

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM MERGE

Acts 1:11—Who also said, Men of Galilee, why do ye stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye beheld him going into heaven.

Revelation 19:6-10—And I heard as a voice of a great crowd, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of strong thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty has taken to himself kingly power. Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he says to me, Write, Blessed are they who are called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are the true words of God. And I fell before his feet to do him homage. And he says to me, See thou do it not. I am thy fellow-bondman, and the fellow-bondman of thy brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Do homage to God. For the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 21:1-7—And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea exists no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall not exist any more, nor grief, nor cry, nor distress shall exist any more, for the former things have passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says to me, Write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be him God, and he shall be to me son.

Revelation 22:16-17—I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And him that is athirst come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely.

May we have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather here unto Thy name, we praise and thank Thee for Thy faithfulness; for Thou hast promised us that “wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in their midst.” So Lord, we know that Thou art here with us. We pray that Thou wilt enable us to remove our shoes and stand in the place as Thy bondservants that we may be able to hear what Thou hast to say to each one of us to prepare and bring us into Thy very presence. We praise and thank Thee knowing that Thou art coming. Lord, we do pray that Thou would so prepare each one of us that we will be able to see Thee face to face without regret and without shame that we may glorify Thy name. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

THE KINGDOM BUILDS THE CHURCH

We have been sharing together on this matter of the church and the kingdom. First, we mentioned how the church is built by the kingdom. Our Lord Jesus said, “I will build My

church upon this rock and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” We do acknowledge that the One who builds the church is the Lord Himself. But how does He build His church? He builds it with living stones and with the life that He has given to each one of us. He builds His church through discipline, that is, everything that is in us which is not of Him will be dealt with until Christ is fully formed in each one of us. That is the reason why we say it is the kingdom that builds the church.

The problem with why the church has not been fully built through these twenty centuries is because God’s people do not know the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens, and this gospel must be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations before the end comes.

The kingdom is not just a term or a name; the kingdom is a reality. Christ is *the* King. He is not a nominal king; He is a real King. And as our King, He demands our absolute surrender. It is only under that condition that the principle of the kingdom can begin to work in our lives to remove everything that is not of Christ, so that Christ may be built up in each one of us, and we will be built together. So we need to remember how important the kingdom of the heavens is because it is the only means which the King will use to build up His church.

THE CHURCH BRINGS IN THE KINGDOM

We have also mentioned that it is the church which brings in the kingdom. When our Lord Jesus first came into this world, it was a fallen world, under a foreign rule, but He came from heaven to bring the kingdom of the heavens to this earth. His first message was: “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.” Thank God that through His preaching of the kingdom of the heavens, some people repented and put themselves under the absolute rule of Jesus the King. And in Matthew 11 the Lord Jesus said, “The kingdom of the heavens is to be seized by violence and the violent seize upon it.” The word *violence* is a neutral term. It depends on who you do violence to. If you do violence to other people, it is sinful, but if, by the grace of God, you are able to do violence do yourself—that is, to put our self underneath instead of allowing it to rule over us, then the violent shall seize upon the kingdom.

On the one hand, positionally, we are all in the kingdom of the heavens because our Lord Jesus said in Colossians 1 that He has delivered us out of the power of darkness and has translated us in the kingdom of the Son of His love (see v. 13). We who believe in the Lord Jesus are in the kingdom of the heavens positionally. But are we really living as a citizen of the kingdom of the heavens in our experience? So it is of absolute importance that as our Lord Jesus is building His church to realize that she has a tremendous responsibility. The church is an overcoming church because the Head of the church has overcome. On Calvary’s cross He cast out the devil and made a public show of His enemies. The victory of our Lord Jesus is absolute. How He denied Himself! He obeyed His Father even unto death, and that the death of the cross. Our Lord Jesus came into this world as a man and overcame the enemy as a man, and we are now in the train of that victory.

THE OVERCOMERS

The church has been given the commission to continue this victory of the Lord Jesus in the world and to defeat the enemy in our lives. How are we going to overcome? It is not by

ourselves; it is by the blood of the Lamb. We realize our weakness, but thank God that the blood of our Lord Jesus cleanses us from all sin. There is no need for us to dwell upon our defeats. As soon as we fall, we get up through the blood of our Lord Jesus.

And we overcome by the word of our testimony. We do have a testimony to bear and it is: "Jesus is Lord." But to bear that testimony, there must be a reality. Is Jesus really our Lord? If He is truly our Lord, then when we say: "Jesus is Lord" there is authority behind it.

And they love not their lives even unto death, and that the death of the cross. God is looking for His church to fulfill its mission to bear the testimony of Jesus. In spite of all the opposition that comes from the enemy, we thank God that because our Lord Jesus has overcome therefore we shall overcome. It is on that basis that the kingdom is brought in.

THE MANCHILD

We find in Revelation 12 that when the manchild is born, immediately he is raptured to the throne. You must remember that the air is where the enemy has his headquarters today, but that manchild will go through the air up to the throne which means that he has overcome Satan, the enemy. As soon as he reaches the throne, the Bible tells us that Michael and his angels will come to the air and fight with Satan and his followers, and there will be no more room there for Satan. He will be thrown down with his followers upon the earth, and the air will be clear to receive the Lord Jesus who will come from the throne to the air. When Satan is cast down upon the earth, the man of sin, the beast, and the false prophet—the trinity of evil—will be upon this earth, and that begins the Great Tribulation. How important it is for the church to be completed so that the kingdom might come!

THE COMING OF THE LORD IN TWO STAGES

Now we would like to consider how the kingdom and the church merge into one. I believe we all know that our Lord Jesus is coming soon. The expectation is here; but how will He come back? Will it be that one day the trumpet will sound, the angels will shout, and our Lord Jesus will come from heaven to this earth with His followers, and every eye will see Him? Is that the way He is coming? Is this the way the church expects Him to come? You know, there are a number of hymns that we have been singing that talk about the coming of the Lord. Usually the words of these songs speak of the trumpet sounding and the angels shouting, and our Lord Jesus coming with His followers. Is this the way He will come? Are you expecting that? Do you wait for that day to come? However, if we read very carefully the Word of God, we find that His coming is in two stages because this is the way He went to heaven.

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and His appearing to His disciples for forty days, He led them to the Mount of Olives where He ascended to heaven (see Acts 1). What was the scene at that time? The disciples who were with Him saw His feet ascending from the Mount of Olives going up. While they were looking at Him, a cloud came and took Him away, and they could not see Him anymore. But surely, He was still ascending. As they continued to look up, two men in white appeared to them and said, "Men of Galilee, why are you looking up in that way? The One who is leaving will come back in like manner." In other words, He will come back in the same way that He left. He left in two stages—the first stage was from Mount Olives to the cloud, which was visible, and every eye saw Him. But the second stage was from the cloud to the throne, which was invisible. Nevertheless, even

though it was invisible, we know that He did arrive there; for on the day of Pentecost we find that He was already crowned and anointed. Out of the Head came the anointing, and the oil came down upon the one hundred and twenty believers who were meeting there.

AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH AND LOT

When we read about the coming of the Lord in the Scriptures, especially in Matthew 24, the word *coming* in Greek is *parousia*. And those who know Greek tell us that *parousia* means “presence.” However, presence is not just one short time or one event; it is a series of events within a certain period of time.

Matthew 24 tells us that the coming of the Lord is like the days of Noah before he entered into the ark. The storm came suddenly, and the people were not aware of its coming. And Luke 17 tells us that it is like in the days of Lot. As soon as he fled from Sodom the fire came down and burned up those cities. So brothers and sisters, in this world it is like in the days of Noah—people are marrying and being given in marriage, doing business as usual; everything seems to be the same as what ordinarily happens. And suddenly it happened! Or as in the days of Lot when people were eating, drinking, building, and planting—everything going on as usual—but as soon as Lot went out, the fire came down.

HIS FIRST COMING WILL BE AS A THIEF

Brothers and sisters, the coming of the Lord is like those days. So far as the world is concerned, they were still sleeping because they were the sons of night, of darkness. But we who are the sons of day, the sons of light, should not be like that. Therefore, when the Lord comes, during the first stage from the throne to the cloud it is invisible.

That is why He used the parable of the thief because that is the way He is coming. Why is it so? No thief will blow the trumpet and say, “I am coming.” But strangely, it is as if the thief knows every hour that you are not watching, so he comes suddenly and goes just as quickly. The Lord Jesus said, “When two men are asleep in bed, suddenly one is taken and one is left. Two women are grinding at the mill in the morning, and suddenly one is taken and one is left. Two men are working in the fields, and suddenly one is taken and one is left” (see Matthew 24:40-41; Luke 17:34-36). This is the way the Lord will come. During the first stage, it is hidden; He will come as a thief. But when the thief comes, what is he looking for? What will He take? Will he come and take your garbage? Then I would hope he will come every night. And strangely, it seems as if the thief always knows where your treasure is, and He will go right to it and leave your trash.

THE TWO PLUS TEN EQUALS TWELVE—THE NUMBER OF THE CHURCH

Why did the Lord mention two in the Scriptures in Matthew and Luke? We know that two is the minimum of plurality. It is a type of the church and speaks of God’s people who are living at the time of His coming. Throughout the centuries, many who love the Lord, many who are the Lord’s, have gone to sleep; they have died. They were waiting for the Lord in their time. I sincerely believe that in the first century, people were looking for the coming of the Lord, and they were not mistaken because the Lord could have come during the first century. Why did He not come? The bride was not ready. He was ever ready, but it seems as if we are never ready. And He has waited and waited for twenty centuries, and we are still not ready.

These two mentioned in the Scripture represent the Christians who are living at the time of the coming of our Lord. Why is it that you have two women grinding at the mill in the morning, two at noontime working in the field, and two sleeping? It is because the earth is round. In some places it is morning, in other places it is noontime, and in other places it is night. When everything, so far as the world is concerned, seems to go on as usual—eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, building and planting—suddenly the manchild is born one day, and as soon as he is born he is taken up to the throne.

Now we know that the number of the church is twelve. There were twelve disciples, which is a complete number. In Matthew 24 and Luke 17 we find two who are living at the time of the coming of our Lord, but how about the other ten? In chapter Matthew 25 there are ten virgins. The kingdom of the heavens at that time is like ten virgins, and they are called virgins because they have been saved out of the world. People who are in the world and do not know the Lord Jesus are adulterers, but virgins refer to Christians because He has cleansed us, delivered us, and set us apart for Himself. Therefore, we are as chaste virgins waiting for our Bridegroom. And these ten virgins were waiting for Him. All ten had a torch with them, but the five wise ones had extra oil in their vessels. The five foolish ones had oil in their torch but they had not prepared for extra oil in their vessels. Probably they had filled their vessels with gold, silver and things that they considered as precious to their lives. But as they were waiting for the Lord, He seemed to delay His coming, and they all fell asleep which speaks of the death of believers. The believers' death is like a sleep. One day, we will wake up and see our Lord's face. So the ten virgins actually represent the believers who are waiting for the Lord but He did not return in their lifetime, and they passed away. But thank God that they will be woken up.

So brothers and sisters, the Lord will come like a thief. Only those who are waiting, who are watching, who are preparing, who do not allow things on this earth to pull them down and fasten them to the world, when the call comes: "Come up," away they will go. And so far as we Christians are concerned, this is the time we are looking for.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Immediately after they ascend to the throne as the welcoming party to our Lord Jesus, there will be war in the air, and Satan will be thrown down upon the earth. The air is clear for our Lord Jesus to descend from the throne to the air waiting for the rest of His own to ascend. During that period, there will be the Great Tribulation upon this earth as we find in Revelation 3. And the promise to the church in Philadelphia is that they will be delivered out of the time of the Great Tribulation because they have overcome. When the Great Tribulation comes, they will already be gone. However, the Christians who are not watching, who are being tied down to this earth, will have to go through the Great Tribulation. It is terrible, but so far as God's purpose is concerned, it is God's mercy. It is as if God gives Christians another opportunity to overcome. In that terrible situation, will they stand firm for the Lord and not worship idols and not have the mark of the beast upon them? Will they rather die without eating than to deny their faith? God gives them another opportunity to be overcomers. Thank God that out of the Great Tribulation, there will be overcomers coming out, as it were, of defeat. But brothers and sisters, what a terrible tribulation they will have to pass through!

Then the Lord shall return to the earth, and before His return, 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that all those who are asleep in Christ Jesus will be awakened, and those who remain on earth will be caught up together with them to the air—not to the throne—for the Lord is already in the air waiting for them. What happens during that period? The judgment seat of Christ takes place.

THE WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

Thank God that we who have been saved do not have to appear at the great white throne judgment. This is a governmental judgment—a judgment of eternal life or death. But thank God that we who believe in the Lord Jesus, who have received the Lord Jesus as our Savior, He was judged for us on Calvary's cross. Therefore, that judgment is no longer ours. Thank God that we have been saved from the great white throne judgment because eternal life has already been settled. On the other hand, it does not mean God's people will not be judged. There will be a family judgment. It is not called a throne judgment because throne is governmental. It is called bema, a seat or judgment seat.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

If you know the culture in the Eastern world, you will know that they have big families, and several generations live together. I came from such a big family. The head of the family, maybe the grandfather, was in control of the whole family and supported the whole family. From time to time, they would have a family meeting to which all the members of the family would be called together. But only those who are in the family could attend that meeting. If you are not in the family, you are not qualified to attend the meeting. The head of the family will sit on the bema, which is a lifted place, and there will be a family judgment. In other words, those children who have brought glory and honor to the family will be recommended and even rewarded. But those members of the family who brought shame and reproach to the family will not only be blamed but even disciplined.

That is the judgment seat of Christ where it will be decided who is worthy to rule and reign with Christ when the kingdom of the heavens shall publicly appear on this earth. If you do not qualify, you will be cast into outer darkness. This is what happened to the five foolish virgins because the door was shut. They could not enter into the marriage feast. They were in darkness, gnashing their teeth, regretting that for the love of a few hours of their lives, they lost their lives.

Brothers and sisters do not think any one of us will totally escape the discipline of the Lord. God is like a Father; a good father will never fail to discipline his sons. Without discipline people never grow up to manhood or womanhood. If we deny or refuse discipline today, one day during the kingdom age He will still discipline us because in Romans 8 it says, "Whom He has foreknown, He has called, whom He has called He has justified, whom He has justified He has glorified" (see vv. 29-30). In other words, everyone who is called, He will see to it that they are conformed to the image of His Son. Do not despise the discipline of the Father today. If you do, you will be disciplined during the kingdom age.

THE WRATH OF GOD POURED OUT

After the judgment seat of Christ is over and all the Christians have been raptured to the air, what happens on this earth? The Bible tells us about the seven vials which are the wrath of God being poured out. This takes place on the earth during the time of the judgment seat of Christ in the air. At the end of this, there will be a last war—the war of Armageddon. Satan will lead all the nations to rebel against God, and Christ will come with His overcomers to the earth to fight that battle. The Bible says that there will be a great earthquake, and Jerusalem will be broken into two. But thank God that among the chosen people He opens a way for those who trust the Lord to escape. When the feet of our Lord Jesus steps down upon Mount Olives, it will be broken into two and it opens the way for His chosen people to flee from disaster. Then Christ will come and put the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire. Satan will be bound and shut up in the abyss for a thousand years. Then the Lord Jesus will judge the nations of the world. Those who treat the Lord's people well will move into the kingdom age as sheep nations. They will be removed into the kingdom of God on earth as nations. During that period those overcomers will reign and rule with Christ from the air to the earth. The nation of Israel will become the first of the nations, and they will go out and evangelize the world. That is the glorious future.

THE TWO MARRIAGES AT THE END

In Revelation we discover that there are two marriages at the end. We find the first one in chapter 19—the wife of the Lamb has made herself ready. She is clothed with bright shining linen which is the righteousnesses of the saints. When the marriage feast comes, the Bridegroom has returned. The five wise virgins enter into the marriage feast and the door is closed. We believe that this marriage actually starts the millennium; in other words, it introduces the millennium. So our question is: who composes this wife of the Lamb that will be with Him throughout the thousand years?

In Revelation 21 we find another marriage. It says, “The bride of the Lamb is ready.” It is the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride for the Lamb. This happens a thousand years later because this is the introduction into eternity to come. So actually, we are told of two marriages here. Maybe it is only one and it continues on but it seems to be broadened. As I read this, I ask this question: Who is the wife of the Lamb in chapter 19? Is she different from the one in chapter 21?

The First Marriage

In my understanding, I feel there is a difference because chapter 19 was before the millennium, and the wife of the Lamb is composed of the overcomers of the church. The overcomers do not overcome just for themselves; they overcome for the whole church as the first fruits. When you have the first fruits, then you know you have the harvest. So I think it is a great privilege if, by the grace of God, we can be among the first fruits and be raptured to the throne where we will be the wife of the Lamb throughout the millennial time and rule and reign with Him from heaven upon earth.

The Second Marriage

Now in chapter 21, it is the beginning of eternity. The old heavens and earth have passed away, and the new Jerusalem is descending from heaven as the bride of the Lamb. This new Jerusalem is the consummation of all the works of God throughout the centuries. It is the gathering up of all the work of Christ including the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church.

We find that the new Jerusalem has twelve gates of pearl. There we find the twelve names of the tribes of Israel, that is, all the work of God in the Old Testament is gathered there. Then there are the twelve foundations which are the names of the apostles. All that the Lord has done in the New Testament in time is gathered there. It is a great coming together of all the work of God throughout the centuries. That will be the eternal bride of our Lord Jesus. It is a city of four-square which is an immense capacity. It is twelve thousand stadia long in breadth and height. And sixty stadia equals to about seven English miles, so you can compute how long it is. We have never seen such a big city before. What the Lord has done is tremendous!

And the wall is one hundred and forty-four cubits. A cubit is the length of the arm. We know that in the garden of Eden there was no wall because God wanted Adam to be the wall. He said, "You guard it." But he failed. However, in the new Jerusalem, there is a huge wall that is complete because it is the multiple of twelve which is perfection. The separation there is perfect. And the wall is made of jasper, and in Revelation 4, the One who sits on the throne is like jasper. It is the life of God; He is the wall.

There was no temple there because God and the Son are the temple. The whole city is a temple. God's throne is there, and there is a river of life coming down from the throne throughout the whole city. There are trees of life everywhere. It is a sign of God's life everywhere—His life alone. There is the river of life flowing through the whole city, and His servants shall serve Him day and night. They have His name upon their forehead. They shall see Him. There is no light; there is no need of light because God is the light and the Lamb is the lamp. There is no longer death or tears. The Lord said, "I make all things new."

Brothers and sisters, this is eternity. This is where we find the church and the kingdom merged into one. And this is our future. Thank God for that.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, what Thou hast prepared for us is beyond our imagination. Thou art the God of glory and nothing but glory will satisfy Thy heart. So Lord, here we are. We are full of shame but Thou art able to transform us from glory to glory as by the Lord the Spirit. O dear Lord, give us a strong desire to put ourselves into Thy hand and allow Thee to work out Thy full salvation, Thy glorious salvation upon each one of us. Deliver us from living for ourselves. Give us that strong desire—for us to live is Christ. Oh, dear Lord, may Thy will be done in us as it is in heaven. May glory be unto Thee! We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.