

*God's will ...  
to restore God's world ...  
through God's people ...  
in God's time.*

Introduction: cf. Denver Broncos' QB, Tim Tebow – stunning victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers in OT last Sunday [Sam Wong's heart was broken!]

*“Tebow, who used to wear eye black in college with John 3:16 written on it ... completed 10 passes for 316 yards, or 31.6 yards per completion. The game's lone interception, thrown by Roethlisberger [i.e., the opposing QB], came on third and 16. The overnight TV rating for the last 15 minutes of the game, during which Tebow won it, was reported to be 31.6.” [Cf. Bruce Arthur, National Post, Jan 12, 2012.]*

While many of you probably know what Jn. 3:16 says, I am just going to say it ...

Jn. 3:16 “For God so loved **the world** [τὸν κόσμον, the cosmos] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Unfortunately many today have taken “the world” in a merely individualistic, private, and consumerist perspective: “the world” = “my world” = “what I am looking for my own pleasure”/“the desire of my heart.” While sometimes what

God desires could overlap what we desire and while not every human desire is bad or against God or His will, but if we equate “the world that God loves” solely with “my world” in terms of what gives me pleasure, satisfaction, fulfillment, & security, then it's an overly self or man-centered – the good news of the Bible has morphed into what I want, i.e., securing my [eternal/everlasting] life insurance. God and His world remain distant and its value is determined by its usefulness, i.e., whether He & His world meet what we looking for.

But Jesus' message of the kingdom is not about obtaining a ironclad life insurance policy, developing a private empire, practicing an individualistic morality, cherry picking some religious rituals to reduce guilty feelings or to ward off demonic attacks, and enduring some this-worldly harassments, while waiting to get into heaven after we die.

In light of God's teaching, the good news of the kingdom is never about satisfying our wants and needs; it doesn't begin with our sins and disobedience, and then end up in “heaven.” This understanding makes “the forgiveness of sin” the only plotline and that it produces “forgiven people” but not **followers** of Jesus (cf. Todd Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, pp. 26ff.).

***The “world” that God loves is much bigger than “my world”!***

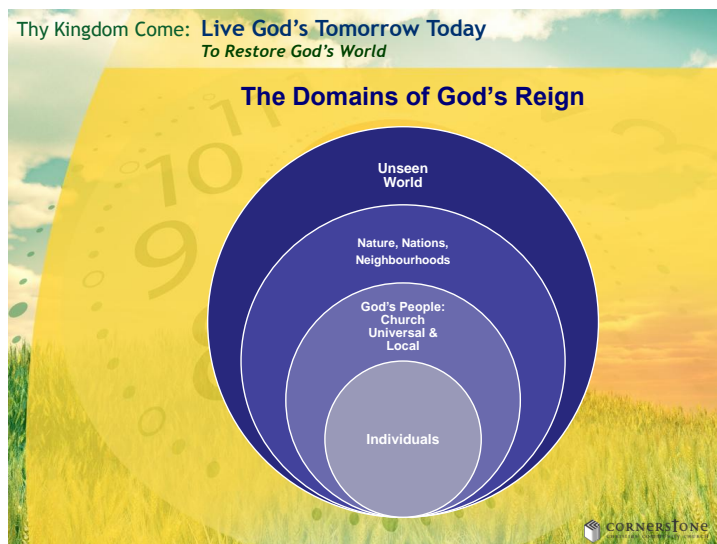
The “world” – the cosmos which is even bigger than our universe – is the arena in which God is King.

## The Kingdom of God

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## God’s Sovereign Reign in “the cosmos”

Let me try to put in graphic expression the different domains [the cosmos] of God’s kingly rule:



Looking at this “BIG PICTURE [on the Puzzle Box]”, we must consider some fundamental life questions which have been posted by philosophers, theologians, and common “Joe’s and Jane’s”:

Life Questions:

*Who are we?*

*Why are we here?*

*Where are we going?*

*Is this life it?*

*What is the ultimate purpose of life?*

*What is wrong with the world/“my world”?*

*What’s the solution?*

*What can we do/What’s our place in this world?*

*How can we contribute?*

Todd Hunter in his book, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, says, “[God] desires to have a renewed humanity who participate in his plan to restore creation ... Having sin-fixed humans was not God’s original motivation for creating, nor was it his ultimate intention for humankind ... we are mended so that we can get back in the game of life as God’s cooperative friends. [Cf. pp. 28, 30; emphasis ours.]

We are created, saved/redeemed, called, and empowered to partner with God to fulfill His purpose for His cosmos!

***Keep the “main thing” the “main thing”; discover our story in God’s grand story revealed in the Bible.***

Let me summarize for you God’s grand story [in the most simplistic description of the “BIG PICTURE”] in FIVE slides:



The rest of the OT continues the story of how God worked out and fulfilled His promise to Adam & Eve by calling individuals, the election of a nation, and the promised Messiah-Servant to bless the world nations and to restore His creation.



The bible, with 40+ different authors in the span of 1,000+ yrs., tells the story of God's purpose in creation and new creation, His cosmos!



Jesus proclaims and embodies the message of the “Kingdom of God”; he teaches parables about it; the Sermon on the Mt. is the Christian charter for right living, kingdom ethics; he sent out the disciples to do likewise – this theme occurs 55x in Matt, 20x in Mk, 46x in Lk, & 5x in Jn.

Jesus is the decisive God-breaking-into-this-world to reverse everything evil; He makes God’s “invisible work” visible, now through his followers. The good news of the kingdom is not about how to a ticket to heaven, but declaring the presence and availability of life aligned with God’s purposes and marked by obedience to His wills. It’s all about living in a “God-bathed, God-permeated world”.

Hence, we acknowledge God’s authority/lordship over our lives, we pledge our total allegiance to Him, we make a choice/decision to follow the King’s agenda first and foremost – we are not building our own castles in our own kingdoms and temples on earth for self-worship but we are a worshipping and serving community, pursuing His vision for the cosmos!

Whenever we execute God’s instructions when we bend our wills toward His, reflect His creative/re-creative, and reforming power in everything we do, we become the extension of His kingdom and the manifestation of life-eternal in our present, embody God’s redeeming work in the whole cosmos. In the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Jesus, God

augmented the beginning of the end of evil and everything that’s anti-god; Christ-followers are partnering with God to establish His ultimate eradication of evil and the eventual arrival of a new heaven and a new earth.

I’ll let Pastor Steve and Pastor Kevin in the coming two weeks to elaborate how God restores His world through His people in His time.

Let me quickly summarize in broad strokes the bible’s grand overarching story:

God established His Kingdom in Creation, Humanity’s Rebellion & Consequences, God’s Outworking of His saving Plan in History & through Israel in particular, The Dawning of the New Age in Jesus’ 1<sup>st</sup> Appearing & the Spreading of the Good News of the Arrival of God’s Kingdom, The Return of the King and A New Creation in the New Heaven and New Earth. [Cf. N. T. Wright; Craig Bartholomew & Michael Goheen.]

Some of you here are probably trying to figure out: if the good news of the kingdom is not about “going to heaven after we died”, then ...

*How do ...*

*“The Sinner’s Prayer”*

*“The Bridge Illustration”*

*“Inviting Jesus to come into my heart”*

*“Beginning a personal relationship with God”*

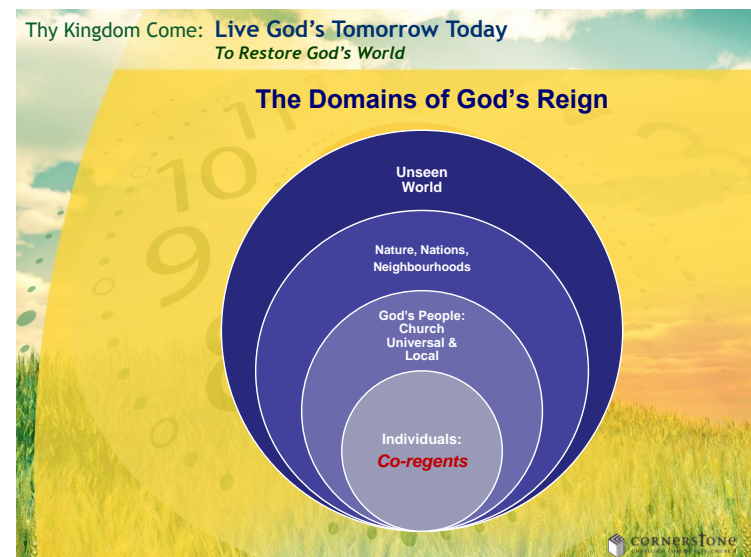
*fit into the kingdom message?*

Let me try to answer this question: usually these elements focus on the individual “conversion moment” as the end game. But from the bible’s retelling of God’s story, all who are created in the image of God are given the privilege and responsibility to look after creation, to bring order to God’s world, to establish relationships and to build communities that reflect the glory of the triune God. When God redeems people in this life on earth, we are purposed to be a sign and foretaste of what He wants to do for the whole cosmos. Those whom God redeemed are forgiven so that they can lead a new life, partnering with God to fulfill His purposes now and in the future. “Conversion” or “having a personal relationship with God through Jesus by faith” or “forgiveness of sin” is what happened – as the starting point of everlasting life now – because the rest of the eternal journey is about imaging God, proclaiming and embodying God’s rule and reign moment-by-moment on earth as it is in heaven. As God-in-Jesus invaded history and brought the dawning of God’s kingly reign in the new heaven and new earth, to take care of this world requires that “people themselves be rescued from the powers that enslaved the world in order that they can be rescuers” (cf.

N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 204). Eternal life is not when we go to heaven after we died; it is a new life in Christ, starting at receiving God’s embrace to begin afresh our re-imagining the glory of the Creator.

N. T. Wright says, “[Being a Christian] is a matter of glimpsing that in God’s new creation, of which Jesus’ resurrection is the start, all that was good in the original creation is reaffirmed. All that has corrupted and defaced it ... will be done away ... learning to live as a renewed human being, anticipating the eventual new creation in and with a world which is still longing and groaning for that final redemption” (*Simply Christian*, p.223).

Let’s revisit the Domains of God’s Reign:



No matter where we are and what is our station in life or profession, we are created and called to co-reign with God. So we are commissioned each and every day to ...

**Discover, develop, and discipline our “regal” calling.**



We are part of God’s grand story of creation and a new creation; we have a place in God’s plan and a role to fulfill the great commission - to make disciples of all nations by living God’s tomorrow today, under the authority of the King who had started and will bring to completion the final stage of restoring the Father’s creation in His time.

Conclusion: Christianity is not offering a new moral teaching; Jesus is not just a moral example for us to imitate; God is not offering another route to “go to heaven” or another magic potion for “reincarnation” and evolving into a higher being”; the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal “force”

to possess for personal benefits. [Cf. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian*]

In the words of Miroslav Wolf, the Christian faith is ...

“... a faith that seeks to mend the world ... active in all spheres of life: education, and arts, business and politics, communication and entertainment, and more ... to care for others ... and to work toward their flourishings, so that life would go well for all and so that all would learn how to learn their lives well ...” (*A Public Faith*, pp. xv-xvi).

Two takeaways:

1. Learn about the Kingdom of God: *Kingdom Come* by Allen Mitsuo Wakabayashi; *One Life* by Scot McKnight.
2. Plan to participate in “Living Your Strength Workshop” when it’s offered.