

## 2.

# THE TWO “KINGDOMS”

Before we get very far in this book, one thing must be made very clear if the readers are to properly understand this message, and that is that the “Kingdom of Heaven” is not the same thing as heaven. Let me say that again. When the New Testament uses the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” it is not referring to heaven. Instead it is referring to the Millennial Kingdom about which we have been talking. Such a mistake is easy to make if we do not read the Bible carefully. Since many believers have heard a great deal of preaching and teaching about heaven as a destination, it is easy to read about “the Kingdom of Heaven” and automatically think “heaven.” However, as we will see throughout this book, this phrase has a very different and important meaning.

Perhaps the confusing element in the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” are the words “of heaven.” What these words actually mean is that the coming earthly Kingdom has its origin in heaven – that it is heavenly in its nature and content. Yet it is a kingdom *from* heaven, not a kingdom *in* heaven. It is not the “heaven” about which the Bible speaks in other places. God reigns supreme in heaven. Heaven is the locus of His authority – the point from which He rules the universe. The words “of heaven” then are referring to the source of this Kingdom about which Jesus testified. It is the place from which the Kingdom is coming, not a destination to which we are going. Again, the prayer which He taught His disciples to pray clearly paints the picture: “Thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10 NASB). Jesus’ prayer was that the

Father's heavenly Kingdom would be fully manifested on the earth. So we see that although the Kingdom of Heaven is heavenly in character and origin, it is not the same thing as heaven.

It is interesting to note that of all the New Testament writers, only Matthew uses the phrase "the Kingdom of Heaven." All of the other writers use the phrase "the Kingdom of God." In the four gospels, when the writers are quoting the same parables of Jesus, Matthew uses "the Kingdom of Heaven" and the other three say "the Kingdom of God." This shows us that these terms are used interchangeably in the inspired Word. There is no difference between the two. Such an observation also reinforces the idea that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is not heaven, rather it is the kingdom of God which will come to this earth when Jesus returns.

The importance of the distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven and "heaven" comes when we read the parables which Jesus taught about this kingdom. If we apply the "kingdom parables" to heaven, then we can come away with some very confusing and even wrong ideas. But when we apply them correctly to the coming earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ, much more of God's truth becomes clear. This is exactly what we will be doing in some of the later chapters of this book.

The Jewish people who were listening to Jesus teach did not have a problem understanding that He was referring to an earthly Kingdom. On the contrary, many of them had difficulty realizing the spiritual aspects of it. For centuries they had been waiting for Messiah the King who would lead them out of bondage. They well knew the scriptures prophesying that One would come to sit on the throne of David and rule over them (Is 9:7). When Herod questioned the scribes regarding the place of the Messiah's birth, they knew the exact location. The coming of a King to set up an earthly Kingdom was no secret to them. It was exactly what they were waiting for. What they failed to realize was that the prophesied coming of Jesus consisted of two events. There was a first coming and there will be a second one – one to which all true believers are looking

forward. And it is at the second one that He will establish His earthly, physical Kingdom.

## TWO ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

What the Jews did not realize then, but what we know now, is that these two comings of Christ correspond to two aspects of the Kingdom of God. First, there is a present spiritual experience of the Kingdom into which Christians can enter and second, there is the coming outward manifestation of the Kingdom on this earth. Today we can experience the Kingdom spiritually, and someday soon it is coming to the earth physically. On the one hand, referring to the first, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). But on the other hand, the scriptures read, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ," (Rev 11:15). Although the spiritual aspect of the Kingdom, ushered in with the first advent of Christ, and the outward manifestation of it, which begins with the second coming, are separated by 2,000 years, they have very much in common. In fact they are inseparable and completely interrelated.

In order to convey a clear comprehension of these two facets of the Kingdom of God, perhaps it will first be necessary to talk about just what a kingdom is. A kingdom is a certain geographical area which is governed by a king. A kingdom is also a collection of people who are subjected to the will and dictates of a particular king. Actually these two definitions fit exactly with the two "Kingdoms" about which we have been talking. With Christ's first coming He is gathering to Himself a people. With His second, He will establish His rightful rulership over this world. His first advent heralded the assertion of His Lordship over hearts and lives of men who are willing to submit themselves to Him, and His second, His Kingship over all the inhabited earth.

In most of the free world today people have a lot of trouble understanding the concept of "king." There are very few rulers today who claim to be kings, and those that do (except perhaps in the Middle East) actually wield very little power. The idea of bowing before someone and

being obedient to his every wish is foreign to us if not even repulsive. The very thought of not being in control of their own lives has not even entered very many men's minds. We, especially in the United States, are used to "freedom" and any "kings" that come along may have some difficulty asserting their influence over us. Alas, such is the situation with Jesus Christ and much of His Church today. We, His people, rightfully belong to Him, but are submitted to His authority very little.

Perhaps a word which could be used to better describe what the Biblical word "king" should mean to us is the word "dictator." Here is a word to which our world can relate. It holds for us the idea of a man who wields absolute power. His word is law and no one dares to disobey. This is really what the Bible means when it uses the word "king." (The word "Lord," by the way, has a very similar meaning.) Although "dictator" may convey to us the idea of harshness or cruelty while our King, Jesus, is not that way, still the concept of absolute power and authority is exactly correct. God has made this same Jesus who was crucified both King and Lord. In fact, He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16). It is to Him we must submit ourselves and Him we must obey.

Now, with this in mind, we can talk a little about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, is the sphere over which God's authority extends. It consists of the territory and the beings over which He rules. We normally assume that most of the universe fits into this category. One exception is this earth and the majority of the people on it. The Bible teaches us that this world is presently in the hands of the devil and he is a prince over it and its inhabitants (Jn 14:30). Although Jesus has defeated him at the cross, this victory has not yet been fully manifested. God is just now in the process of establishing His rightful authority over this world. When Jesus Christ returns, the devil will be chained up for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-3) and He will reign supreme in all the earth.

As mentioned previously, the first place that He is starting to rule and the area in which He is working today is the hearts and lives of men and women. Through the events of His first advent, Jesus Christ demonstrated His

right to transfer people out of this world's kingdom of darkness into His own Kingdom of light. He has redeemed mankind with His own precious blood and purchased us for His own possession. Now we are rightfully His! Whereas once we were obedient to the evil ruler of this age, now we need be subjected to him no longer. Jesus has set us free. Although we were God's because He made us, Satan usurped this authority in the garden of Eden through his temptation of Adam and Eve. Now, Jesus Christ is in the process of recovering us from this fall and reestablishing His Kingship over His people. Hallelujah!

### **OUR WILLINGNESS IS ESSENTIAL**

There is, however, a very interesting aspect of Christ's Kingdom to which we must pay very careful attention. Jesus will reign over only those who are willing. Today He will be a King over only those who want Him to be. When He came in person to the Jews in Israel most of them rejected Him. At one point their leaders (who were supposed to be waiting for Messiah) declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19:15). And so it is still today. We can either accept or reject the Kingship of Jesus Christ. But there is a day coming when this option will lapse. When Jesus Christ comes again, the scriptures tell us that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:10,11). At this time He will powerfully subject the whole earth and the inhabitants thereof to Himself (Lk 19:27).

These days in evangelical circles, a person can hear many people preaching such things as "receive Jesus," "trust Jesus," or "ask Jesus into your life." These things are true and right and good. However, this is not the whole story. What seems to be missing from this kind of preaching is that when we receive Jesus, we receive Him for what He is – King and Lord. When the first disciples preached, they preached the Lord Jesus Christ. They proclaimed a Christ who wanted full allegiance, who asked for a total commitment of the rest of their lives and who required a complete separation from what was not in His Kingdom. This is why they saw such marvelous results. Those preachers did not overemphasize what Christ could do for the people but they announced what the people's respon-

sibility was toward God. They knew who Jesus was. He was the King promised long ago and they were wise enough to submit themselves totally to Him. How we could stand a good dose of this kind of preaching today! How we need to follow their example!

This is one explanation of why we have so many lukewarm, insincere converts to Christianity today. We tell them something like: "If only you will receive Jesus He will make you happy and make you feel good and help you with your life." On the other hand Jesus preached: "Repent (totally change your way of thinking and living) for the Kingdom (the rulership) of Heaven is at hand."

This then is the problem. When we lead someone to receive Christ without making it very plain to them the total commitment which is required, at first things may go along just fine. But sooner or later Jesus will begin to assert His rightful Lordship over their lives. Since these converts have not been prepared for anything like that, many times they turn away and walk with Him no more. Or sometimes there begins a long and painful struggle with God about who is to run their lives.

We could easily spare people this problem by telling them the truth from the beginning. Let us tell them plainly that they should not even begin to build a tower until they sit down and thoroughly count the cost. I am afraid that we water down the gospel to get "numbers" "saved" when in reality we are doing service neither to God nor to them. It is all too easy to immunize converts with easy Christianity, making it all the harder for them to later realize the truth.

This then is the gospel of the Kingdom. It is the gospel that Jesus preached. We are to repent because there is a spiritual Kingdom which has been announced in which God is to have complete control over every aspect of our lives. He is to rule over our minds, our emotions and our will. Our bodies are to be His to use to further His plans and purposes. Our money, our future, our hopes and dreams, all these things are to be completely submitted to the authority of our King. Furthermore, there is an outward, earthly manifestation of this Kingdom coming soon

to this earth of which we can be a part if we are willing. Actually, there is no other gospel. Although we usually hear only other aspects of it, this is really what the Bible teaches.

The Kingdom of God today is an inward, spiritual Kingdom. It is a Kingdom which does not come with observation (Lk 17:20,21). This means that it is not yet manifested outwardly. The subjection of a man's heart to Jesus Christ is a hidden thing. To enter such a Kingdom, which is spiritual in nature, firstly requires a new, spiritual birth. Just as we were born physically to enter into this world, so we need to be born again of the Spirit of God to enter into the spiritual Kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). This new birth itself requires an element of submission to God. To have it we must repent for our sins and acknowledge Jesus' rightful Lordship over our lives. In the process He cleanses us from our sins with His precious blood and makes us one with God.

Once we enter the sphere of God's reigning over us, it is essential that we continue submitting ourselves to Him if we are to keep on experiencing the present Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, after we enter God's Kingdom, it is all too possible for us to later rebel against Him. As mentioned previously, today Jesus will rule over only those who are willing for Him to do so. Just as our initial entrance into His Kingdom depended upon our willingness to meet certain requirements, so our continued willingness is crucial if we are to be His subjects. God will not force Himself on anyone. Unless we want Him to be our King, He will not be. We all have to choose.

I would like to emphasize here that this is a choice which we have to make every day if not every minute of every day. There is a constant battle going on. Satan wants to retain his control over our lives and keep us subjected to himself. Unfortunately there is still an old nature within us, a product of our first natural birth, which sides with the devil against God. But Jesus Christ has overcome all that is within us and all that is within the world, which is the sphere of the devil. The new life with the new nature which has been born into us has the power to overcome all

opposition. Within us we have the supernatural power to overcome Satan and his kingdom.

The pivotal point however is our will. We must be completely willing to submit ourselves to God. If we are, He will give us the power to overcome. If not we will only end up, whether knowingly or not, being a servant of the devil. How many Christians are in this boat! They belong to God, but in their daily lives they are pursuing the things of this world and their own pleasure and so become slaves to the ruler of the world. Oh how we believers need to submit ourselves totally, without reservation, to our rightful Lord and Creator! What a shame it is when we go our own way, but what a glory to God when we willingly live in His Kingdom and allow Him to be the Lord of our lives!

So we see that there are two aspects of the Kingdom of God. There is a present spiritual reality of which we can be a part, and there is the coming earthly manifestation of it. As stated earlier, our role in the coming Kingdom has everything to do with our participation in the present one. Do not be fooled. No one who serves themselves today will be rewarded tomorrow. The Kingdom of Heaven which is coming is not separate from the one we can be experiencing today. They are really the same thing. They have one King, one purpose and one reality. I beg you, submit yourselves to God today.