

The Kingdom Of Life In Conflict With The Kingdom Of Death

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"And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden" (Genesis 2:9).

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:15-17).

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:22-24).

"The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

"The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:1-5).

"But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We are occupied in these messages with those words: "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory", and I must take you back for a minute or two to where we began.

You will remember what we said about the last verse of Matthew 16 and the first verse of chapter 17. Jesus said to His disciples: "There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom", and because there are no chapter divisions in Matthew's writing, the record runs straight on into what is our chapter 17: "Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: and he was transfigured before them." Many people have thought that the Transfiguration was the fulfilment of those words at the end of chapter 16, for they think it was the "Son of man coming in his kingdom", but we have given good reasons for saying that that was only half of the truth. The Transfiguration was the King presented in His glory, but it was on the Day of Pentecost that the King came with the Kingdom, spiritually.

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THE POWER OF THE KINGDOM

Now it is from that point that we have to take things up. "Thine is the kingdom, and the power." It was on the Day of Pentecost that the Kingdom came in power, for although the disciples had seen the King, they had not received the power of the Kingdom. At the beginning of the Book of the Acts the King is speaking to them "the things concerning the kingdom", and then, having Himself been present as King and speaking these things concerning the Kingdom, He said to them: 'Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye receive power, and ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you not many days hence.'

What we want to see at this time, as the Lord helps, is what it is that the Kingdom and the power focus upon. What is it that the Kingdom and the power focus upon? In other words, if the coming of the Holy Spirit is the power of the Kingdom, upon what does the Holy Spirit focus His attention? I hope you will not think that I am exaggerating when I say that this is the most important thing in the Bible, and it is most manifestly true that it is the most important thing in the New Testament. Be very patient with me, for I want to get this very clear. What is the focal point of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Kingdom and the power?

What is the supreme mark of the Holy Spirit's interest? Let me put that in another way: What is the supreme

evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit? Now I am not going to give the answers that a lot of people are giving today. They are saying: 'Except this... and that... you don't know anything about the Holy Spirit!' Whatever there may be of other evidences of the Holy Spirit, and we are not discussing that, there is one supreme evidence of the Holy Spirit, and that truth is found in the Bible from the first chapter to the last. There are, of course, a lot of these other things which are not found in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, but you will find this one thing everywhere through the Bible, and it comes out into full manifestation at the beginning of the Book of the Acts. Well, one word: Resurrection. Resurrection is the greatest thing in the Bible, and most certainly in the New Testament.

RESURRECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

You open your Bible with this: "The spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters." What was He there for? Why was He brooding over the waters? Because the world had been baptized into the judgment of death. The baptismal waters had overflowed the whole earth in judgment and everything was in a state of darkness and death, so the Spirit of God was there for the purpose of resurrection - and it is something to be noted that it was on the third day of the creation that living things came into being on the earth. The earth began to produce living things on the third day, and everyone knows that it was on the third day that the Lord Jesus rose again.

Well, we cannot pass through the whole Bible on this matter. Undoubtedly Abram was in the realm of death. The beginning of his life with God was like a resurrection from the dead, and the climax of Abraham's life was the resurrection of Isaac. Later Israel as a people were in Egypt, the place of death. The judgment of death was executed upon Egypt, but, as by the power of resurrection, God brought His people out of the land of death and darkness. It is said that they were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:2), and we know that baptism is through death into life. Later the nation was in Babylon, the land of spiritual death, and there the Lord called deliverance from Babylon a 'resurrection'. The Lord said, through the prophet, "I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12).

That is only a very imperfect indication that resurrection governs the whole of the Old Testament.

RESURRECTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now when we come into the New Testament we come to these words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses." What did that witness turn out to be? It is in one statement: "And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 4:33). They were witnesses to two things, or to two sides of one thing. They were witnesses to the FACT of the resurrection, but they were more than that; they were witnesses to the POWER of the resurrection.

Why did the Lord Jesus dwell forty days with His disciples after His resurrection? Luke puts it into one statement: "He also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days." That is the answer to the question - "MANY proofs". He was going to leave them without any ground for a question about this matter of the resurrection, and they were going to have the evidence of the resurrection by many proofs.

Now, dear friends, resurrection is not just a doctrine. It may be Christian teaching, but it is not Christian doctrine without up-to-date evidence. Do you know that all the writing and the teaching about the Lord Jesus and the resurrection was not done until thirty-five years after it all happened? I do want you to get this. You see, we have it in a book, and I could be just telling you what is in the book, for there it says that Jesus died, was crucified, and God raised Him from the dead, and then He appeared to His disciples for forty days. You can read all that in the book - but not one apostle had a book, that is, a New Testament or any part of it. The teaching came after the truth, the fact. What is in the book came thirty-five years after the fact. If people were to ask those apostles: 'Now how do you know that Jesus rose from the dead?', they would never have said: 'It is in the book.' They said: 'It is inside of us!' It is a part of our own spiritual history, and you will only have to wait a little while to see the proof of that. You will do all that you possibly can in this world to kill this testimony, every kind of power that is known will be used to kill this testimony - and this testimony will prove to be greater in power than all the powers in this universe. When Jesus said: "Ye shall be my witnesses", He meant that the apostles themselves would be personal witnesses to this great fact. When Matthew wrote his Gospel, he did so because the things that were going to be in it had already been proved to be true in the world. Christianity had got on very well for at least thirty-five years without any written record, for it rested upon facts which were proved in the lives of those who preached. The impact of this Kingdom was upon a realm greater than this world.

THE KINGDOM OF INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of indestructible life. Do you get that? Let me say it again. This is not only a statement of Christian truth; it is a test of Christian life. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of indestructible life, but the Kingdom of God is in conflict with another kingdom, and this is a thing we have been emphasizing all the time. We have seen that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of LIGHT in conflict with the kingdom of darkness, and now it is the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of LIFE in conflict with the kingdom of death.

I wonder if you have ever stopped to think about: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you"? I think there are a lot of mistaken ideas about this matter of power. So many people tell us that THIS is what the power of the Holy Spirit is, and that... and that. Well, they may be more or less right, but what I am saying to you, dear friends, and what I believe to be the truth, is that the power of the Holy Spirit is the power of Divine life. If I had the time I could prove it from the Scriptures. You have only to see how power is linked with resurrection in the New Testament to see that that IS the power of the Holy Spirit. What does the Word say about the Holy Spirit's action in raising Jesus from the dead? It focuses upon the life that was in Him, and says that when Jesus was in the grave He did not see corruption. Peter quotes the Scriptures about this - "Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption " (Acts 2:27), and then applies that Scripture to Jesus and says: "Nor DID his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:31). The whole natural course of things was held in control. And then Paul says: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11). You see, the power of the Holy Spirit was demonstrated in suspending the power of death. And then there is that superlative word of the Apostle Paul: "The exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19-20).

RESURRECTION LIFE THE BATTLEGROUND

Well, I think you are getting clear that the supreme mark of the Holy Spirit's presence is resurrection, but this resurrection life is always the battleground between the two kingdoms. Take the case of the Lord Jesus. It says: "In him was life" (John 1:4), and remember that that is put right at the beginning of John's Gospel and is linked with the incarnation. This Divine life did not come into Jesus at some later period in His life. It was there from the beginning. Why is the little babe, Jesus, immediately the object of the great murderer, Satan? That devil-controlled man, Herod, will murder all the little boys in order to get that one Boy. Satan wants to destroy that life before it gets a chance of growing up! Well, the Holy Spirit saw to it that Herod did not succeed.

Then, when the Lord Jesus came up from the waters of baptism and commenced His preaching ministry, He commenced where all preaching ought to begin - in His own town. He went to Nazareth, and what did He say in the synagogue there? He took the prophet Isaiah and opened at the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18). The Divine life is within, and the Spirit is open. What was the end of that episode? The men of His town took hold of Him and dragged Him toward the edge of the hill in order to throw Him over and destroy Him. The life, the Spirit, and the warfare: the power of death seeking to destroy that Divine life.

And then, in Jerusalem. How many times did they take up stones to stone Him? How many times did they take counsel together to put Him to death? You see, it is the battle for this Divine life.

And what was true of the Lord Jesus was true of His apostles. The power of the Spirit came upon them, the Divine life was in them - and then the battle began! Peter is put in prison. He is brought before the council and the council decide to put him to death. Herod decides to put him to death. He had killed James, and when he saw that that pleased the people, he took Peter also. Stephen is stoned, and what shall we say about Paul? He said: "In deaths oft". They stoned him, and tried to kill him many times.

What is the reason for all this? It is that Divine life. Anything or anyone who really is possessed of this gift of eternal life is a marked person by Satan. Anything that has this Divine life in it is something that Satan cannot endure. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death is the great power of Satan, and the power of the kingdom of Satan. Life is the power of the Kingdom of God.

This, of course, means two or three things. The first question arises: If this is true, have we got this Divine life? Let me put that in another way. Does the devil leave you alone? Does the devil tolerate you? If there is any reason to feel that the devil is not troubled about you, that ought to be a very great trouble to you! It is a very good sign if the devil does not like you. Dead things are allies of the devil. A dead church is never troubled by him because it is his ally. Whether it be an individual Christian, or a company of Christians, if they have this

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Divine life they will be in a battle. It is an easy thing to say, but it is not so easy to experience. It is easy to say: 'Well, I believe that I have everlasting life,' and it is easy to say that we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it does involve us in a real conflict.

What I want you to take away with you is just this. This is not just teaching about resurrection. We are to be witnesses TO the resurrection, and, as I have said, witnessing is not even just taking the Bible and saying: 'It says in the Bible that Jesus rose from the dead.' We must not only have a Bible, we must BE the Bible. Why does the Lord allow the devil to attack us? In order that the testimony of the POWER of His resurrection might be manifested in us. Paul put it this way: "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:10 - R.V. margin). We are the testimony to the resurrection. "Ye shall be my witnesses... the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you."

Because that Divine life was in Jesus, in His apostles, and in the early Church, we are in the good of it today. Otherwise the best that would have happened would have been that Christianity was a story in some history books of two thousand years ago. It might even have ceased to be a story at all, so great was the power of the kingdom of death against it, but because this indestructible life was in it, and is in it, it goes on and on through the centuries. The power of death is sometimes so great that we wonder if we will survive and, like Paul, we despair of life, but, as I have said so often, up we come again! With Paul we say: "As dying, and behold, we live" (2 Corinthians 6:9).

This is the Kingdom of God in power in terms of Divine life. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8), but that which abides for ever is that life which the Lord has protected from the garden of Eden onwards.