

THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:8-10,13,16.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; For he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God ... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth. ... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

God's law is everywhere; God's kingdom is everywhere. We may try to ignore his law; we may rebel against his authority and his kingdom, but we cannot escape the influence of the kingdom nor the consequences of our choices concerning it. We have already observed, and shall find it increasingly true that the kingdom of God has many modes, many facets, and even many locations, for there is no space in which there is no kingdom, and unto every kingdom there is a law given. But in every kingdom -- earthly or heavenly -- animal, vegetable, or mineral -- physical or spiritual -- present or future -- God is King. His kingdom is universal. His law is the law of every kingdom; for he is the Lord God omnipotent, who reigneth.

We wish to consider in today's sermon some of the aspects of what we call the kingdom of heaven, or the heavenly kingdom, as separate and apart from the kingdom on earth. Jesus said that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto him. In God's infinity there is no division between earth and heaven, between living and dead, between past, present and future. To our finite minds there is. All the people we know are divided into two groups -- the living and the dead; those who now live on earth, and those who now live in heaven, or on another plane of existence. Faith tells us that God is supreme there too; that Christ has conquered death; that he is King and Lord over those we call dead, as well as over those living souls who are trying to do his will on earth.

Heaven is God's home -- his abiding place. Any attempt of our finite minds to fix the geographical location of his kingdom is futile and ludicrous; but reason says that it must be somewhere -- that there is no kingdom in which there is no space, as there is no space in which there is no kingdom. Because the spirits of the righteous dead are taken home to God, who gave them life in the beginning, we know that heaven must also be the temporary abode of the righteous, where they await the resurrection of the body. In Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus at his death was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. To the thief on the cross Jesus promised, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." To the disciples Jesus promised, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." To Peter Jesus said, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards." Of little children Jesus said, "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

The heavenly kingdom is also the dwelling place of Christ, the Son, who was with the Father in the beginning, and who returned to him after his death and resurrection. Stephen at his martyrdom looked upward and saw Jesus at the right hand of God. Paul understood heaven to be the abiding place of Christ when he wrote to the Colossians.

"Ye have a Master in heaven." Peter speaks of the Christ "who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."

Because the heavenly kingdom is an eternal kingdom, in which all the best and finest values of human personality will be preserved for all time, Jesus counselled his disciples not to lay up treasure on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal, but to lay up treasures in heaven. To the rich young ruler, he suggested that his perishable worldly wealth be given to the poor, so that he should have treasure in heaven. Paul wrote to the Hebrews who had been despoiled of their goods and worldly wealth, "ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Whatever treasure we accumulate on earth must be left behind at death; the treasure we amass in the heavenly kingdom will be ours for all eternity. It cannot be destroyed, and no one can take it from us.

The heavenly kingdom is represented in scriptures as the gathering place and the meeting place of all those who have chosen the paths of righteousness on earth. Jesus said that many should come from the north, and south, and east, and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. It is there, in the paradise of God, that they await in rest and peace the resurrection of the body, and the uniting of the heavenly kingdom with the kingdom of God on earth. It is there that our righteous loved ones await our coming. It is there that all the righteous await the day of resurrection, when Christ shall return to earth bringing the righteous with him in bodies immortal, to begin the thousand year reign.

Our human senses cannot observe or detect this heavenly kingdom. Our human knowledge cannot fathom its glories, or search out its place. Yet we see it through the eyes of faith; we walk by faith, not by sight. In faith we strive to show diligence, and to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Abraham was called to go out into a place which he should receive for an inheritance, and went out obediently, in faith believing God's promises. Like Abraham, we press on in faith, not yet having seen the heavenly kingdom, but believing that it is there, that God's promises are sure, and that if we are faithful and obedient we shall obtain the kingdom which he has promised -- the city not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, which he has prepared.

One thing we should keep constantly in mind as we strive for this heavenly kingdom is that the heavenly kingdom and the kingdom of God on earth are some day going to be one, and that even now they are essentially one, under one King, one Ruler, one Lord. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." The subjects of the kingdom in heaven and on earth are one family under the name of Jesus Christ -- children of God, heirs to his kingdom, and joint heirs with his Son our Lord.

Citizens of this heavenly kingdom while they live their lives on earth govern their conduct by their hope of the kingdom. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "For our conversation, (that is, our conduct) is in heaven." Even on earth, the citizens of God's kingdom are ever mindful of the kingdom to which they belong, and suit their conduct to the laws of that kingdom.

Those who live the heavenly way of life while on earth look forward to the day old things shall pass away, and there shall be a new heaven and a new earth -- when the citizens of the heavenly kingdom will be clothed in immortal and perfect bodies, and shall dwell on the new earth with their God and Savior. John saw this day in his vision on Patmos, and saw the redeemed arrayed in white robes around the throne of God. Peter looked for the new heaven and new earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness," where the righteous of all ages should dwell together in the perfected, sanctified kingdom which Christ delivers to the Father.

The kingdom of God is divided as to location, but one in loyalty, allegiance, purpose, and quality of life. Those who live in it and according to its law on earth will find the values they have created preserved in the final kingdom of God for all eternity.