

7.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AMONG YOU

In the last chapter we examined one of God's primary purposes for creating man and putting him on the earth. This purpose was to establish His Kingdom here by recapturing this planet from the domination of the devil and reestablishing it under His rightful authority. We have also seen that God created man in His image and after His likeness and placed him on the earth to be His agent through which He would accomplish this plan.

Man repeatedly failed to carry out the commission with which God entrusted him in the first chapter of Genesis. Seemingly, the devil reigned supreme. But throughout this history God had promised a seed who would prevail. The fulfillment of this promise is found in Jesus Christ. He was the Son of God, born of a woman, in the family of Israel, of the tribe of Judah and from the seed of David the King. It is He who God promised would sit upon the throne of His Kingdom forever. Since Jesus was born of Mary, a woman of this earth, He was fully man. The scripture says that He Himself partook of flesh and blood (Heb 2:14). He became what we are in order to transform us to be as He is. Not only is Jesus a complete man, He is also truly God. In Him, the scripture reads, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9). This man is the incarnation or the embodiment of the Word of God. John 1:14 states: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

This man who was God, Jesus Christ, is the fulfillment of God's promise to send a seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). This is exactly what Jesus did. From His birth the man Jesus Christ was completely sinless. He never did anything that displeased the Father (Jn 8:29). His earthly life was in total opposition to all that the devil's kingdom is. He never participated in evil in any way. His life was the living manifestation of God's righteousness on this earth right in the middle of the devil's domain. How Satan must have hated Him. He was a perfect man. At one point He said, "the prince of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me" (Jn 14:30). Hallelujah! God sent His Son, and He became a man in whom the devil had nothing – no control, no dominion and no way through which he could influence Him. What a glory to God and what a victory over the enemy that a real man walked this earth sinlessly, living in perfect submission to God. He was never drawn into all the evil and the corruption that Satan had to offer.

Now don't think that Jesus wasn't tempted. His sinlessness was not a result of an easy life. In the wilderness He fasted for forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the devil. He was tried in every aspect just as we are today (Heb 4:15). He did not escape temptation – He overcame it. He lived victoriously above it. He did not give in to the seduction of evil, which is why the Bible says with Him the Father is well pleased (Mt 3:17). Jesus lived in this sinless, perfect way from His birth to His death on the cross.

It is worth mentioning here that His dying on the cross was the fulfillment of all the typology of sacrifice in the Old Testament. Jesus was the Lamb of God who offered Himself without spot or blemish for the sins of the world. The Israelites were supposed to find a perfect male lamb to offer to God. Before it could be offered, it had to be examined carefully to make sure that it had no imperfection. In the same way Jesus too, before He was crucified, was examined. Pontius Pilate and his soldiers did their own brand of examination. They beat Him, spit on Him and mocked Him. They tried everything they knew to get some kind of ungodly reaction from Him which would satisfy their craving to see someone break down under

their abuse. Herod also checked Him out thoroughly. Later, Pilate after he was finished with his exam said, "I find no fault in him" (Jn 19:4, 19:6). This is really impressive. No doubt Pilate spent much of his time dealing with men and passing out judgment. I'm sure many different kind of characters had passed in front of his tribunal of justice. Yet without a doubt, he could not have said this about any other man. He was so impressed with this one man, Jesus, that he could truthfully say that he couldn't find any fault in Him whatsoever.

This was a man that overcame all that the devil threw at Him. He lived a victor. Not only this but when Jesus rose from the dead He overcame the most powerful tool that the devil has – death. He overcame sin during His life and He overcame death in His resurrection from the grave. Death could not hold Him. The strength of Satan was overcome in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, the man who was God. All that the enemy and his forces could muster was thwarted. When Jesus rose from the dead He made an open show of their defeat. He triumphed over them completely (Col 2:15). There was nothing – no weapon which they possessed—which could stop Him from fulfilling the will of God. How glorious this is to see – that finally a man, a divine, holy man – fulfilled God's will and accomplished His plan. In Jesus Christ, God's commission was fulfilled.

THE KINGDOM AMONG YOU

When Jesus walked on this earth almost 2,000 years ago He was the living manifestation of the Kingdom of God. In every aspect of His life He was completely submitted to God's reigning and ruling. For the first time since the creation of Adam there was a man walking the earth who was satisfying God's requirements. Through Jesus' human living the Kingdom of God was declared to men. When the Pharisees asked Him where His Kingdom was, He told them, "For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lk 17:21 NASB* (see note on next page)). When He said this Jesus was referring to Himself. He was the unique manifestation of God's Kingdom. In all that He said or did He reflected the will of the Father. At one point He boldly

declared, "I always do those things that please Him [the Father]" (Jn 8:29). This was truly the Kingdom of God. Although He was living in the midst of a hostile environment, He expressed God in every aspect of His life.

(*NOTE) The reason I have chosen this translation is that it gives a more correct understanding of this verse. Some versions have "within you" instead of "in the midst of you" or "among you." Although it is true that we can experience the Kingdom of God inwardly today, at the time when Jesus spoke these words the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out and thus it would have been impossible for any of His hearers to have the Kingdom of God residing in them.

As Jesus began His ministry He preached repentance for the sake of the Kingdom. He said, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). This meant that the rulership or the authority of heaven was being manifested and that men needed to repent for their part in Satan's kingdom. They were being called upon to repent for the deeds which they were doing and even the thoughts which they were thinking which were contrary to the new, heavenly Kingdom. Since the Kingdom of God was now at hand men needed to turn away from the other kingdom in which they had been participating in order to become a part of the Kingdom which God was offering. The gospel of the Kingdom means the gospel of repentance for the sake of entering into God's Kingdom. If we are to enter in we must turn away from all the evil and the sin of the devil's kingdom in which we have been living. We must change camps, so to speak. God requires that we defect and come to the other side. This is the gospel which Jesus preached. It is an absolute, radical message and leaves no room for compromise.

The two kingdoms about which we have been speaking – the kingdom of this world and the heavenly Kingdom – are in total opposition to each other. There is no middle ground. In order to become completely subjected to God's Kingdom we must be wholly set free from Satan's. This requires a deep, thorough repenting in the heart of every man concerning the things which he was doing, saying and thinking before he knew about the Kingdom of God.

I'm afraid that many Christian preachers do not announce this gospel of the Kingdom. Becoming a Christian is too often portrayed as being easy and demanding nothing more than a simple acceptance of a gift. Although we must accept the gift, this is just the beginning. There is actually much more to it than that. When Jesus and John the Baptist preached, they preached repentance for the sake of the Kingdom.

If we are really going to do God's will and fully enter His Kingdom we must repent categorically for everything in which we have been participating that is against Him. Repentance means that we turn our hearts away from these things and determine never to be involved in them again. It means changing our mind and making decisions with our will to leave one kingdom and enter into another. This gospel is not watered down or easy but through Jesus Christ it is entirely possible for anyone who desires it. We can all live in victory just as Jesus did.

THE OVERCOMING LIFE

The reason that we can live as Christ did is that He has given us His very own life. The eternal life, which God promises to give through His Son Jesus, is His own divine, eternal life. When Jesus Christ, who lived victoriously, conquering Satan and sin, now begins to live in us, we too can live as He did. The scripture asks of those who believe, "Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" (II Cor 13:5). Praise God, this same Jesus who lived on this earth apart from the kingdom of the enemy now resides in us. Jesus has given His Kingdom life to men. When we receive Jesus Christ we receive all that He is and all that He accomplished. When He comes into us He brings all His attributes and power with Him. Through the Holy Spirit every believer can enter into victory.

Since God has poured His Holy Spirit into men upon this earth (the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, Rm 8:2) there are now thousands of individuals who have the life and the power to live in God's Kingdom. Now, through the Spirit, the overcoming life of Christ is being fruitful and multiplying in people all over the earth. These men and women can fulfill God's original command to overcome the pow-

ers of evil in this world and live according to God. This eternal power dwells in all believers. And if they are only willing to repent, to change kingdoms, to cease from doing the works of darkness and to enter into the Kingdom of light, Jesus Christ within them will supply them to do it. His life, His victorious life, will enable them to overcome.

This is not something which we can do by our own efforts. It is not a victory which we can gain by our own determination and will power. Instead, it is a submission of our entire being to Another. We can, through the opening of our heart to Him, allow His divine, overcoming life, to live through us. The secret of our victory over sin and the enemy is not to try harder, but to yield ourselves more and more to Him.

Here we find the purpose for which Jesus came and died. He came to gather to Himself a special people who would allow Him to live in them and live His victorious life through them. Thus, they would express Him and manifest His dominion over His enemy. By His power they now can live in this hostile world and yet be subjecting themselves to His authority. By allowing Jesus Christ to fill them and live through them, they manifest Christ's victory and establish God's authority over this earth. At last the purpose for which man was created is finding fulfillment. All that now remains is for God to finish gathering all those whom He has chosen and prepare them for that final day. Very soon we will all be caught up to meet Him in the air and return with Him to reign. Our role is to submit ourselves completely to Him and to announce this gospel of the Kingdom in all the earth.

The Church is the body of Christ. Just as Jesus' physical body was the vehicle through which He expressed Himself many years ago, so the church is His expression on this earth today. Since He has ascended to the Father, we His people are now the vessel through which He wishes to express Himself and accomplish His work. This word "body" is not just a nice religious expression. It contains much important spiritual meaning. God's will is to use His people as instruments of righteousness and as a testimony of Himself. This is both a privilege and an awesome

responsibility. We are to be expressing the invisible God of the universe to the inhabitants of the earth as well as displaying His victory to the heavenly hosts. Today, through His body, the Church, God is manifesting His wisdom and His eternal plan (Eph 3:10). How we need to take this commission of Christ's seriously! It is of the utmost importance to Him to accomplish this work through us, so much so in fact that He died in order that it might be done. This is not a small thing for which we have been called. One day soon when we stand before His judgment seat we will be called upon to give an account of our response to this all-important commission.

One very important aspect of this work is that we are to announce this gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15). Part of our job as Jesus' disciples is to preach as He did the gospel of the Kingdom. His will is for all men to hear the message of repentance and to receive His new life. For this to happen, we must cooperate. We must be willing to go wherever He sends us and spread the good news. We too need to "be fruitful and multiply" spiritually. If we are willing and obedient, He will empower us to rescue men and women out of Satan's kingdom of darkness and transfer them into His own Kingdom of light. Jesus Christ is coming back again soon and I am very sure that He would be happy to find you standing in the gap, saving people from God's wrath and getting them ready for the wedding feast.

PREPARING GOD'S PEOPLE

This brings up another essential aspect of our Kingdom commission. It is also our responsibility to assist God in perfecting His people and preparing them for His coming. Not only do we need to introduce them to Christ's Kingdom, but we also need to teach them how to live in it. God does not want a collection of spiritual babies but a multitude of mature saints with whom He can dwell in intimate fellowship forever. Before He ascended He said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Mt 28:19,20 NASB). Building up the body of Christ is not a secondary responsibility but an equal part of the task. Not

only do we need to bring in the raw materials, but we are also being called upon to assist Him in fashioning them into what He wishes them to be. We must be helping each other prepare for His coming.

It should be noted that not all members of Jesus' body have the same function. All of us are not called to do the same thing. There are many different kinds of work to be done. The scripture specifically mentions in several places that there are various gifts, administrations and abilities which the Spirit gives and with which we can serve God (see I Cor 12:4-12, Rm 12:4). The important message is not that we are all to do the same job, but that we are all to do what Jesus is calling us to do. Each and every one of us is to be actively serving God in some capacity. All believers must live under the authority and direction of Jesus today if we are to find His approval when He returns. Whatever your job or function is, you should be doing it with all of your energy. If you do not know what it is then you should seek the Lord's face through prayer and seek fellowship with other believers until you know that you are walking in His will.

One reason that many Christians have difficulty knowing the will of God for their lives is that they have so many priorities which come ahead of serving God. For example, first they get an education, marry a wife, find a good job, buy a house and then wonder what God's will for their life is. No wonder they are confused! If we are to really know the will of God, we must be open to Him in every area of our lives. All things must be put in subjection to Him. The extent to which we are truly open to Him is the extent to which we can know His will. No one who is genuinely seeking God will be left hanging in bewilderment for long. God is able to lead His people.

Of course simply standing in one place and praying for years may not bring the answer. Sometimes we must begin to move in the direction in which we think He might be leading to find His will. As we walk, we will have the inner assurance of His blessing or the conviction that we have made a mistake. Be bold! Take steps toward doing the work to which you think Jesus is calling you. Making mis-

takes is not fatal but burying your talents in the earth will bring His disapproval on judgment day. "Blessed are those who listen to God's message and practice it!" (Lk 11:28 Williams).

Once we receive the Lord, this is not the end. Instead it is the beginning of a life-long process of following Him, doing His will and expressing His life and nature to the perishing world. Jesus has run the race before us, overcome all the power of the enemy, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Now we, His people, are faced with the responsibility of following Him in this victory. By faith we can serve Him and accomplish His will upon the earth. Since we have His life within us, we too can live as He did. There is no acceptable excuse for not living in God's Kingdom today and manifesting His will upon the earth. The great and terrible Day of the Lord is coming. Who can stand in the day of His appearing? I tell you, it will be those who have done His will.

