

THESE LAST DAYS

THE KINGDOM ECONOMY 1



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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A REVISION STUDY

These Last Days
The Kingdom Economy 1
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Welcome to *These Last Days*

Welcome to *These Last Days*, an introduction and overview of God's plan and agenda for history before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. *These Last Days* is part 1 of a 10-part series on *The Kingdom Economy*. The purpose of this series is to outline the dramatic difference living in Christ's Kingdom can make in our lives, societies, and cultures, and to provide practical guidance for making Christ's agenda our own.

These Last Days provides an overview of God's intentions in bringing His Kingdom to earth. With the coming of the Kingdom, a new *administration* or *economy* began unfolding on earth. As the followers of Christ have made the Kingdom turn into this new dimension of living through faith in Jesus Christ, they have, in many ways, turned their world rightside-up for God and His glory.

All who have made the Kingdom turn – all who follow Jesus in this new realm of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit – must acquaint themselves with His agenda for these last days. They may expect to know the fullness of life as He intends it to the extent that they embrace that agenda and pursue it day by day in every area of life.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to subscribe to our free instructional newsletters, including *ReVision*, *Scriptorium*, and *The Week* – all dailies – and *Crosfigell*, featuring insights from Scripture and our Celtic Christian forebears (three times per week).

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Fullness of the Times

...having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. Ephesians 1.9, 10

A new era

The Apostle Paul refers to the times in which we live as *the fullness of the times* (cf. Gal. 4.4), as if something new had burst forth into human history, overflowing and breaking through whatever held it dammed in place, and was now filling the world.

What Paul referred to as *the fullness of the times*, the prophets Isaiah and Joel described as *the last days* (cf. Is. 2.8, Mic. 4.1 – the NKJV has “the latter days”). The fullness of times, the last days to which the prophets looked forward, began on the first Christian Pentecost, as Peter explained in Acts 2.14-17. On that day, when the Holy Spirit of God was poured out upon His people, a new era began. A new epoch and dimension of human history – the ongoing work of Christ, enthroned in glory – was inaugurated, and began to bring its fullness to human lives and all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

We would be accurate in saying that a new *economy* began to be implemented, according to an agenda from beyond this world, and with a view to bringing the power of love to bear on all aspects of life in the world in these last days.

It is the economy!

We remember that candidate Bill Clinton built his successful campaign for the presidency around the mantra, “It’s the economy, stupid!” As it turns out, he was correct: the economy *is* the central and most important concern.

Only, not the particular economy you might think.

The economy that matters above all else is not the free, commercial economy of our American republic, but the eternal economy which God has proclaimed and is establishing under [the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ](#).

Our text mentions this idea of a divine economy under the rubric of a “dispensation” or an “administration” (NASB) or even a “plan” (ESV). God, Paul insists, has a *plan* for *administering* the world that embraces and affects everything that takes place in these last days. It’s not that God has not always been Lord of all; rather, in these last days, He has made known His agenda for grace, truth, salvation, and life in Jesus Christ, and He is calling all people everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel (Acts 17.30).

The word Paul uses here is, in the Greek, *oikonomia* – economy. It means an *order*, an *administration*, a *way of “keeping house”* that flows from a pool of divine priorities through communities of Kingdom citizens and ambassadors unto a new order on earth, one that reflects the way things are in heaven. It is a flow of spiritual power, the power of God’s Spirit, and it issues on earth from within the community of His people, all those who have made the Kingdom turn (Jn. 7.37-39). There is a divine economy, a *Kingdom* economy, and God is setting it up in our midst, right now, today, and every day of our lives.

We are part of that great plan, and thus it behooves us to understand as much as we can about it, so that we can make our way in these last days according to God’s purposes and designs.

Four things

Let's notice four things about the divine economy as Paul introduces in it our text.

First, it is a program established for *now*. In his Pentecost sermon Peter announced that, with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the pouring out of God's Spirit, the "last days" had begun (Acts 2.14-17), the new economy has been put into effect. Paul says Jesus came in "the fullness of the times" to inaugurate His great work of redemption in these last days (Gal. 4.4). The "fullness of the times" in which the divine economy is unfolding, is now. We are living in the last days, the fullness of the times, when the Lord of heaven and earth is establishing and expanding His divine economy.

The Kingdom economy of Christ is being established *in* time, *through* time, and *with* time. And this suggests that we need to make sure we *understand* the gift of time and how the Lord intends us to use it in furthering the flow of His economy.

Second, that divine economy *embraces all things*. Everything in heaven and on earth is subject to God's unfolding plan. Our interest and part in this Kingdom economy, therefore, reaches to every area of our lives, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

God's purpose in doing so, third, is to *gather together earthly things with heavenly things* so as to effect peace and harmony between the two realms. God's Kingdom is coming on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6.10). He is making things right on earth – all things: human lives and relationships, work, culture, institutions, the affairs of nations, indeed, the whole vast cosmos and creation. God is making things right with Himself, according to His original plan that all His creation should be "good" and "very good." Nothing is off limits or insignificant as God sets up His Kingdom economy.

Finally, all this is being accomplished *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. Only those who know Jesus and have made the Kingdom turn into His grace and power can take up the work of laboring with God to advance His divine order on earth as it is in heaven.

What a glorious privilege and opportunity! What a high calling! It *is* the economy – the *divine* economy – that matters most. Let us not stupidly miss this – and our exciting place in it – by being distracted to lesser things.

For reflection or discussion

1. How many different ways can you identify that people organize their lives around the fact of our free-market economy? That is, how is it apparent that people are *focused* on this as their primary frame of reference in life?
2. An "economy" is simply a plan or a way of administering a "household." What do you understand by "the Kingdom economy" at this point?
3. Do you think it would make a difference if people organized their schedules and lives more self-consciously around the Kingdom economy? In what ways?

Next steps – Preparation: How much of your own life is consciously being ordered, arranged, and pursued under the umbrella of the Kingdom economy at this time? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

Prayer:

2 A Rightside-up World

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. James 1.17

God's household

In these last days, God has begun to establish His economy on earth – His “household,” His way of doing things, His administration for gathering together and reconciling all things on earth and in heaven.

His Kingdom has come, and is coming – on earth, as it is in heaven. We are living in the last days, in the fullness of the times.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, God is pursuing a *plan* to restore all things to Himself, so that His original very good (Gen. 1.31) purposes might be realized, increasingly *in time* and finally, fully, and completely when time as we know it is no more. This plan involves His Kingdom, which unfolds and advances in and through all those who have come to know Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The followers of Jesus Christ have been called to a stewardship – an *economy* – by means of which we are to affect everything and everyone with the power of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Rom. 14.17-19).

But what does that mean? How should we as Christians expect our lives to impact the world around us for the Kingdom economy?

A new order

As God works in and through each believer, a new order of the ages flows to life, beginning with each individual, and demonstrates the cleansing power of the Gospel to make all things new, and vivifying power of the Word and Spirit of God to turn the world rightside-up (Heb. 4.12; Acts 17.1-9).

While the Kingdom economy is too vast in scope, and too glorious and beautiful to describe in a short space, we can mention at least *three aspects* of that economy which we may expect increasingly to realize, as we focus on and pursue them, making the most of the time of our lives in these last days.

First, the divine economy comes to expression *from the unseen world to the world of things we can see*. It flows to earth and through all its cultures, societies, and institutions as a good and perfect gift from God, embodied in His Spirit, according to His Word, through those who have made the Kingdom turn. In order to understand, therefore, what the shape of the divine economy should look like in any situation, Christians need to be well-versed in [the landscape of unseen things](#), as that is revealed to us in the Scriptures.

Yeah, right away we got problems. Because for too many Christians, the world of unseen things, which is so crucial to full faith in Christ (Heb. 11.1), is largely *terra incognita*.

The unseen world exists all around us. It is the dwelling-place of Christ, Who is seated at the right hand of God. He is served by myriads of angels, celebrated by unnumbered departed saints, and, with the Father, dispatches His Spirit to make us willing and able to do the work required for advancing the Kingdom economy.

The unseen realm abounds in patterns of beauty, embodiments of truth, and exemplars of goodness from which we may draw in the time of our lives, as we work to bring the economy of heaven to expression on

earth. If we're ever going to make progress in the Kingdom economy, we need to become better acquainted with that realm from which it derives and flows.

Second, the norms and standards of the Kingdom economy *are unchanging and unalterable*. [God's declared intentions – His Law and promises – remain the same for all times](#), and provide the motivation, vision, and protocols for all who take up the work of the divine economy. Certainly applications of God's standards will be adjusted from time to time and place to place, but the standards do not change and must not be neglected or altered to suit our temporal convenience.

The Kingdom economy brings an administration of love and justice to earth for these last days, but not through the politics of human governments or markets. Love and justice abound on earth as the Church of Jesus Christ learns, teaches, and obeys His Law unto love for God and neighbors.

Third, the divine economy is *unfailing and unyielding*. It is moving forward, flowing and developing and advancing, expanding to take more and more of the world into its purview and power, and nothing can withstand its progress or divert its course (cf. Dan. 2.44, 45; Is. 9.6, 7).

Either we are flowing and advancing with the Kingdom, or that divine economy is leaving us behind.

His Kingdom is forever!

God does not change, His purposes do not change, and His determination to expand His economy into all the world will not be set aside by the schemes of unbelieving men or the neglect of faithless saints.

Make no mistake about it: It's the Kingdom economy that matters above all else. They are stupid indeed who ignore the reality of this new order, fail to take up their place in it, or foolishly consider that, somehow, they might be able to ignore, resist, or withstand it.

For reflection or discussion

1. What are some ways our world today seems to be “upside-down”? Why is this so?
2. Meditate on Acts 17.1-9. What was it about those first Christians that caused their neighbors to see them this way?
3. Faith, the writer of Hebrews tells us, is the *evidence* that we live in and hope for the unseen world (Heb. 11.1). What “unseen” world? What “evidence”? What do we mean by saying that the divine economy has its provenance in this unseen realm?

Next steps – Preparation: How familiar are you with that unseen realm from which the divine economy flows? Talk with a church leader about how you might become more “at home” in the unseen things of Christ. After all, full and flourishing faith depends on this (Heb. 11.1).

Prayer:

3 The End of the Kingdom

For the earth will be filled

With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,

As the waters cover the sea. Habakkuk 2.14

The glory of God

The glory of God in every aspect of life is the end toward which the Kingdom economy is unfolding in these last days. All believers are called to embrace this agenda and way of life (1 Thess. 2.12).

To be sure, that end will not be fully realized until God Himself brings it in with the advent of the new heavens and new earth. Only then will the earth and all creation be overflowed and filled with the life-giving Spirit of Christ, and the Sun of Righteousness will be risen with full healing in His wings for everything He has made. Believers long for this day, and, in many respects, the anticipation of this day affects their choices and actions here and now (2 Pet. 3.10-14).

In the meantime, however, Christians, to whom the stewardship of the Kingdom economy has been entrusted, must meet with God in His glory, there to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, so that they might do all things in such a way as to bring glory to God (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

There is not a facet of our lives, not a nook or cranny of the cosmos where God does not intend that His glory should shine forth and be known. Indeed, even now He is showing His glory in created things, and even in much of the culture that human beings make to meet their own needs (Ps. 19.1-4; Ps. 68.18). God is manifesting His glory; the task of those entrusted with the Kingdom economy is to serve as docents of the glory of God, bringing His glory to light and making it known for all to see in these last days.

Making God's glory known

But what does that entail?

The glory of God is the manifestation of God's presence, glimpsed through created things, as they yield to, refract, and magnify His beauty, goodness, and truth through their own unique features and functions. All creation proclaims the glory of God. Every human being has an innate sense of beauty, goodness, and truth. That's not to say that human beings agree on these matters, just that they all have a *sense* of them. The ultimate standard of true beauty, true goodness, and true truth is God Himself, especially as revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 1.1-3). He is *all* beauty, goodness, and truth, and He is able to make His character and presence known through the creation and culture with which we are surrounded all day long.

Our task, as those called to the Kingdom and glory of God, and charged with the administration of the His economy, is to draw out, exemplify, point out, heighten, and pursue the glory of God in every aspect of life.

Beginning with us

Think of this charge in terms of the relationships, roles, and responsibilities that fill our daily lives. Our mission in these last days is to glorify God by living out the reality of His indwelling presence (cf. Mic. 4.1-8). In all our relationships, cultural activities, conversations, families, vocations, and diversions – what will it look like, and how will it appear to others when the glorious presence of God is being refracted through us?

Certainly there will be manifestations of beauty – things that demonstrate right proportion, wholesome and pleasing patterns, edifying tendencies and proclivities, and things which bring pleasure and delight to others.

We would also expect to find evidence of remarkable goodness, like the Lord Jesus Christ is good – looking out for others, serving their needs, accomplishing works and projects that bring healing, health, happiness, and wholesomeness to others.

Moreover, we will strive to make sure that all our efforts are bathed with truth, grounded in the Word of God and reflective of the character of Jesus Christ Himself. Nothing of deceit, nothing misleading or equivocal, nothing to confuse or subvert should be part of our way of life. We are bringers of the light of a new day, and the fruit of that light is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph. 5.9).

What is true for us as individual citizens in the Kingdom will be true for our Kingdom communities as well. Local churches are signs and outposts of the Kingdom of God; we are Kingdom wells and springs in the midst of the barren communities of the world. It is to be expected, therefore, that Kingdom beauty, goodness, and truth will attach to all that we are becoming, everything we do, and will flow out to everything and everyone in our path.

All this is subsumed in the idea of love, which is the currency of the Kingdom in the divine economy, and comes to expression in the form of justice, which above all, citizens of the Kingdom are charged with pursuing (Deut. 16.20).

We need to understand the glory of God, and to be faithful in meeting with God in His glory, until the glory that shines from His face begins to affect and transform us, flowing through us into every aspect of our lives (2 Cor. 4.6; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

For until we *know* the glory of God – His beauty, goodness, and truth impacting us soul and body, day by day – we will not be able to *show* that glory to the watching world. This is our charge in these last days, and, while – as Solomon insisted (Eccl. 1.13) – this is a difficult task, it is one which, as we give ourselves diligently to it, we may certainly expect to realize.

For reflection or discussion

1. What do you understand by the “glory of God”? What does it mean to “glorify” God in your life?
2. How do beauty, goodness, and truth relate to the glory of God? Do individual believers have a responsibility for bringing beauty, goodness, and truth in to the world? What about local churches?
3. How often do you think and plan for bringing beauty, goodness, and truth into your world? Is this something you ought to do a bit more consistently? Why or why not?

Next steps – Demonstration: How much of beauty, goodness, and truth can you identify in your life at this time? Talk with a Christian friend about this question. See if together you can come up with some areas where you might increase in showing the glory of God to those around you.

Prayer:

4 The Kingdom Mission

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28.19

Priorities and practices

Any economy of any kind has priorities and practices which sustain and advance it. Those priorities and practices, taken together, describe the *mission* or purpose of that economy.

In the Kingdom economy, where the overarching objective in these last days is to bring God’s beauty, goodness, and truth to light within human culture and society, *all* our activities must be directed to this end. It will make our task more fruitful if we attack our responsibilities and duties in the divine economy according to some graspable categories.

There’s just so much to do, and so many ways that we might glorify God!

Every believer’s calling

Three primary categories of activities define our lives and callings within the divine economy in these last days.

First and pre-eminent among these is that which Jesus described in our text: *Make disciples*. All believers, as those taught by the Lord, are called to this Great Commission of making disciples. This duty and calling should define everything we do, in any area of our lives, whether we are engaged with other Christians or are interacting with our unbelieving neighbors and associates.

Every *believer*, who is by definition a disciple, needs to be encouraged and strengthened in that calling. And every *nonbeliever*, at the very least, deserves our every effort to show them the life of discipleship and to explain the way into it. Every follower of Christ engages with believers and nonbelievers; thus we must learn what making disciples requires of us with all the people to whom God sends us each day.

In our calling to make disciples, we are never off duty, and we never lack for opportunities to contribute something to someone. As we do, this contributes to the flow and advance of the divine economy. Each of us has been sent to a Personal Mission Field, in which Jesus intends to fill all things with Himself through our faithful and obedient lives (Eph. 1.15-23; 4.8).

Two questions

But we don’t want to take anything for granted in this calling. Since *making* disciples is what we must be about as our first priority in stewarding the Kingdom economy, we need to ask two important questions.

First, what is a disciple? And second, what’s involved in “making” disciples? Unless we understand these aspects of this, our Kingdom mission in these last days, we will have a difficult time fulfilling our stewardship.

A disciple, in the simplest of terms, is one who has made the Kingdom turn, who follows Jesus and learns from Him. Every disciple of Jesus is called to deny himself, take up his own unique calling to serve, and be busy about the task of ministering the grace and truth of God to others.

As followers of Christ we must first learn from Him (Matt. 11.28-30). We learn from Jesus by listening to Him in His Word, communing with Him in prayer, and gathering with other disciples to study and discuss His calling on our lives.

In addition to learning about Jesus, every disciple must begin to live as He did (Eph. 4.17-24), to show the love of God to one and all, go out of our way to serve others, and pursue holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12,14; 2 Cor. 7.1).

Every disciple of Jesus will also be involved in encouraging others to consider Him. With our fellow Christians we will worship, pray, study, share, and take up works of service. With our unbelieving friends we will show the love of Jesus and share the stories of what Jesus has done for us, explaining the teaching of Scripture concerning His saving and redeeming work on our behalf.

A disciple of Jesus – a *follower* of the Lord – will thus evidence an abiding passion for His concerns, a determination to live after the pattern of His life, and a desire to serve others with His grace and truth.

Discipleship is a full-time calling. If we think that being a Christian means only that we have confessed our sins and are going to heaven when we die, then we grossly misunderstand the Lord's calling for all who would follow Him. As we labor together at *being* disciples of Jesus Christ, we will find it the great joy and the noblest calling of our lives to work at *helping others* follow Him as well. Making disciples involves being together in the Lord, sharing what we're learning, encouraging and edifying one another, bearing one another's burdens, and making the most of every opportunity to demonstrate and teach what it means to follow Jesus.

In the Kingdom economy of these last days, we will get nowhere fast unless we embrace being and making disciples as the defining mission of our lives.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you explain to a non-believing friend or colleague what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?
2. What is involved in the work of "making disciples"? Whose job is this, anyway?
3. "Discipleship is a full-time calling." Do you agree? Why or why not?

Next steps – Demonstration: How would you describe the state of your own discipleship at this time? How about your work of disciple-making? Talk with a church leader about these questions.

Prayer:

5 The Lord's Agenda, and Ours

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16.18

The context for discipleship

The Church is the primary sign and outpost of the Kingdom economy, the conduit through which the Kingdom flows over the earth, and the context in which the work of making disciples goes forward. This makes the Church very important, and *building* the Church at the very top of the Lord's agenda for these last days.

Indeed, *central* to the divine economy is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in building His Church. For this work He has poured out His Holy Spirit, given His people His Law and all His Word, raised up pastors and teachers, and established an order and priorities for carrying out His will.

But this is not a work which we may take on in whatever manner seems appropriate to us. The Lord has declared that *He* will build His Church, and He entrusted the Apostle Paul with the blueprint for pursuing this great work.

The blueprint

In Ephesians 4.11-16 Paul, picking up on the Lord's idea of “building” the Church (cf. v. 12), shows us both what the *outcome* of that project is to be and the *process* we must follow in order to accomplish it. Paul says a church is being built-up when it is growing in unity and maturity, so that, increasingly, as a body, the local church constitutes the present incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's understanding of a healthy, growing church thus has very little to do with facilities, numbers of staff or attendees, size of budget, variety of programs, or degree of contemporaneity. For Paul, a local church is being built up when it evidences unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity in discerning, speaking, and living the truth of God in love. A local church is healthy when the Kingdom economy of God flows through into the surrounding community.

If this is not the focus of *our* efforts in building our own churches, then we're working for something other than what the Apostle Paul explained as the outcome our Lord is seeking. We will not be able to achieve this outcome until we submit every aspect of the life of the church to the Word of God, beginning with His Law.

Getting healthy, growing churches

Further, Paul told us how to achieve the outcome of healthy, growing churches. He outlined the *process* for making disciples – real disciples, people who are equipped, soul and body, to serve others with the grace and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who are, in fact, doing so: pastors and teachers equip the followers of Christ to live for and serve Him in their own Personal Mission Fields. This is the work of shepherding God's flock, as Jesus and the apostles explained (cf. Jn. 10; Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.1-3).

We do not build the church by running programs, raising money, or bending over backward to accommodate the cultural preferences and conveniences of our contemporary generation. We must build the church the way Jesus did, investing in people for extended periods of time, making disciples, equipping them for ministry, and then sending them out to live as witnesses for Christ and His Kingdom.

Does this sound like what's happening in your church?

One of the indicators of a healthy, growing church, according to Paul, is that every member of the Body has become equipped and is serving others with the gifts God's Spirit supplies (Eph. 4.11-16; 1 Cor. 12.7-11). Churches are not healthy when 20% of the people do 80% of the work, while 80% of the people wait around to be served. This is not a *healthy* church but a church in need of the *reviving power* of God's Spirit. For every member to be thus equipped and serving, every member must submit to the process of becoming a disciple, a true follower of the Lord. And pastors and teachers must make it their business to make disciples until we *all* contribute to the building-up of Christ's Body, according to His agenda.

The work of making disciples and building the local church are thus intimately connected. If we are faithful in making disciples, we should realize increasingly healthy churches, which serve in their communities as signs and outposts of the Kingdom and the divine economy, and through which the goodness, righteousness, and truth of God flow to every nook and cranny of their community, and the church becomes a thing of joy and beauty to its neighbors (Ps. 48.1).

As we persevere in this effort during these last days, God will build our congregations into true spiritual communities vibrant with worship, mutual edification, compassionate sharing, and fervent outreach to the larger community. That such churches are so few and far between in our day is a measure of just how much work we have to do in pursuing this aspect of the divine economy.

For reflection or discussion

1. What does "build My church" look like in your church? How does the work of Christ's agenda go forward within your congregation at this time?
2. Healthy churches demonstrate unity and maturity in the Lord. Look at Ephesians 4.13-16. How would you explain each of the terms Paul presents here?
3. Healthy churches become healthy according to the pattern outlined in Ephesians 4.11, 12. To what extent does this pattern represent what happens in your church?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a church leader or pastor about how your church assesses its health. How do your church leaders determine whether or not yours is a healthy, growing church?

Prayer:

6 Our First Priority

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever. Isaiah 9.6, 7*

The Rule of King Jesus

The Word of God came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ in order to accomplish the redemptive plan of God and inaugurate the Kingdom and the divine economy that Kingdom brings to light.

He did this, as He frequently testified, by bringing the Kingdom of God into the affairs of human history and calling all those who would follow Him to seek that Kingdom as their first priority. Making disciples and building the Church creates a setting and context, a font and wellspring, a sign and outpost in communities all over the world, for seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God. Seeking the Kingdom of God must be the defining priority for all our earthly activities, for only thus can we expect to see the knowledge of the glory of the Lord coming to light in these last days (Matt. 6.33).

The Kingdom of God is the rule of King Jesus, in the power of His Spirit, by which He is reconciling the world and all things in it back to His Father and ours, making all things new, replacing the darkness of sin and fear with righteousness and peace and joy in the Spirit, and bringing the knowledge of the glory of God to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (1 Jn. 2.8; Rom. 14.17, 18).

Kingdom and glory

The *realization* or *attainment* of the Kingdom of God is the *objective* of the divine economy, toward which the work of making disciples and building the church are directed. God is glorified as His Kingdom advances. As His Kingdom advances, it affects all areas of life, everything which in these last days is in the thrall and power of an economy *other* than that which God intends. For as the Kingdom of God grows, by the Word and Spirit of God, in and through the Church, every sector of society, all of culture, and every human being are brought into contact with a reality infused with transforming power not of this world.

Over the past 2,000 years of Christian history, the Church has been the healthiest and has contributed the most good to the world when this vision of the Kingdom of God has been the motive force in all her endeavors.

In our day, when we have turned the faith of Jesus Christ into a shrunken and personal thing (David Wells), this vision of the Kingdom of God is all but nonexistent. Of course, every Christians knows about the Kingdom and believes in it, at least to an extent. But while many claim some affinity with or identity in the Kingdom of God, how many have actually made the Kingdom turn and are striving with all their strength to lay hold on that glorious domain? The *evidence* of this world-transforming power is sparse in our world today, suggesting that churches have lost their focus and are seeking something other than the Kingdom of God.

Seeking the Kingdom

But what does it mean to seek this Kingdom?

First, it means to *understand* the Kingdom and its peculiar nature. God's is a Kingdom where righteousness, peace, and joy proliferate in the Holy Spirit (Heb. 14.17, 18). In the Kingdom of God true spiritual power is at work (1 Cor. 4.20; Acts 1.8), and holy virtues spread out from the churches to touch, affect, and infuse all aspects of life and culture with the life of Christ and the glory of God (Gal. 5.16-23). Christians should have some sense of what that might look like in their own lives, churches, and communities; and pastors should preach and work toward that vision fervently, tirelessly, and with full conviction.

Second, seeking the Kingdom requires that each believer take up the challenge of *growing* in Kingdom virtues and skills as a part of our everyday walk with the Lord (2 Pet. 1.5-11). Here our calling to make and be disciples intersects with Christ's command to seek the Kingdom, and our prayer that this Kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven. The Kingdom of God is at work *within* believers and their churches, and *among* and *through* them in the larger communities in which they live.

Third, we need to [*proclaim the Kingdom*](#), as Jesus and the apostles did. We need to tell our neighbors, with great joy, that a new power has broken into human history, a new hope is held out to us, a new economy is unfolding all around us, and new promises can light our paths through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We must proclaim this message without compromise and with great joy, and we must back up our proclamation with works that bring the newness and glory of the rule of Jesus into all of life and culture.

Finally, we must *pray fervently* for the coming of the Kingdom. The progress of God's Kingdom in these last days is the work of our Lord Jesus, and He will be pleased to do this great work through us if we will turn consistently to Him in prayer.

The divine economy is unfolding and flowing and straining toward the realization of the Kingdom of God. Are we?

For reflection or discussion

1. What do you understand by "the Kingdom of God"?
2. Meditate on Daniel 2.44, 45 and Isaiah 9.6, 7. How did these two prophets regard the Kingdom of God?
3. Suggest some practical, ongoing ways for seeking the Kingdom of God. How will you know when you are making progress in the Kingdom?

Next steps – Preparation: How strong is your understanding of the Kingdom of God? Or of what it means to seek the Kingdom? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions. How can you help one another in this high and holy calling?

Prayer:

7 Planning to Succeed

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom...
Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90.12, 16, 17*

Planning in the Kingdom economy

Americans spend a good deal of time – probably more than we realize – planning to succeed in our free enterprise economy.

When you think of all the hours we spend in education and training, just to find the right niche for a lifetime of getting and spending; or how diligent we can be in planning our retirement and other aspects of a secure financial future; not to mention the plans we make at work, for improving our homes, going on vacation, and for making the best use of our resources – in view of all this, planning to succeed in the American economy is a constant, ongoing part of what every American must do.

But I wonder if we spend as much time planning for success in the divine economy? Thinking about the time God has entrusted to us in these last days, and the work He’s calling us to do within that time?

My experience tells me that we do not. Instead, what far too many Christians do is squeeze everything that relates to the *divine* economy within their plans for success in the *American* economy.

And then we wonder why our lives in Christ are no more exhilarating and power-filled than they are. This is *not* what Paul means by making the most of the time God has entrusted to us (Eph. 5.15-17).

Planning and review

If we’re going to find our way around and make progress in the Kingdom economy – so that we maximize our contribution to the work of making disciples, building the Church, and advancing the Kingdom, and, along the way, find full and abundant, powerful and glory-filled life in Christ – we must improve the way we use the time entrusted to us. It will help us in this regard if we adopt a perpetual process of planning and review related to everything in our lives. If we’re not willing to do this, or if we make our plans in anything less than a God-honoring, Kingdom-seeking way, then our Christian life will suffer, and along with that, our witness for the Lord as well.

So how do we do this? How do we make our way in the divine economy and plan for success in that glorious and everywhere-present realm?

Moving forward

First, we must humbly admit that we do not know the future, but that the Lord does (Jms. 4.14; Prov. 27.1). Therefore, we need to be careful that we’re not merely relying on what *we* want or *we* think is best for our plans and future. Let us come humbly before the Lord, seeking His wisdom, and ask Him to help us “number” our days, as our text indicates, so that we can make the best use of the time He entrusts to us in these last days.

At the same time, we must accept that, puny though they may seem to us, our lives matter to God and are significant for His eternal plan. So we must be diligent, day by day, in pleading with Him to show us the work we've been given to do. The work we've been given to do in advancing the Kingdom economy is greater than the job at which we work. We want to glorify God in *all* our work; thus, we need to be clear about what that work is, and how we may best serve the Kingdom purposes of God in it.

The more we study the different aspects of the divine economy, the more we will be able to plan our activities around those divinely-appointed priorities. We will want to make the most of every opportunity we have each day for advancing God's realm and rule on earth as it is in heaven (Eph. 5.15-17).

We all engage people throughout the course of the day. Do we have a Kingdom mission plan for reaching out to each one of them?

We all have gifts from God's Spirit which we are to use in building-up our fellow church members (1 Cor. 12.7-11). Have we begun to discover and exercise those gifts?

And we all work and live in [a variety of cultural and social arenas](#) – home, neighborhood, work, and so forth – where we can give ourselves to the pursuit of the priority of God's Kingdom – righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, unto the glory of God in all things.

So if we can make all these opportunities the constant focus of our study, prayer, and growth, we'll make *better plans* and do *better work* within the divine economy.

Making our way in the divine economy is not rocket science; it is, however, hard work, and it requires a continuous focus on the Lord's priorities and will, together with constant reliance on His presence and Spirit, if we're going to be wise in knowing where we fit and what we have to contribute to the glorious divine economy that is unfolding all around us, and that God intends to flow through us to our world in these last days.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you agree that people who are focused on the free-market economy as their defining frame of reference do a lot of planning? Can you give some examples?
2. Should we who are focused on the divine economy do a better job at planning how we will use our time? Why or why not? In what ways?
3. How might we plan more effectively to position ourselves within the unfolding, overflowing, and advancing divine economy? And if we refuse to do this?

Next steps – Preparation: What can you do to begin making better progress in the divine economy? Share your thoughts and plans with a Christian friend, and seek your friend's support in prayer.

Prayer:

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the Kingdom of God? What do we mean by a “Kingdom economy”?
2. Cite some of the ways it is evident most people today order their lives around the free and commercial economy of Western capitalism. Is this the only or even the *best* way to organize our lives? Explain.
3. How do you understand the mission of the Kingdom in relation to your own life? How do you prepare for that mission each day?
4. What do we mean by saying that local churches are signs and outposts, fonts and wellsprings of the Kingdom? What role should local churches play in bringing more of the Kingdom economy to light in their communities?
5. What are the greatest obstacles to our realizing more of the increasing presence of the Kingdom economy in our lives, churches, communities, and times?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.