New overlap. For believers, the Now both reprises the Old in some ways and (of far greater importance to us) it is in many ways proleptic of the New, the coming Kingdom.

God created time. He is an eternal, infinite Being. God *transcends* time. For God there is no sequence of past, present and future, as there is for earthly beings limited to time and space. God rules over *all* time, including the future. If we’re in Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we need to know what God has revealed about the future, and *live* the future, because that’s what we’ve been called to. The future is Life. All else is Death.

When Jesus came, His mission was to invite people into the promised Messianic Kingdom. All His teaching was about that Kingdom. All His parables refer to the Kingdom (even if the Kingdom isn’t explicit). The four Gospels are to invite readers into *the Kingdom* by following Jesus. (They are not there to invite people to eternal life in heaven, a concept forced on the church by amillennialism.) In other words, Jesus came to inaugurate the *New*. In Matthew 12 the trajectory of rejecting Jesus was set with the allegation that Jesus was doing miracles in the power of Satan. So another interim era is introduced in Chapter 13 with the so-called “kingdom” parables. The last of these parables is most instructive: The kingdom is like “new treasures as well as old” (13:52). The Now era (the interval between His rejection and Return) has aspects of the new (the promised future era) as well as of the old (the existing, O.T. era). Let’s discuss this, because we need to correctly understand the role of a follower of Jesus in today’s world.

First, I’ll try to define these “times.” For this discussion, the Old is everything in the Old Testament. Exactly where it ends and the Now begins is unclear. It might be that the Now begins with the Gospels in the New Testament, or it arguably might begin with the passion of Christ or even in the early chapters of Acts. Locating that boundary is not important for us here. The New begins with the Return of the exalted Christ to establish on earth His Messianic Kingdom, which doesn’t end. Now some fundamentals and necessary concepts.

Messiah Jesus is King. And we’re united to Him, we identify with Him. According to many New Testament texts, we’re *in Christ*. We are His Body. So, we’re here in the Now to live out the life of the coming King. When Jesus returns to set up the Messianic Kingdom, it’ll be a coercive rule. We don’t coerce. We instead live humbly, selflessly, sacrificially, obediently – as did the King at His first Advent, which fulfilled the Old. Also for Now, reprised from the Old, are justification by faith, sanctification by obedience to the Word, discipline of God’s people, and the necessity of repentance. Knowing God, loving Him, serving Him and being loyal and committed to Him are creational responsibilities throughout all time.

In the Old, God was present with His people, although hidden from sight; and His people had access to Him although only under certain conditions and thru mediators. That continues in the Now, although access is more full and intimate, thru Jesus the Messiah/King, His Word and His Spirit. In the future New, God will be visibly present with full access to all.

Now, we live the qualities of the King and those of His future Kingdom, such as love, life, truth, justice and righteousness, holiness, and more. Our present lives are to express the Person of the King and the nature of the future Kingdom. We forgive others and love others because in the New will be unimaginably gracious forgiveness and outpouring of love, and the New will only be possible because of forgiveness and love.

Jesus is also Prophet and Priest. As we identify with Him, we too live out these roles. As prophet, we declare the will of God. We teach and preach and share His Word with others. As priest, we intercede for others, praying for their needs and blessing. We are like Jesus continuing His work for God, in the here-and-now.

Our role in union with Jesus is to become like Jesus. So sanctification is our responsibility in this life. We become holy, as He is holy. We practice righteousness as He did. We obey His teachings, precepts, values, commands and His laws because . . . because we’re kingly, and to be kingly is to be like Jesus. His mind is to be our mind. The “fruit of the Spirit” are for us, now. The peace and the joy of the future are for us to experience, now. In Philippians 3, Paul compellingly

argues that we're to live out, in the here-and-now, the truths of the future, of the New. We're to live in the power of Jesus, not minding earthly things or earthly matters which are inimical to the Gospel.

We live as if in the future, that is, anticipating the reality of the future, making that a reality now. The great transformations of creation and society that will occur when Jesus returns are for the future. But the transformation of our character, of our being, is for Now. We're to put off everything that's evil in the Old and that persists in the Now, and become now what we'll be fully in the New.

We're foreigners living in a strange world. Like the Levites of the Old, we have no land, no home, no investment in this world. We belong in the future glorious Kingdom, not in the sin-saturated evil age of Old/Now. This world is not our home, nor are we pursuing the interests of the present world. We are citizens of the Kingdom. And so we live as if in the Kingdom and we long for the Kingdom to come, for the King to return, so that the glories of the future can be a reality.

In the coming Kingdom, the Gentile nations will honor the Jewish Messiah/King. The blessings of participating in the Kingdom will be extended to the Gentiles. Paul understood this, which is why he was the Apostle to the Gentiles. He brought that aspect of the New to the Now. Likewise, in the coming Kingdom, the Holy Spirit will have a profound and pervasive role. That's why the Spirit is given to us who are following Christ in the Now. It anticipates (in part) the great reality of the New.

Jesus is the new and greater Moses, the new and greater Joshua, and Elijah. He is the second Adam, an obedient Adam. He is the promised ideal and perfect offspring of David. Jesus is also the personal embodiment of the Nation of Israel, although He is the obedient and righteous Israel who glorifies God. We who are His followers and identify with Him thus are members of a true Israel. Yet, Jesus is also the ultimate King, the Ruler and Judge of all humanity. He will return as sovereign ruler over a restored and perfect creation and be worshiped by all humans, forever. We who are His followers and identify with Him thus will rule and judge humanity with Him in the future Kingdom.

Paul's appeal to Caesar and his journey to Rome was to argue that Christianity is really a sect of Judaism, the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures' hope. By His passion, Jesus ratified the New Covenant and inaugurated the Kingdom, but it was not realized because the rejected King is not here. His passion made followers of Jesus fit to be in the Kingdom. Paul lived in the Now, but he understood that his Now was elements of the Old continuing while the New was (soon) coming. And—get this!—Paul taught that our life in the Now is really determined and controlled by the New.

So the Now, the present church age, retains certain elements of the Old while anticipating the reality of the future New. The Church is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus narrated in the Gospels, which was (is) inviting or calling and then preparing people for the coming Kingdom. So the Now incorporates in part the Old while expressing in part the New.

In the Old era and continuing in the Now, the Gentile nations of the world are anti-God and corrupt, totally corrupt, and they are condemned. (America, by the way, is just another of the many condemned Gentile nations of the world. Don't suppose otherwise!) Only God's people, the people of Israel will be rescued (Zechariah 12,14). God's judgment of the world of Gentile nations however is being delayed during this Now era so that elect individuals from among all the nations can be rescued to participate in the coming New era. The mission of the Church, the work of Jesus' followers, is evangelistic outreach to the world. It's what Israel was supposed to be doing during the Old era. A future-minded follower of Christ will understand this role. As we've discussed often, the true Church will be snatched up to be with Christ before the terrible judgments of Revelation 6-17.

The Now is corrupted by sin, as was the Old. Anti-theistic people imagine counterfeit kingdoms and strive desperately to bring them to reality. So they've invented MAGA, Marxism, Islam, karma, and much else. Followers of Jesus however have to understand the grand meta-narrative of Scripture and our role in it to be able to live faithfully to God. (This is why we teach Scripture's dispensations and pre-millennialism.) And our pursuit of life, that is, the transformation of our character and our service for Christ, is to be as if the Millennium, the New, were already a reality.

The above concept encapsulates the worldview of almost all of the New Testament. We live in the anticipation of the New, the promised Messianic Kingdom. In the Kingdom, we'll be obediently and lovingly serving God full-time. So let's do that now. And we'll be revealing God's glory by our transformed persons, so let's do that now also. And as we'll be holy then, let's be holy now. We must—*must*—understand our purpose and role in this present life and, with a zeal that honors the Lord, commit to fulfilling it.