

Growing in Christ

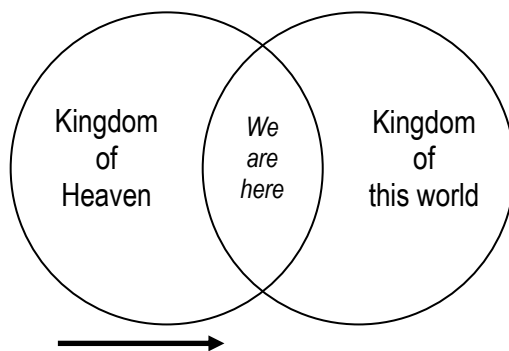
Part 15: 'Living in Two Kingdoms'

When you were born, you were born into this fallen world, the kingdom of this earth, the kingdom of Satan, as the Bible calls it. This is the finite, material, cause-and-effect world in which we see, taste, smell, feel and hear. It is the world which dominates our time and thinking most days. It is the natural world, the earthly realm. This is the kingdom in which the vast majority of people in the world reside exclusively. Anyone who has not accepted the gift of God's grace and experienced the reality of the Kingdom of heaven is only aware of this earthly kingdom. This is reality as far as they know now.

However, you and I and the millions of others who are born again Christians do not only live in this earthly kingdom. The Bible says that we have been born again into a new kingdom - the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. This is a supernatural world, an infinite realm and the eternal, everlasting kingdom where Jesus Christ rules as Lord.

Unlike this earthly, finite realm, the Kingdom of God is not perceived by our five senses. It is not visible, tangible and able to be experienced in the same physical way. It certainly impacts this physical world and our physical bodies but it also transcends them. It is a spiritual kingdom perceived by and experienced by that part of us we call our spirit.

That's why Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3 that, *".. flesh gives birth to flesh but spirit gives birth to spirit .."* and unless we are born again into this spiritual realm, we will not experience its wonder, glory or power. It will not be real to us. It will be an illusion that is talked about, preached about and sung about by millions of deluded people called Christians. To one who has not been born again – their only reality is this earthly kingdom. So let's look at the two kingdoms as they are right now.



When Jesus came to earth over 2,000 years ago He ushered in the kingdom heaven - He launched a full scale heavenly attack on the kingdom of this world – a kingdom ruled by Satan. Jesus' intent was to rescue everyone who had been taken captive by the enemy. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the power and the glory and the reality of the eternal kingdom of heaven was released on earth.

So now everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, that is literally those who believe *into* Jesus; step into His life and embrace His life (as their own), His death (as their own) and His resurrection (as their own) they are born again into the kingdom of heaven.

That is, they have a spiritual awakening. Their spirit is regenerated by God's Holy Spirit. They are given a new citizenship - only this one lasts forever and is not of this world. They remain part of the kingdom of this world as long as they live and breathe here but they are now also a part of the eternal, majestic, supernatural kingdom of heaven which is moving more and more across to take over the kingdom of Satan so that one day there will be only one kingdom, one reality, one existence - the kingdom of heaven. When that eclipse is complete, Satan will be gone, sin will be gone, everyone will bow the knee to Jesus and all flesh will know the glory of the kingdom of heaven and all unholiness and sin will be removed for all time.

Until then, you and I and all believers live in that middle area where the two kingdoms clash - and I mean clash. This is light vs darkness; sin vs holiness; truth vs error; grace vs law; God vs Satan; right vs wrong; power vs impotence; glory vs shame. These two kingdoms are diametrically opposed to one another and so living with this dual citizenship is not easy and will always bring with it a degree of tension, pain, conflict and confusion. It's like we have a dual personality. It's like we are two people in one body sometimes. As wonderful as it is to be saved, redeemed and heaven bound - it is also a daily battle. That is what happens when kingdoms clash. Like it or not, we are caught up in the greatest cosmic battle we could ever imagine - but, of course, it's a battle Jesus has already won!

So when we pick up the Bible and start reading it; when we go to the Word of God to find help in working out our salvation, understanding how we should live and move and act and react as a Christian, it is absolutely essential that we understand this dual kingdom reality. We need to know that there are certain things which have happened and are happening in the spiritual realm, in the kingdom of heaven, which are not yet fully realised or experienced in this kingdom. We have to realise that although God has secured our salvation over 2,000 years ago in this earthly time line, we still have to deal with the realities of a fallen, sinful world where there are cause-and-effect consequences. Let me explain this by giving you some examples.

Sin

In the Kingdom of heaven, your sins are completely forgiven. They have been atoned for. There is no punishment for your sins anymore. Way back in the Old Testament God foretold the day when He would wipe away our sins and He did that through Jesus. Jesus atoned for your sin. He paid the price for it once and for all. Is there any sin in the kingdom of heaven? No. Are you in the kingdom of heaven? Yes! So in God's eternal Kingdom - Jesus has taken away your sin. Yet you still have to live in the kingdom of this world where Satan reigns and tempts us and lures us and inhabits our fallen nature and so we still sin don't we? 1 John tells us we are liars if we say we are without sin. We still stumble and fall. But our sin can never separate us from God. Our sin can never again have any bearing on our eternal relationship with God - that was secured by the blood of Jesus Christ in the kingdom of heaven. God does not hide His face from us because of our sin.

All those Old Testament verses about sin coming between us and God **no longer apply** to born-again believers. Our sin, with respect to our eternal relationship with God, has been taken away and the very code (the law) which defined our sin and which Satan used to accuse us, has been nailed to the cross! God still hears our prayers when we sin. God still blesses us with gifts and power and fruitful ministry when we sin. All that stuff unfolds in the kingdom of heaven where our sin is atoned for and taken away along with all punishment.

Yet back in this earthly realm, sin is still sin and it's as ugly and destructive and horrid as it has always been. Sin will still hurt you. It may even kill you physically if it's bad enough. It will destroy relationships. It will hinder the spread of the gospel and affect the credibility of the Church in the eyes of the world. It will cause others to stumble. It will lead little ones astray when they see it in us. It will open the door for Satan to march into our lives, re-armed by our sin, as he brings his evil ministry of distraction, discouragement, deception and death.

Sin is horrible. Don't do it. Flee from all evil. Stand firm against the schemes of the enemy. Your soul may be secure in the kingdom of heaven and your relationship with God may be secure in Christ but if you yield to the evil in this world and allow sin to reign in you then you will be living in darkness all your days on this earth and you will have to wait until you die to experience the abundance and glory of the heavenly kingdom. So don't sin.

But please don't ever let anyone tell you that your sin has any effect on your relationship with God from His perspective - because it doesn't. This is the gospel. This is the truth. And that is why they call it 'good news.' That is why they call it grace.

Oh yes, let me assure you that if you continue to let sin have its way you will *feel like* you are a long way from God; you will *feel* punished; you will lose the *experience* of His grace as you allow Satan to have more and more control. But Satan is the one who accuses, not God. Satan is the one who brings guilt and shame back into your life. Satan is the one who convinces you that God can't hear you or bless you or use you because you are an unholy vessel.

So friends, in this cause-and-effect world, sin will bring horrible consequences into your life. You will reap what you sow. But don't confuse this kingdom for the kingdom of heaven where which you sit at the right hand of God dressed in the righteous robes of Christ.

Forgiveness

In the Kingdom of heaven forgiveness is complete. All your sin has been forgiven. Because there is no calendar in heaven that means there is no past, present or future. Therefore, your sin has been forgiven - period! That means back down in this earthly realm, all your sin has been forgiven through the death of Jesus on Calvary.

The sins of Abraham were forgiven in the wounds of Jesus thousands of years before Jesus entered time and space. The sins of your great, great, great grandchildren are forgiven in the wounds of Jesus years before they are even born. That is the reality of forgiveness in the Kingdom of heaven, where is no beginning or end. If you a resident of the kingdom of heaven, then are all your sins forgiven! Yet back down here in this cause-and-effect world, there are days when you and I might *feel* condemned and not forgiven. Our experience can at times be very different to the reality achieved for us in Christ. That's why when the writers and translators of the New Testament have Jesus saying that God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others, they are not talking about what happens in the kingdom of heaven. The only realm that you and I can affect by our actions and our inaction is this earthly kingdom.

***Nothing that happens in the kingdom of heaven
is ever dependent upon what you or I do or don't do.***

Now let me assure you that in this world, if you harbour unforgiveness or bitterness in your heart then it will grow like a cancer and it will rob you of the experience of God's forgiveness in such a way that you will feel condemned. But it will not be God who condemns you; it will not be God who robs you of the freedom and glory and wonder of the experience of being forgiven and cleansed. It will be Satan, working through your own tortured conscience, empowered by your own unforgiving heart. In Jesus name, I pray that you get this.

You cannot lose your eternal salvation by your actions. You cannot lose your forgiveness by your actions. It is all wrapped up in the same wonderful free gift of God's grace. It is secured for you, signed with God's hand, in the blood of His own dear Son. It is finished. But back here, while we still have to struggle in this fallen, broken kingdom as well, we need to be diligent and not give the enemy a foothold by not forgiving everyone, every time - straight away.

Holiness and Righteousness

In the kingdom of heaven you are united with Christ, washed by His blood, clothed in His pure white robes, filled with His presence and therefore you are the righteousness of Christ and you are 100% pure and holy. You have to be - if you want to be in the presence of God. Do you understand that holiness and sin cannot occupy the same space any more than you can go forward and backward at the same time? It is simply not possible.

Therefore, as you approach the eternal throne of God in worship and prayer, you must be pure, white, stainless, holy and 100% righteous. What happens if you are not? You vaporise. You are burned up by the holiness of God. So how is that possible? His name is Jesus, that's how. Jesus did that for you.

Jesus is why you can pray. Jesus is why you can talk to God and hear God talk to you. Jesus is why you can climb up on your Father's lap and call Him daddy - because in the kingdom of heaven you are in Christ and in Christ there is no sin, no unholiness, no unrighteousness. You are spotless in the kingdom of heaven.

Back here in this earthly realm we are all working at letting that holy nature permeate our fallen nature. In this earthly kingdom we pray, we worship, we help each other, we hold each other accountable so that the holiness that is ours in Christ is seen more and more in our lives. Little by little, day by day, it overcomes the fallen nature in us, as the kingdom of light gradually eclipses the kingdom of darkness.

Spiritual Gifts

Take a deep breath – this one might stretch you! All of the spiritual gifts are in Christ and Christ is in you. Therefore, you possess the fullness of God in Christ which obviously includes all the spiritual gifts. That's right - prophecy, healing, discernment of spirits etc. They are all there. So what about the Bible passages that say, *"To one is given this gift and to another is given that gift."* ?

Well those refer to the practical outworking of the gifts in this world. This is where it helps to study a little Greek. In the original language in which the New Testament was written, that verse could just as easily be translated, *"In one is released this gift, and in another is released that gift."* An interesting alternative, I'm sure you agree, and it'd actually a more valid and helpful translation.

No doubt you have heard teachers talk about spiritual gifts through the analogy of an orchestra. I think it is an excellent analogy but I actually use that picture very differently to most. Most teachers see each of us as one member of that orchestra, playing our one instrument and occasionally the really talented few might even play two instruments at different times. The conductor is Jesus and He determines which gifts operate by determining who He puts in His Church.

That's a great picture. However I see the picture very differently. I see Jesus as the whole orchestra and God the Father (through His Spirit on earth) as the Conductor. Now because you and I are in Christ, guess what that means? It means each of us, as believers, has the entire orchestra within us all the time because Christ is in us. The conductor can therefore release particular instruments in us at particular times as He sees fit and at times He may release half a dozen at once in some people.

The hard thing is that in this limited, finite, cause-and-effect earthly kingdom, we find that picture very hard to see and so we would rather walk by sight and revert to a far inferior view of spiritual gifts, thereby robbing the Church of so much power and effectiveness.

I could go on all day with examples but if you understand the essence of what I am saying then you will see this dual reality in everything you think, say and do and it will cause hundreds of difficult Bible passages to suddenly make sense.

The conflict we so often experience in interpreting the Bible is that we fail to have this dual kingdom concept firmly embedded in our thinking and so we will take passages that refer to our eternal condition in the Kingdom of Heaven and apply them to our daily lives in this world and get really frustrated and confused. Or we will take exhortations to live pure, godly lives and clean up our act and apply them to our lives in the eternal kingdom and end up with no assurance of salvation or forgiveness or anything.

We must understand what it means to live in both kingdoms every moment of every day. After a while it will make sense and a lot of things will fall into place. Our ability to deal with sin will be far greater when we know that God is not our accuser. The quality of our love relationship with God will increase markedly when we are not trying to please Him with our behaviour or our performance.

Some of the most famous words of Jesus are also the most profound, in my opinion. I refer to what we have called the Lord's prayer. The opening words of that prayer sum up this entire sermon and if we recited those words a hundred times a day, just maybe we would start to see how we are really supposed to live. Jesus gave us a model for prayer and a model for life when He said we should pray, *"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

I preached [a whole series](#) on three of those words not long ago and I would encourage you to re-visit that teaching. Those words send shivers up my spine every time I say them. YOUR KINGDOM COME. These are three of the most powerful words you could ever utter. What do they mean? The words that follow tell us. *"Your kingdom come"* literally means: *"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

This is a prayer that asks God to speed up the eclipse. When we say, *'Your kingdom come,'* we are asking that the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven would become the reality in this earthly Kingdom. In fact, we are praying that one will replace the other. What a prayer! Just think about it. *'Your kingdom come'* means that holiness, righteousness, peace, forgiveness, security, salvation, discernment, love, grace, peace, etc. all increase ... as sin, evil, condemnation, fear, anxiety, ignorance, hate, law and all things evil decrease.

When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we are asking that the reality of heaven will become our experience more and more here on earth. It means that our life which is dominated by the now, the finite, the natural - along with sickness, poverty, weakness, ineffectiveness - will more and more be dominated by healing, riches, abundance, strength, power and rich fruit that lasts into eternity.

That is what's happening right now across the world. The reality of the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing against the reality of the kingdom of this world. In both a physical and spiritual sense, the lame are walking; the deaf can hear; the blind are beginning to see clearly for the first time; the power and the glory and the honour and grace and mercy and presence of God which saturates heaven is beginning to flood across the earth. Let's check this again to make sure we know the truth . . .

Are there any sick people in heaven? No. Well start praying for the sick now. The power of God to heal is increasing every day. If you are sick you should ask someone to pray for your healing. If you know people who are sick you should ask them if you can pray for them and don't stop praying and believing.

Are there any lost people in heaven? No. Well guess what friends? The kingdom of heaven is here in power and there are over 80,000 people every day coming into the reality of that kingdom across the world. The power of God is present to save and convince people of their need of Jesus. Have you tested the water lately and shared your faith with anyone? Have you told anyone your story? Have you overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony lately?

Are there any demonised people in heaven? No. Well there are millions down here who need setting free. Satan has taken God's children captive and his power needs to be broken. As you and I pray those words, 'Your kingdom come,' and believe them - the demons will flee and prisoners will be set free right across this nation.

Throughout my ministry over the past 40 plus years I have sat in services and meetings where the kingdom of heaven flooded the room in a way I cannot describe and the powers of darkness manifested in people right across the auditorium all at once. There was screaming and yelling and cursing and then the power of the Holy Spirit packed those demons' bags and sent them out the back door in one massive purging and the peace of God fell on that place and healed people everywhere. There are no demons tormenting God's people in heaven and soon there will be none here either as God's kingdom comes and God's will is done here, on earth as it already is in heaven.

Are there any lonely, hurting, abused or rejected people in heaven? No. Well let's pray that the kingdom of heaven comes to our city through you and me as we reach out to the hundreds and hundreds of people around us every single day who go through life not feeling love or acceptance or grace from anyone.

If you want to see the power and reality of the kingdom of heaven unleashed in your community, in your Church, in your family, in your own life ... then perhaps you have the faith to pray this prayer with me right now:

May Your kingdom come, Lord, may Your will be done here in our city; here in this Church, as it is in heaven. Let the blind see, let the deaf hear, let the lame dance before your throne; let the prisoners rejoice in their freedom; let the demons flee for their lives; let bitterness die; let unforgiveness be gone; may there be no regrets; no tears of sadness - only tears of joy; let the righteous rejoice in the presence of their God; let the children run and laugh and play in the courtyard of their Father; let the army of God march into the enemy's camp and release all the hostages and bring them to freedom; let the power and the glory and the majesty and the excitement and the reality of Your kingdom flood our hearts, our minds, our Church, our city and our nation. In the mighty and matchless name of Jesus we pray, amen.

