

ONE ACCORD
AND CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
(Lord's Day—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight
The Divine Trinity and the Kingdom of God

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:3; 2:32-36; 8:12; 14:22; 16:6-7; 20:28; 28:23, 31

- I. Even as the Divine Trinity is the framework of the entire New Testament, so the Divine Trinity is the structure of the book of Acts; chapter after chapter of Acts unveils the operation of the Divine Trinity for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy—e.g., 1:1-2, 4-5, 8, 11, 21; 2:4, 17-18, 21-24, 27, 31-33, 36, 38; 13:2, 4, 7, 9-10, 12, 16, 23, 30, 33-39, 49-50, 52; 28:15, 23, 25, 31:**
- A. We must be governed by the revelation that God is uniquely one—Psa. 86:10; Isa. 45:5; 1 Cor. 8:4:
1. The unique God is triune, three-one—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit— Matt. 28:19.
 2. *The Triune God* refers mainly to God Himself; *the Divine Trinity* refers mainly to God's being triune, which is the primary attribute of the Godhead—v. 19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4-5.
- B. The Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—was fully involved with the Son's ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit—Acts 2:32-36:
1. The Son ascended, the Father exalted Him, and the Spirit was poured out— Luke 24:51; Phil. 2:9; Acts 1:9-11; 2:32-36.
 2. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit were all wrapped up with the outpouring of the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God—v. 33; John 7:37-39; Phil. 1:19.
- C. In Acts 16:6-7 *the Holy Spirit* and *the Spirit of Jesus* are used interchangeably, revealing that the Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit:
1. *The Holy Spirit* is a general title of the Spirit of God in the New Testament— Acts 9:17, 31.
 2. *The Spirit of Jesus* is a particular expression concerning the Spirit of God and refers to the Spirit of the incarnated Savior who, as Jesus in His humanity, passed through human living and death on the cross—16:7:
 - a. This indicates that in the Spirit of Jesus there is not only the divine element of God but also the human element of Jesus and the elements of His human living and His suffering of death as well—Phil. 2:7-8.
 - b. In his ministry the apostle Paul needed such an all-inclusive Spirit.
 3. As a vessel containing the Triune God, Paul was fully constituted of the Holy Spirit, who was involved with the Lord's incarnation and birth, and of the Spirit of Jesus, who was involved with the Lord's humanity, human living, all-inclusive death, life-imparting resurrection, and ascension—Eph. 3:14-17; Luke 1:35; Acts 2:32-36; Phil. 1:19.
 4. The kind of work that we do for the Lord depends on the kind of Spirit by whom we are guided, directed, instructed, and constituted; when the all-inclusive Spirit becomes our constitution, our work will be the expression of this Spirit—Acts 16:6-7; Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19.

- D. God obtained the church “through His own blood”—Acts 20:28:
 - 1. God purchased the church by paying the price of “His own blood.”
 - 2. Through incarnation our God, the Creator, the eternal One, became mingled with man—John 1:1, 14:
 - a. As a result, He was no longer only God—He became a God-man, who had blood and was able to die for us—1 John 1:7.
 - b. When the Lord Jesus, the God-man, died on the cross, He died not only as man but also as God.
 - 3. The blood that He shed was not only the blood of the man Jesus but also the blood of the God-man.
 - 4. Therefore, His blood, through which God obtained the church, is “His own blood”—Acts 20:28.

II. The kingdom of God is the main subject of the apostles’ preaching in Acts—1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31:

- A. The fact that the resurrected Christ, in His appearing to the apostles through a period of forty days, spoke to them “the things concerning the kingdom of God” indicates that the kingdom would be the main subject of the apostles’ preaching in their coming commission after Pentecost—1:3.
- B. According to the New Testament, the kingdom of God is not a visible, material realm; actually, the kingdom of God is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself— Luke 17:20-21.
- C. The churches and the kingdom of God go together; the churches produced by the propagation of the resurrected Christ are the kingdom of God on earth today— Acts 14:22; 20:25:
 - 1. The resurrected Christ, who is propagating Himself in His ascension, by the Spirit, and through the disciples, is the reality of the kingdom of God; the kingdom of God is His expansion—1:8; 8:12:
 - a. The churches are the expansion of Christ, who came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God; this is revealed in the Gospels—Mark 4:3, 26.
 - b. In the Gospels Christ was the seed of the kingdom; in the book of Acts we have the propagation of this seed to produce the churches as the kingdom of God— 8:1, 12; 13:1-4.
 - 2. We in the churches are the propagation of Christ and the expansion of Christ, and we are enlarging the kingdom of God—Rev. 1:9, 11.
- D. The kingdom of God is the spreading of Christ as life into His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life—2 Pet. 1:3-11:
 - 1. To enter into this kingdom, people need to repent of their sins and believe in the gospel so that their sins may be forgiven and so that they may be regenerated by God to have the divine life, which matches the divine nature of this kingdom—Mark 1:15; John 3:3, 5.
 - 2. All the believers in Christ can share the kingdom in the church age for their enjoyment of God in His righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit— Rom. 14:17.
 - 3. The kingdom of God will become the kingdom of Christ and of God for the overcoming believers to inherit and enjoy in the coming kingdom age so that they may reign with Christ for a thousand years—1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 20:4, 6.
 - 4. As the eternal kingdom, the kingdom of God will be an eternal blessing of God’s eternal life for all of God’s redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for

eternity—21:1-4; 22:1-5, 14, 17.

- E. In Acts 14:22 Paul entreated the believers who were continuing in the faith to realize that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God, because the whole world opposes our entering in; to enter into the kingdom of God is to enter into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom.
- F. In Acts 19 we see that Satan is fighting against God's spreading of His kingdom on earth; the prevailing ministry for the propagation of Christ is a fighting, a battle, for God's kingdom—vv. 23-41.
- G. Paul's proclaiming the kingdom of God in 28:31 was the propagation of the resurrected Christ:
 - 1. This is proved by the words *teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ*, which things go together with the kingdom of God—vv. 31, 23.
 - 2. To teach concerning Christ is to spread the kingdom of God; therefore, the kingdom of God is actually the propagation of the resurrected Christ—a process that continues to be carried out through the believers today—v. 31.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

Entering into the Kingdom of God through Many Tribulations

A Kingdom of the Divine Life

In Acts 14:22 we see that Paul and Barnabas told the disciples that “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” Many think that the kingdom of God is merely a sphere where God may rule over people as the King. According to this understanding, the kingdom of God is simply a realm where God rules over His people. I do not say that this understanding is wrong, but it is superficial and natural.

The kingdom of God was a main subject of the apostles' preaching in Acts (8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). It is not a material kingdom visible to human sight but a kingdom of the divine life. It is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life.

Christ as the Seed of Life Sown into the Believers

In the *Life-study of Mark* we have pointed out that the kingdom of God is the Savior Himself (Luke 17:21) as the seed of life sown into His believers, God's chosen people (Mark 4:3, 26), and developing into a realm in which God may rule as His kingdom in His divine life. Its entrance is regeneration (John 3:5), and its development is the believers' growth in the divine life (2 Pet. 1:3-11). It is the church life today, in which the faithful believers live (Rom. 14:17), and it will develop into the coming kingdom as an inheritance reward (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) to the overcoming saints in the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6). Eventually, it will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the eternal kingdom of God, an eternal realm of the eternal blessing of God's eternal life for all of God's redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (21:1-4; 22:1-5, 14).

In Acts 14:22 Paul exhorted the believers who were continuing in the faith to realize that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. Do you think that Paul regarded the kingdom of God as only a realm where God's people are under His ruling and that to enter into this realm we must pass through tribulation? Paul may have had the thought that the kingdom of God is a realm in which God rules over His people, but this certainly was not his main thought concerning the kingdom of God. We need to remember that Paul was exhorting disciples who were somewhat advanced. They were continuing not only in the grace of God but also in the faith. The charge to continue in the faith is both deeper and higher than that to continue in the grace. Therefore, those whom Paul was exhorting in 14:22 were somewhat learned in divine things. In telling them that they must enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation, Paul certainly regarded the kingdom as

something more than an objective realm in which God rules as the King.

What, then, was Paul's main thought concerning the kingdom of God? If we would know this, we need to realize that according to the New Testament, the kingdom of God is not a visible, material realm. Actually, the kingdom of God is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When He was questioned by the Pharisees about the kingdom, "He answered them and said, The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, Behold, here it is! or, There! For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). As the context proves, the kingdom of God is the Savior Himself, who was in the midst of the Pharisees. Wherever the Savior is, there is the kingdom of God. This was the reason He could say that the kingdom was in the midst of the Pharisees. As the Lord's word in Luke 17:20 indicates, this kingdom does not come with observation; that is, it is spiritual, not material and visible.

In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom into His disciples. The development of this kingdom seed begins in Acts and continues in all the Epistles. This development reaches its consummation—the harvest—in the book of Revelation. According to the Lord's word and Paul's understanding, the kingdom of God is not a material realm. Rather, the kingdom is spiritual, divine, and even personal. The kingdom is Christ as the seed sown into the hearts of His chosen people. Our hearts are the soil into which the kingdom seed is sown and in which this seed develops. As we have pointed out, the seed of the kingdom is sown in the Gospels, it develops in Acts and the Epistles, and it consummates with the harvest in Revelation. This is the proper definition of the kingdom of God.

Entering into the Full Enjoyment of the Resurrected Christ as the Kingdom of God

Now that we have seen that the kingdom of God is Christ as the seed that is sown into us, develops, and consummates in a harvest, we need to ask what it means to enter into the kingdom. To enter into the kingdom of God is to enter into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom. However, we may not understand what it means to enjoy Christ as the kingdom. The whole world opposes the entering of God's people into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom. Judaism, for example, has been usurped and utilized by Satan to frustrate the believers from entering this enjoyment. Throughout the centuries other forms of religion—Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam—have also been used by God's enemy to keep God's people from entering into the full enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 tells us that through a period of forty days the resurrected Christ appeared to the apostles and spoke to them "the things concerning the kingdom of God." Peter and all the one hundred and twenty had been brought to the Lord, and they had received the essential Spirit for their life, living, and existence. They were truly followers of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, in chapter 1 of Acts they had not yet entered into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom of God, as God's ruling realm. It was still necessary for them to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected Christ as God's kingdom. On the day of Pentecost Peter and all the others surely entered into this realm—the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the sphere in which God rules over His people. As Peter was preaching the gospel in Acts 2, we see with him and the other apostles a picture of the kingdom of God. In Acts 2 the one hundred and twenty were in the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as God's ruling realm. Such a realm is the kingdom of God.

Very soon after the believers entered into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom of God, the Jewish religion came in to frustrate this enjoyment. If in chapters 3, 4, and 5, Peter, John, and the other believers had shown any weakness, they would have lost the full enjoyment of the resurrected Christ, and as a result, they would have missed the kingdom of God.

In the light of what we have seen concerning the kingdom of God, let us now come back to Acts 14 and ask if the disciples whom Paul was exhorting had entered into the realm of the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom of God. No, those believers had not yet entered into that enjoyment; they

were still on the way. Therefore, Paul charged them to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the kingdom of God. Here he seemed to be saying, “I have preached to you the resurrected Christ as the holy and faithful things, as the grace of God, as eternal life, and even as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. The full enjoyment of grace, eternal life, and the Spirit is a realm, and this realm is God’s kingdom. You have not yet entered into this realm—you are on the way. Therefore, I exhort you through many tribulations to enter into the kingdom of God. You should expect opposition and be prepared for it. You will face much tribulation. But through all these tribulations you must endeavor to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the kingdom of God. When you have the enjoyment of such a Christ, you will be under the divine rule. Then you will become the kingdom of God, which is the proper church life.” (*Life-study of Acts*, pp. 335-339)