A Problem with Flesh and Blood

Dear Culture Contrarians,

Few things are more confusing to Christians today than the subject of the kingdom of God (also called the kingdom of heaven in Matthew). I remember listening to a discussion by three distinguished Bible teachers, all of whom I respected (respected because they are now with the Lord). They each had a different view of what the kingdom is, when it begins, and why it even matters!

The options are multitude: there is no kingdom, we are now in the kingdom, the kingdom is already but not yet, the church is the kingdom, the kingdom is spiritual and Jesus sits on the throne of David in heaven, the kingdom is completely future, and probably some ideas I’ve missed. It is interesting to me how a subject like this reveals our hermeneutics and theological biases.

Here is one argument for a completely future kingdom: we have to be resurrected, or glorified to be in the kingdom. There is a problem with flesh and blood; it cannot inherit the kingdom. Paul’s argument to the Corinthians is that there must be a resurrection because the resurrection is required for participation in the kingdom. “Now this I am making clear, Brothers, ‘Flesh and blood are not being able to inherit the kingdom of God; nor is corruption inheriting incorruption,’” 1 Corinthians 15:50 (my translation). To “inherit” something means we obtain, acquire, receive, or possess something. We may be promised an inheritance, but we do not inherit something until we actually possess it; hence Paul motivates the Colossian believers by warning them to not lose the reward of their inheritance, Colossians 3:24. In an absolute sense (Aorist tense of the first Infinitive “inherit”), we cannot possess the kingdom of God in our current flesh and blood condition. In the second use of “inherit” Paul uses a Present Infinitive. We cannot even be in the process of possessing the kingdom right now because we still have corrupt bodies and have yet to receive incorruptible bodies. Paul uses the word “inherit” with two different tenses in the same sentence! Why would he do this? To make clear to us that it is not, in any sense, nor in any way possible, for us to participate in the kingdom of God without a resurrection or, in the case of a few believers, a glorification without dying first.

So, we pray, “Thy kingdom come….”

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My love to you all,