

November 21, Reign of Christ Sunday (John 18:33-37)

## **Ultimately, the reign of God is God's government set up in the human heart.**

by [Frank A. Thomas](#) in the [November 3, 2021](#) issue

When Pilate interrogates Jesus, he sounds much like the disciples who thought the kingdom Jesus kept referring to was a political one. “Are you the king of the Jews?” he asks Jesus.

Jesus responds, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate points out that he is not Jewish and that Jesus’ own people have handed him over. “What have you done?” he asks.

Jesus responds, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Despite expectations, he is not of an earthly empire that will chase out the oppressive Romans and institute a political reign that will usher in the age of blessing for Israel. His kingdom, his realm, is not of this world.

If we were listening carefully to John and to the synoptic gospels, we would know how Jesus is going to respond here. Though we, like Jesus’ disciples, don’t always talk much about the kingdom, this is pretty much all that Jesus talks about.

In Mark, Jesus comes into Galilee preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God (1:14)—at the very beginning and inaugural point of his ministry, Jesus is talking about the kingdom. Luke records Jesus’ words: “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because this is why I was sent” (4:43). Jesus goes through every city and village preaching and demonstrating the Good News of the kingdom of God.

“But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you” (Matt. 13:11). “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of

God is within you” (Luke 17:20–21). Jesus talks about God’s reign more than he talks about anything else.

The kingdom of God is God’s reign—not over a country or a group of people but over the whole of human history. This realm of God affirms what is good, true, and just in every age, and it corrects what is misguided, unjust, and wrong. It is not about a geographical country nor a particular race or ethnicity. God’s realm does not settle on boundaries that we make, such as a particular version of the Christian faith that we endorse. The reign of God is not about a sentimental vagueness that requires nothing of us except that we try to be nice. Nor is God’s realm a national or a political entity.

It is a community in God’s care that lives in radical love, joy, peace, truth, and righteousness.

The kingdom is rooted in the paradoxical name and nature of God. The realm of God is preached and therefore inaugurated: it is here, but it is also on the way. God’s reign is plain, but it is also mysterious. God’s realm is open to everybody, but it is also hidden. Though it somehow is never fully realized, it is so profound and so real that we cannot escape its claim. The church is God’s realm in its visible form; though fallible, it participates in the inauguration of the reign of God. This kingdom is the most beautiful and alluring thing in life, yet it is also the most demanding and radical thing one could ever know or do. The kingdom of God is paradoxical.

The kingdom of God is under divine sovereignty. Ultimately, the reign of God is God’s government set up in the human heart. God comes into the human heart at the point of regeneration and makes that heart a holy habitation. God’s government invades the human heart such that God’s authority is established in a person’s mind and will. When God occupies a human heart, then the kingdom has come to earth. When God sets up government in a human heart, then peace shall reign. When God sets up government in a human heart, then we shall beat our swords into plowshares. When God sets up government in enough human hearts, then we shall study war no more.

The question is whether we, each of us, serve a government of this world. Can we say with Jesus that the government we serve is not of this world? Is God’s government set up in our human hearts?