

A Christian Response to Millennialism

Every pastor should become conversant with millennialism. There are four major schools of thought on the so-called millennium. Lutherans are *amillennial*. There is no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on this earth over a visible, political kingdom. Rather, the thousand years (millennium) of Revelation 20 refers to the reign of Christ in His church. It is the reign of Christ's gracious kingdom by the authority of the Gospel and Sacraments. It is a spiritual, not a political reign. Christ rules now, beneath the despised forms of the means of grace, hidden from human sight, but grasped by faith, and His kingdom will last forever and ever.

The second major school of thought is *postmillennialism*.

Postmillennialism is the teaching that the church will Christianise this world, ushering in a millennium of prosperity and peace, after which Christ will return. Christ will return after the millennium, hence the designation postmillennialism.

Premillennialism is the third major school of thought.

It is the teaching that Christ will return before (pre-) the millennium and rule on this earth for a thousand years.

It will be a political kingdom with Jerusalem as the capital city from which Jesus will rule this world for a thousand years, during which peace and prosperity will abound. Christ will judge this world after His millennial reign.

Dispensationalism is a variant of premillennialism. It is the fourth major school of thought. Dispensationalism teaches that the history of the world is divided into seven dispensations. During each dispensation, God tests mankind in a certain way, and mankind fails the test. We are presently living in the sixth of seven dispensations, the dispensation of grace or the church. Dispensationalism originated a couple of hundred years ago in Scotland. The *Scofield Reference Bible* popularised it. It is the view of most Evangelicals, who regard it as the only correct "literal" interpretation of biblical prophecy. Amillennialism is rejected as a "spiritualising" of prophecy, rather than taking the Bible literally. Millions of conservative Christians are dispensationalists. Dispensationalism teaches that the prophecies concerning Israel in the Old Testament are not fulfilled in the Christian Church, but pertain to the present-day state of Israel. Political events concerning Israel are interpreted as fulfilling biblical prophecy.

Does it matter which position we hold? Yes, it does! The kingdom of God that Christ established was not intended to be a political reign. The New Testament makes it clear that the heirs of God's promise to Abraham are Christians. The church is Israel. Israel is the church. The Old Testament is a Christian book. Its promises about a land, Christ's reign, and the kingdom of God are fulfilled in the holy Christian Church. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets were all Christians looking forward to the coming of the Christ, the Saviour, who would rule over us by God's grace. Pilate ordered that Jesus be identified on the cross as the King of the Jews. There, on Calvary, is where Jesus established His kingdom on earth, as He crushed the head of Satan, bound him, and claimed authority to reign over His kingdom. After He rose, He gave the keys of the kingdom He had promised to His church. Whenever sinners are set free from their sins by Christ's absolution, Christ reigns and Satan is bound. As we read through the psalms and the prophets, we see this kingdom described. Jesus reigns!

He reigns, despite evidence to the contrary. When secularists impose their woke ideology on Christians and tear down the country we love, Christ reigns on His throne. God laughs at political tyrants of every description. His Son is set on His holy hill, on Mt. Zion. We don't need, neither do we want, a political fulfilment of God's promises. We have something far better. We are ruled by God's grace right now. The church is not a "parenthesis" between this dispensation and that dispensation. The church is eternal. The church militant, to which we Christians belong, while experiencing many crosses, will become the church triumphant. What we have now by faith will become ours by sight when Christ returns to judge and bring His bride home.

As we battle through the culture wars, we are fighting for a worthy cause. If we love our country, we will surely want her to embrace what is good, decent, just, and equitable. But this culture war is not the battle of Christ's kingdom. That battle was won on the cross, and that victory is ours when, through faith, we receive the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and freedom from sin and death that Christ's gospel gives. It is in proclaiming and confessing the Gospel that Christ was delivered over because of our sins and raised again because of our justification that we participate in Christ's millennial reign over this earth. The church, not the state of Israel, is the kingdom of God on earth. As the elders sing: "*Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth*" (Revelation 5:9-10).

It does not look like we are reigning, but Jesus told Pilate His kingdom was not of this world. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29). The kingdom is here and now, and it is ours. God forbid that we should seek an earthly, political fulfilment of the promises He has given us throughout the Holy Scriptures! We find the fulfilment of God's promises in Christ, our crucified and risen Saviour. We wait for the day when everything we now have by faith, we shall experience with all our senses in risen and glorified bodies. Meanwhile, we live by faith. The just shall live by faith.