

POLITICAL LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: Revelation 19:11-16

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Today's sermon title, THE POLITICAL LAWS OF THE KINGDOM, may sound contradictory and incongruous to some who supposed that there would be no politics in the kingdom of God. But if that kingdom is to be a kingdom, there will necessarily have to be certain laws and certain forms of government to implement the economic, social, moral, and physical laws about which we have been talking in the last few sermons.

Obviously God is King over the kingdom of God, ruling through the regency of his Son, Jesus Christ. He is ruler not by succession, for he was before all others. He is ruler not by right of exploration or discovery, for no unknown territory in all the vastnesses of space is unknown to him. He is ruler, not by right of conquest as are so many human kings; for he never had to depose or kill another king in order to have a kingdom. He is King by right of creation. He rules because he has a right to rule over that which he has made and created. He is the King who wrote the laws by which all the realms of space are governed. Rulers of worldly kingdoms have often tried to superimpose their own laws, but no human kingdom has ever survived for long if its rulers and its citizens have ignored the laws of God.

The people of ancient Israel were chosen to be God's people, and charged with the responsibility of demonstrating to the world the peculiar advantages of dwelling in a kingdom over which GOD was ruler. There was never any doubt about who was ruler in the early theocracy of Israel. The prophet leader ruled not in his own right or in his own strength, but in the name of God. The prophet was responsible for choosing the judges, who were military leaders endowed with special and supernatural power not only for judging violations of law or cases of difficulty between men, but for leading Israel in war against her enemies. Though Israel frequently lost sight of God and his purposes in them as a nation, there was never any doubt in the minds of the prophets and judges that God was king and ruler, and that they merely transmitted and executed his will.

When Israel demanded of Samuel the prophet that he make them a king, this demand was a violation of all that Israel had been taught from its beginning. When Samuel inquired of the Lord as to what he should do with this demand, God said, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." It is significant, however, that God, speaking through the prophet, chose the king. Saul was chosen and anointed by Samuel. It is significant that there was a deep and fundamental belief that God gave some special endowment to the king so chosen. Saul was told, "thou shalt be turned into another man," and the scripture says further, "God gave him another heart." When the Spirit of God departed from Saul after his disobedience and rebellion,

he was no longer a king -- but just an ordinary man -- and Samuel, God's spokesman and servant, deposed him as boldly as he had set him up in the beginning, anointing David in his stead.

Several things are significant in this account of the making and unmaking of kings. First, under Saul, and under David at the beginning of his reign, there was no nobility; one man was esteemed as good as another before God and before the King. Second, there was still a large degree of democracy within the framework of the monarchy. Samuel called the people together to ratify God's selection of Saul as king, and later to ratify his selection of David. The people were expected to assume much of the responsibility and burden of making governmental decisions. Third, not until David had established a kingdom patterned after the worldly kingdoms about him, taxing and burdening the people as Samuel had warned that a king would do, not until then was their any question of lineal succession -- of the throne passing from father to son. Saul made no attempt to name his successor, or to have his son follow him. David did. God did not choose Solomon, the son of David; he was set on the throne by the will of David and the political machinations of his mother, Bathsheba; and his accession was accompanied by revolt and bloodshed. Fourth, in the early kingdom there were constitutional limits on the king -- a written constitutional law. Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord." (I Samuel 10:25; See also Deut. 12:18-20)

In the theocracy of Israel, it will be noted that the state and religion were almost one and the same. God ruled, through prophets and judges, with the consent of the people. The rights of the people were safeguarded not only by constitutional law, but by the prophet who spoke for God, and deposed judges and kings who violated that law. In the theocratic state this combination of religion and politics worked very well. When David built up the power of the throne, established a nobility and a standing army to keep himself in power, this combination became a bad thing. In the days of Solomon, it resulted in the governmental sanctioning of paganistic religions which were brought in by Solomon's many wives. In later years, the established state religion which under the theocracy had been good, became corrupt, and gave the sanction of God to a state and a king which were oppressive and corrupt. In either case, it was a far cry back to the ancient concept of a theocratic kingdom in which God ruled through prophets and prophetically appointed judges.

Out of this historical material we may formulate some simple principles as the political laws of the kingdom of God. One is that there must always be freedom of choice, free moral will and agency in God's kingdom. There is no spiritual or moral value in an act which is forced against a man's will. Citizens of the kingdom must obey kingdom law because they want to, because they choose to, because it is their nature to. There may have to be a degree of coercion to prevent the criminal and the rebellious and the unregenerate from trespassing on the rights and privileges and liberties of others; but in the kingdom of God any coercion against a man's conscience, and attempt to force him into certain beliefs or moral actions against his will, is completely out of harmony with God's nature, God's purpose, and God's will. In the kingdom of God, it is not right that one man should be in bondage to another, for each man must be free to make his own choices, to plot the course of his own life, to arrive at his own moral decisions, in order that he may rightfully be held accountable for those choices and decisions. The fundamental political law of the kingdom then is freedom under God -- free moral will and agency -- free choice -- freedom to seek happiness and fulfillment in any and every way which does not limit or infringe upon the freedoms of someone else.

In the kingdom of God all men have equal rights and privileges, so long as they obey the laws of the kingdom, and respect the rights and freedoms of all others. There is no nobility in the kingdom of God save the nobility of unselfish service and of righteousness. No one man has a right to rule over his fellow men in the kingdom of God, for one is our ruler, even Christ, to whom God has given the kingdom as his vice-regent.

When Jesus returns in clouds of glory to rule in person over his kingdom, all the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. He will be known as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORES. He is the only man who ever lived who was worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing; who would use all these things as they should be used, and not be corrupted by them. The sad history of the human race has proved again and again that power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely, save when it is wielded by Jesus Christ, the King who alone is worthy to receive that power.