

LIFE AND THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:20 , 48 ; 7:21 ; 19:23-26 ; John 3:3 ; Rev. 22:1-2

The Scriptures, from beginning to end, associate life with authority. When man is first mentioned, these two matters are both introduced. In the first chapter of Genesis the question of authority is brought up. When God created man, He said, "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (v. 28). As soon as God created Adam, He bestowed on him the right to govern the entire earth. But Genesis 1 does not tell us all that transpired between God and man when man was created, so Genesis 2 supplements the record. Genesis 1 tells us that God wanted man to exercise dominion over the earth on His behalf, and it tells us also what sort of man this man must be who is to wield authority for God. He must be "in the image of God" (v. 27). The man who is to rule the earth for God must be a man according to God's "likeness" (v. 26)—that is, like God—so that when you have seen this man who is in dominion, you have, as it were, seen God Himself. The man who is to govern the earth for God is not merely one who wields authority; he is one who wields authority as God's representative. That is a tremendous thing. That is a transcendent thing, and it demands a transcendent life for its accomplishment. A supernatural task requires a supernatural life. It is necessary for us to grasp this point—that if man is to represent God and to exercise dominion for God on the earth, then man must possess a supernatural life. He cannot possibly bear so lofty a responsibility in the strength of his own natural life. If he is to wield divine authority and be a divine representative, he must possess the divine life.

Let me use an illustration here. A dog cannot fly. To a dog, flight is a sheer impossibility. But what a dog cannot do, a bird can do with ease. It is the simplest thing for a bird to soar up into the sky. The life of a dog is a life that cannot fly; the life of a bird is a life that flies with ease. The bird has the kind of nature that flies, and it would suffer intensely if you did not let it fly. As for the dog, if you want it to crawl into a hole, it can do that, or if you want it to climb up a hill, it can do that too. But if you ask it to fly, it simply cannot. It is a matter of life. Our corrupt natural life cannot be subject to God. We need another life for that. We need the life of God. The new birth is the coming of God into man so that what before was impossible to man now becomes possible. "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). Our problem with authority is no problem to God. When we have His life, it is the most natural thing to come under His authority. It is as spontaneous as for a bird to fly. If we suppress the divine life within us and do not let it submit to the divine authority, then we will suffer as a caged bird suffers. But when we submit to the divine control, we are wonderfully released. The more we submit, the more released we are until, as Isaiah puts it, we can "mount up with wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31).

Brothers and sisters, do you see that the whole question of the kingdom is a question of life?

The demands of the kingdom are terrific, but the provision of the divine life is equal to all its demands. A full gospel presents the kingdom with its requirements. It also presents the precious blood to cleanse from defilement and the life to supply the power that makes us partakers in the kingdom. The gospel presents these three things—the kingdom, the blood, and the life. The kingdom makes its demands, but by virtue of the cleansing that comes through the precious blood and the power that comes through the divine life, even we who by nature are fallen creatures can live the kingdom life. Praise God, the very source of life is within us—even God Himself! The God on the throne who issues His demands is the One who meets His own demands. From the throne He requires that we be subject to Him, and from within He supplies the life that can be subject to Him. This takes no toll of our strength, but it does require our cooperation. There is no need for us to do, but there is the need for us to let Him do. Otherwise, how could the demands of the kingdom ever be met? Listen to these lofty demands: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist him who is evil; rather whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to him who wishes to sue you and take your tunic, yield to him your cloak also” (Matt. 5:38-40). In my youth, when I read those words, I thought, “Oh, I could not possibly do that. And never in all my life will I be able, so I’ll have to give up being a Christian. I can’t be a false Christian, and I can’t be a true one, so I can’t be one at all. There’s no way out.” But a voice within me said, “You can’t help being a Christian.” I wanted to draw back, but I could not draw back; I wanted to go forward, but I could not go forward. Oh, the misery of it! For a long time I was in great perplexity, but one day God showed me that what I was trying to do was an utter impossibility, and He had never meant me to try. Imagine trying to attain to this: “You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48). That day light dawned, and I was able to praise God that He was my Father, and that the Father’s life in me could enable even me to be perfect. The question is not one of our ability to do but of giving our consent to His doing. He is impotent if we refuse consent. And that is where the trouble often lies—He is willing, but we are unwilling.

Do you see? The requirements of the kingdom can never be met by man, and God never expected man to meet them. The demands He makes, He Himself meets—and that is the grace revealed in the New Testament. In the Old Testament the law made its demands on man, but in the New Testament it is the kingdom that makes its demands. The demands of the kingdom are far more exacting than the demands of the law. The demands of the law proved how utterly impotent man was; now the demands of the kingdom prove, not how unable man is, but how able God is. There is no need for the

demands of the kingdom to prove man's inability, for that has been conclusively proved by the demands of the law. Today the requirements of the kingdom serve to demonstrate the infinite ability of God. He has become our life that in us He may meet all the demands His kingdom makes upon us.

It is important to realize that God's life has been given for the sake of His kingdom. If we do not let Him set up His throne in our lives and assert His authority over us, His life cannot operate in us. God has put His life in us for the specific purpose of meeting the demands of His kingdom, and unless we allow Him to establish His kingdom in us, His life within us cannot function.

We read of the river of living water that "on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month" (Rev. 22:2). Wherever this river flowed, every need was met. But where did the river come from? "And he showed me a river of water of life,...proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (v. 1). Life is always associated with the throne. When we yield to God's authority and let Him establish His kingdom in our lives, then we are maintained in victory and in fullness of life, for then we too are in authority.