



THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

(Week 5) - The Supernatural Now of the Church and the Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

Why don't miracles happen today as often as they did in the Bible?

- **The Supernatural Now**

Miracles are supernatural by definition, but Timothy Keller writes, "We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the

natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order.” In other words, miracles are previews of the kingdom of God, because they restore things to the way they were meant to be before sin and death entered the picture. Miracles are previews of what will one day be the norm. But they are only one preview of the kingdom of God.

There are other supernatural occurrences that, I will argue, happen daily. It is what I call “the supernatural now.” Preaching by definition is a supernatural now, meaning that as I explain God’s Word, the Holy Spirit is working in your hearts and minds via the Scriptures. It is an overlapping of the Kingdom of heaven with the kingdom of earth.

When someone comes to believe in Christ as Lord, isn’t that a supernatural occurrence? Isn’t being born again by God’s Spirit supernatural? It is an overlapping of the Kingdom of heaven with the kingdom of earth.

When you display the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control) in your daily life, isn’t that a

supernatural occurrence? It is an overlapping of the Kingdom of heaven with the kingdom of earth. It’s a restoration of the way things were meant to be.

We often don’t see it that way because it’s the supernatural now. It’s the work of the Spirit through the ordinary means of the word, the fellowship and the prayers in our daily lives. The supernatural now is just not flashy enough for us sometimes.

But this idea of the supernatural now is the reality of the kingdom of God in our midst, the world in which we live.

For the church to function effectively and act wisely, she must understand the world in which she lives.

The ideal and the real of being the church is seen most clearly in the doctrine of the church and the kingdom of God.

When Jesus ascended into heaven He burned a hole in the heavens that left an opening in our world where the heaven and earth overlap.

What is the difference between the church and the kingdom of God? Are they separate entities? How are they alike? How are they different? To help us examine this topic, we're going to turn to the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 13:24-33

24 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,

Now, in verses 37-39 of this parable, Jesus gives us the key to understanding this parable. This is a great example of one of the principles of biblical interpretation and that is Scripture interprets Scripture.

37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world,

So, the man is Jesus and the good field is the world. So, now the question is, "What are the seeds He is sowing in the world?"

and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.

Christians are the good seed that is sown into the world. The weeds are those who are in

opposition to God, but we mustn't think of this opposition as always overt and in our face. It is more often the strategy of infiltration, meaning there are spies among us. It is the one who befriends and ingratiates himself with the intent of doing harm. That's the idea, but it becomes even more sinister, because the one being used to infiltrate the church as a weed and choke the work of the church doesn't know he's being used as a pawn by the enemy.

There is a blindness. What is really disheartening sometimes is that the greatest opposition to the work of the church comes from within the church itself.

How does this happen in the church?

25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

And the church just can't fight because it's asleep in the Light. We're sleepy about the Word. We're sleepy about doctrine. We're sleepy about our relationship with the Lord.

26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them,

‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29 But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Jesus explains to them later that “the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.”

In this parable we see two different ages. Let’s take a look at the different ages according to the Bible.

Matthew 12:32

32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Ephesians 1:21

21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

The point we want to emphasize from these passages is that there is “this age” — the age in which we live — but there is also “the age to come” — a completely distinct age which has not yet arrived. However, the church lives in this present age. And as we will see, this

present age is different from the kingdom of God. That’s the first thing we notice is that the age the church lives in and the kingdom of God are separate.

Matthew 13:39-40

39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

This age — the age we live in — will come to an end.

So, we can see this simple progression from these verses. There is “this age.” There will be an “end of the age.” This will usher in “the age to come.”

Now, let’s look at some seven characteristics of how this age and the age to come overlap.

Galatians 1:4

4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

1. **This present age is marked by evil.**

Why does he refer to it as “this present evil age?” Because it is a time when humanity has strayed from God’s rule and reign. When we don’t love each other and our neighbors as we should, evil ensues. Jesus identifies Himself as Lord not only by His miracles but by the authority with which He speaks. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46) Just refusing to acknowledge God as the One who tells us to love our neighbors is evil and a sign that we do not love God. People do not love each other because they do not love God. This equals a present evil age. Theologian John Frame reminds us, “If God sets the standards, we may not argue with him. For us to debate with God is as ridiculous as for clay to debate with its potter.” (Is. 45:9-11)

1 Corinthians 1:20

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

2. This present age is marked by foolishness that parades as wisdom.

This foolishness has so infiltrated the church that you lose people when you criticize it, but

here it goes. One example: the therapeutic culture. The therapeutic marks the language of the church because it marks the language of the culture. We have brought it into the church, not because it is wise, but because we are influenced by the age that we live in — the age where the therapist has become the high priest of culture.

There are ministries that are marked by this therapeutic language and the church just eats it up, not seeing it as weeds sown into the field that Jesus has planted.

“Philip Rieff (1922–2006) stands as one of the 20th century’s keenest intellectuals and cultural commentators. During his academic career he focused on the work of Sigmund Freud. According to Rieff, Freud’s exploration of neurosis (mental illness like depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsion) was really an exploration of authority, as Western man was coming to the conclusion that the idea of divine authority is an illusion. The idea was ‘God doesn’t exist; therefore, he isn’t a legitimate authority.’ Freud realized that as belief in God faded, psychological neuroses multiplied. Instead of correcting this by pointing persons back to God, however, Freud sought to heal by teaching his patients

to accept this loss of authority as a positive development.

“Thus the therapeutic culture was born. In place of theology, Freud and his adherents (supporters) left us with the therapeutic culture. Rieff warned that the tradeoff would not be a fruitful one.”

In other words, Rieff examined the beliefs of society and warned, “This is where you’re headed.”

1 Corinthians 3:18

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

This warning to not deceive ourselves is for Christians. The evangelical church does so many foolish things that David Wells in his book *The Courage to be Protestant* remarked about how he felt sorry for anyone trying to satirize evangelicalism because it’s already doing so many things that are satirical in nature but it doesn’t realize it. Like the pastor who had a motocross ramp built in the sanctuary and had two motocross bikes doing jumps over his head to illustrate how

the Holy Spirit propels us from one hill in life to the next. The reasoning is that the church somehow needs whistles and bells because the gospel isn’t compelling enough. (That is the theme of the screenplay that I’ve written. Just so you know, that’s what it’s about.)

1 Timothy 6:17

17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

3. In this present age is marked by false hope.

We often set our hopes on things that ultimately don’t bring hope. We set our hopes on false hopes.

- *The Man on the Moon*

So, how should we live in this present evil age? Here’s where the kingdom of God and this present evil age start to intersect.

Matthew 5:13-14

13 “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

The church is a taste of the kingdom of God. The church is a light which flows from the kingdom of God and shines into this present evil age.

When Jesus left this earth He burned a hole in heaven that shoots into the earth through the Holy Spirit. That’s how heaven (the Kingdom of God - the not yet) breaks into our world (the earth) and sprinkles salt and light (that’s the Holy Spirit in us).

Titus 2:12

12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

4. The gospel brings restoration, meaning it restores things to how they were meant to be.

The gospel retrains our minds in how we see the world, in what we live for and in who we live for.

We abandon ungodliness, meaning we abandon any perspective that doesn’t have its center in the God of the Bible, in any authority that doesn’t have God at its core.

We abandon worldly passions, meaning we don’t allow our lives to be controlled by our passions. It’s not that we’re not passionate about life (remember we’re told by God to enjoy everything He has richly provided), but Christians should not be controlled by their passions or their emotional state. That’s what it means to be self-controlled, which is a fruit of the Spirit.

And the rejoicing we experience now in this present evil age is a preview of what is to come. Now, here is where this present evil age and the kingdom of God intersect, as it where.

Mark 10:30

30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions,

So, we receive this abundance of blessing and trouble all at the same time in this life.

and in the age to come eternal life.

5. **In the age to come we will experience full restoration. (That's the not yet part of the overlap.)**

We have the full expectation of eternal life in the age to come. The age to come will provide us everything we've ever hoped for, which is wonderful news. But what about the now?

1 Corinthians 10:11

11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Hebrews 1:2

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The present age we live in is the end of the age... we are in the last days now. The end times isn't in the future. The end times is now. That can sound scary, but it's not reason for the Christian to fret.

Hebrews 9:26

26 But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

6. **Jesus is the hope of this present evil age.**

Philippians 2:9-11

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is why Christianity is both intriguing and frighteningly threatening. Jesus Christ is the authority to look to — first to find peace for your soul in restoring your relationship with God and then in how the salvation He has provided works itself out in our daily lives. It's the idea of the ordinary supernatural now. Luke explains it this way:

Luke 17:21

21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

So, we live in this present evil age, but the kingdom of God is in our midst. The kingdom of God is the supernatural now.

Matthew 12:28

28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Matthew 4:23

23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Even though the age to come has not arrived, yet it is in our midst, meaning we get this glimpse of the age to come, of the kingdom that is coming, the new heaven and the new earth — as Christ is resident in the body of the church, we see the kingdom of God in our midst. It is here, but not fully here. It is now, but not yet. So, the kingdom and the church are separate entities, but the kingdom is previewed through the church through the supernatural now.

7. **The kingdom of God is the supernatural now in this present evil age.**

That's what the rest of this parable is referring to, the supernatural now, meaning the fruit of the Spirit exhibited in the body of the church whereby people can find refuge and hope

and encouragement and a real relationship with the living God.

31 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

This supernatural now works itself out into a community little by little.

33 He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

So, do you see yourself as salt and light in your corner of the world?

Maybe you've bought into the lie that if you become a Christian that God will ruin all your fun. The lie is that you can find fulfillment somewhere other than Jesus.

**What has God said to you today?
What are you going to do about it?**