

## LIFE UNDER THE RULING OF THE KINGDOM

What is the real meaning of the kingdom? A kingdom is a **rule**, a **government**, and the **kingdom of God** simply means the **rule and government of God**. From eternity to eternity God is the King, the sovereign almighty Ruler of the whole universe. The entire universe from eternity to eternity is the kingdom of God. According to Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14:12-20, one of the archangels, Lucifer, rebelled against God, and a number of the angels followed him in his rebellion (Rev. 12:3-4). After the creation of man, Lucifer, or Satan, came to induce man to rebel also. Due to these two **rebellions**—that of Satan with his angels and that of man—the ruling and government of God has been greatly **interrupted**, **tested**, and **attacked**. Instead of being under the rule and control of God, the earth has come under the rule and control of Satan and fallen man. This is the **earthly kingdom**. By the time the Lord Jesus came to the earth at His incarnation, nearly the whole earth was the kingdom of the earth, controlled by Satan and by man. The Lord Jesus came to work out **God's intention** of bringing His kingdom into this world. God's intention is to **have the earth controlled by the heavens**. For this reason He needs to bring His kingdom to the earth. The whole earth needs to be brought under a heavenly rule and government. The Lord Jesus came to bring the earth under the control of the kingdom of the heavens.

This is why John the Baptist cried, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near” (Matt. 3:2). Men needed to **repent** and to come under the heavenly rule. When the Lord Jesus came with the kingdom of the heavens, He was rejected by the Jewish people; so He turned to the Gentiles and established His church among the Gentiles. Within the **church** He brought all things **under the control and government of the heavens**. In the church there is the heavenly rule and government, and there is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. During the period of the church age, however, the kingdom of the heavens, the heavenly rule, is not manifested in an open way. Rather, it is a heavenly rule in a very mysterious and hidden way. Although it is not yet manifested, the reality of the heavenly rule is present. In the church at least some of the Christians are under the ruling of the heavens. With them there is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will **subdue** the whole world, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord. At that time the kingdom of the heavens will be manifested in an open way (Rev. 11:15). The kingdom of the heavens will become the **ruling power** and **will govern** in a **manifested, open way**, not in a mysterious and hidden way. Now the kingdom of the heavens rules **within the church** in a hidden, mysterious way, but at that time the kingdom of the heavens will be fully manifested. The kingdom of the heavens simply means the heavenly rule and government. If you are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, you are under the control and rule of the heavens.

When the Lord Jesus turned the kingdom of the heavens to the church, He brought a group of people out of the world to be under the heavenly control. Through **regeneration** all the Christians have been brought **into the kingdom of the heavens**. This means that all Christians by their regeneration have been brought under the control of the heavens. This is a marvelous beginning, but after such a good beginning through regeneration, **not many are willing** to be controlled by the heavens. Therefore, they are regenerated and saved by the Lord, yet they are defeated. They had a good beginning, but they did not have a good continuation. They were brought into the kingdom by their new birth, but they did not continue practically in the kingdom by being willing to be controlled by the heavenly rule. Within the church the true believers have been regenerated and brought into the kingdom of God. But among these true believers many are defeated. Only a small number are victorious and overcoming. The **overcomers** are the ones who are **willing** to be under the control of the kingdom of the heavens. They are willing to live and walk and do things according to the teachings of the Lord concerning the reality of the kingdom in Matthew 5-7. They are **sanctified**; they are **victorious** over sin, self, the flesh, and the world; and they are **in the process** of being transformed.

Let me cite some examples to help you understand the meaning of being under the rule of the heavens. In a university there are many students who are unsaved; there are other students who are regenerated, saved Christians, but who are not victorious and overcoming. Rather, they are defeated. Only a small number of the Christians are victorious and overcoming. Because most of the students may be naughty, they need to be **controlled by the administration** of the school. If, however, you are a Christian **under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens**, you should **not need** the control of the administration of the school. If the rules say that the lights must be off by ten thirty, you should not

need someone to come by and enforce this rule. The unbelievers and the defeated Christians may even cover the light and continue to study until two o'clock in the morning. If you did such a thing and you were **under the rule** of the kingdom of the heavens, you would surely **repent** and go to the school administration, apologizing and offering to pay for the electricity. If you are **under the rule** of the kingdom of the heavens, there is **no need** for anyone to control you. If we need policemen to control us, it means we are defeated Christians. We must be those heavenly people who are under a **heavenly ruling**, a **heavenly control**, and a **heavenly government**. We should have no need of any other kind of control.

Even cultured, educated ladies and gentlemen will sometimes steal something when they have an opportunity. This means that they are simply **under the control of this earth**; they are not under the control of the heavens. If the police were removed from any major city, what confusion and chaos would result! This is because people today are under the control of the earth and the earthly government and not under the control of the kingdom of the heavens.

As the heavenly people, we must be **under the heavenly control**, **under the kingdom of the heavens**. This is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. God's intention in regenerating us is to bring us under His heavenly control. But many of us, after being regenerated, are **not willing** to be controlled by the heavenly ruling; we are in the church, but we are not in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

The kingdom of the heavens belongs to those who are **poor in spirit**, who are **pure in heart**, who are **meek**, whose **righteousness exceeds** that of the Pharisees, and **who do the will of God**. Whoever lives in such a way is in the kingdom of the heavens, and the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. The Word does not say shall be yours but is yours. When we are pure in heart and poor in spirit, the kingdom is ours. This means that we are in the kingdom now, and we are under the ruling of the kingdom of the heavens now.

### **THE KINGDOM BEING RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY**

In Romans 14:17 the apostle Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." In dealing with **ourselves** we must be **righteous**; with **others** we must have **peace**; before **God** we must have **joy**. If we are lacking any one of these three things, it means that we are wrong. It indicates that we are not living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Many years ago I thought that all Christians were wonderful, but now I realize that many Christians are very selfish. They are not under the control of the heavens. They are not strict in dealing with themselves so that they may be righteous; they do not have the full peace with others; and they do not have joy before God and with God. If you are **under the control of the heavens**, you will **deal with yourself according to righteousness**, you will **keep peace with others**, and you will be **joyful before and with God**. This is the heavenly ruling, the heavenly government, and it is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

You **may** be a regenerated member of the church and yet **not** be under the control of the heavens. Although you are in the church, you are not in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. If you are a defeated Christian, not living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, where will you be when the Lord Jesus comes back? Some have taught in the past that although you are defeated now, when the Lord Jesus comes back, you will be treated the same as the overcoming, victorious ones, and you will go into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to be a king with the Lord. This is not logical.

### **THE KINGDOM AS AN INHERITANCE**

Consider the case in 1 Corinthians 5. A brother who was in the church in Corinth committed a sin that even the worldly people would condemn. Let us read 1 Corinthians 5:1 and 5: "It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication that does not even occur among the Gentiles, that someone has his stepmother...To deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." When the Lord Jesus comes back, will such a sinful one be lost? No! Verse 5 says, "That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

When the Lord Jesus comes back, surely the apostle Paul will be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens and rule as a king with the Lord Jesus because **he had already been living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens**. But what about that sinful brother in Corinth? Do you think that he was living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens? He was in the church in Corinth, but he was not in the reality of the kingdom of the

heavens. As such a **defeated, sinful believer**, surely he will **not** be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to rule and reign with the Lord.

Let us also read 1 Corinthians 6:6-7: “Brother goes to court with brother, and this before unbelievers. Already then it is altogether a defeat to you that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?” The Lord’s attitude toward the brother who was in fornication and toward those who were defrauding one another is in verses 9 and 10: “Do you not know that the **unrighteous will not** inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be led astray; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor effeminate nor homosexuals nor thieves nor the covetous, not drunkards, not revilers, not the rapacious will inherit the kingdom of God.” Chapter 5 shows that a fornicator is still saved, but chapter 6 shows that such a person **cannot** inherit the kingdom of God. The Word does not say that he cannot enter the kingdom of God but that he cannot inherit the kingdom of God. There is a big difference between **entering** the kingdom of God and **inheriting** the kingdom of God. To **enter** the kingdom of God, **we simply need a new birth** (John 3:3, 5). But to **inherit** the kingdom of God, we need to **live in the reality** of the kingdom of the heavens now.

When will the overcomers, the victorious ones, inherit the kingdom of God? Surely that will be at the time when the Lord Jesus comes back. The **kingdom today** is not an enjoyment but an **exercise**. Today we are **not** enjoying or inheriting; today we are exercising. But when the **Lord Jesus comes back**, the kingdom will be an **enjoyment** to us. At that time we will enjoy the kingdom, and we will be kings ruling with the Lord Jesus. The kingdom will be an **inheritance** to us. To be saved into the kingdom is one thing; to inherit the kingdom of God is another thing.

### SUFFERING A LOSS

When the Lord Jesus comes back, the apostle Paul will inherit the manifestation of the kingdom. But what about the sinful brother in 1 Corinthians 5? Will he inherit the kingdom of God? No! What will happen to him? The answer to this is found in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15: “The work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone’s work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” When the Lord Jesus returns, the fire will prove each one’s work. If anyone’s work **remains**, he will receive not salvation but a **reward**. These verses are not related to the security of our salvation; they are related to whether we will receive a reward or suffer loss when the Lord Jesus comes back. Verse 15 says, “He will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” Do not consider that as long as you are saved, there is no problem. To be saved is one thing, and to be rewarded or to suffer loss is another. You can be **saved** and **yet still suffer loss**. And even though you **suffer loss**, you will **still be saved**. Once we are **saved**, **we can never be lost** (John 10:28-29). But once we are **saved**, we can either be **rewarded** by the Lord or **suffer loss**.

### THE EXERCISE OF THE KINGDOM

The kingdom of the heavens is used by God for two purposes: first is for the **exercise of His children**, and second is for a **reward to His children**. Today the kingdom of the heavens is an exercise. Do not say that we have been saved by grace and that everything is by grace. Yes, we do have Christ as grace, but we also have the **kingdom as an exercise**. Even with a proper family life there are these two sides. In the Bible there is surely the side of enjoyment and grace, but there is also the side of exercise and responsibility. Christ is the grace, and the kingdom is the exercise. By His resurrection the Lord Jesus has regenerated us (1 Pet. 1:3). But now that we are **regenerated**, we must be **exercised** in the kingdom. We are not simply in the home of God; we are also in the kingdom of God. The home is a place for grace and enjoyment, but the kingdom is a place for exercise. Many Christians simply enjoy the family life of the household of God, but they neglect the exercise of the kingdom life. The kingdom of the heavens is used by God to cause us to exercise.

### THE REWARD OF THE KINGDOM

The kingdom of the heavens is also used by God as a **reward** to His **faithful children**. If we **exercise** ourselves in a **proper way** after we are saved, we will enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens as a reward. **Today** the kingdom of the heavens is an **exercise** to us, but **tomorrow** it will be an **enjoyment** to us. The big question is whether or not we will be **qualified** to inherit the kingdom of the heavens. God is very gracious, but He is also very wise. He saves us by His grace, but in His wisdom He causes us to be **exercised** by the kingdom, and He will **reward**

us with the kingdom. If we are **defeated**, when He comes back, surely He will **punish** us. We will not enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens as our inheritance.

Now let us read Matthew 24:37-44: “Just as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day in which Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know that judgment was coming until the flood came and took all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. At that time two men will be in the field; **one is taken and one is left**. Two women will be grinding at the mill; **one is taken and one is left**. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes. But know this, that if the householder had known in which watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also be ready, because at an hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming.” These verses show that the Lord Jesus will come back, not as a visitor but as a thief, either to **steal you away** or to **leave you here**. When the thief comes, he always steals **only precious things**. If you are a precious one when the Lord Jesus comes back, you will be stolen away, but if you are a defeated believer, you will not be so precious to the Lord, so He will not take you away. The Lord’s words were, “Be ready, because at an hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming.”

Let us also read Matthew 24:45-51: “Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, **will find so doing**. Truly I say to you that he will **set him over all his possessions**. But if that evil slave says in his heart, My master delays, and begins to **beat** his fellow slaves and **eats and drinks with the drunken**, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will **cut him** asunder and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” Do not consider that the slave who was **cut off signifies an unbeliever**. The fact that he is a slave indicates that he is saved. Consider your own situation: you are saved, but are you a faithful slave of the Lord? Are you the first slave or the second? If you are the first slave, the Lord Jesus will set you over all His possessions when He comes back. But if you are the second, you will be cut off from this ruling manifestation and, furthermore, you will suffer. You will weep and gnash your teeth.

### THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

This section continues with Matthew 25:1. At that time indicates that chapter 25 is a continuation of chapter 24. The phrase the kingdom of the heavens indicates that the previous discourse is also related to the kingdom of the heavens. In chapter 25 the kingdom of the heavens is likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. **Each** of the ten **had a lamp**, indicating that **each was regenerated**. But five of them were **prudent**, and five were **foolish**. Those who were **foolish** took their lamps but **took no oil** with them in their vessels. Their lamps were lit, but they did not have an extra portion of oil. The **prudent**, however, **took oil** in their vessels with their lamps. They had oil in their lamps and also another portion of oil in their vessels. Oil, of course, is a type of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is in our regenerated spirit. But besides this portion of the Spirit, we need to have another portion, that is, the filling of the Spirit in our soul, our vessel. We need to have a **portion of the Spirit in addition to what we received in our spirit at regeneration**.

Verse 5 says that while the bridegroom delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. Not only did the five foolish ones become drowsy and sleep, but the prudent ones also became drowsy and slept. **Sleep** here indicates **death** (1 Thes. 4:15). This means that all ten of the virgins died. Because the Lord has tarried these many years, saint after saint has died, including those who are overcomers. This indicates that the **ten virgins** do not represent the living saints but the **dead saints**. Since the number signifying the church is twelve and not ten, where are the other two saints? They were included in the previous chapter. In Matthew 24:40-41 the Lord indicated that two men may be in the field or that two women may be grinding at the mill. These two represent the living ones at the time of the Lord Jesus’ return. When the **Lord returns**, the **majority** of the Christians will have died. Ten is the majority of twelve. This is the principle in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament time ten tribes rebelled against the house of David. Only two were left—Judah and Benjamin. This means that the majority of the tribes rebelled. When the Lord Jesus returns, the majority of the Christians will have died, and only a minority will still be living. The ten virgins represent the dead saints. Due to the Lord’s tarrying, all these will have become drowsy and slept. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 Paul uses the word asleep to indicate those who have died. We must see that the ten virgins



represent the majority of the Christians who will have died by the time the Lord comes back. **Not only the foolish ones will have died, but also the prudent ones will have died.**

At midnight the cry came: "Behold, the bridegroom!" (Matt. 25:6). Then all the virgins **arose** and trimmed their lamps. This means they **rose up** in resurrection. The dead saints rose up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish then asked for oil from the prudent virgins. Their own lamps were going out, and they had no oil in their vessels. Since their lamps were going out, it means they were lit, indicating that they are saved. Even the foolish ones had their lamps lit, but they **did not have an extra portion** of the oil for further use. The foolish virgins were told that they needed to go and buy the oil for themselves. While they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Afterward, the foolish virgins came desiring to enter into the wedding feast, but the bridegroom's reply was that he did not know them. The **foolish** virgins **suffered a great loss**; they were unable to enter into the wedding feast.

When the Lord Jesus returns, all the dead saints will be **resurrected**, and those who are **ready** will **enjoy** the wedding feast. In other words, as the Lord's cultivated land (1 Cor. 3:9), they are matured and ripe, so they are ready to enter into the wedding feast of the Lamb. The wedding feast is simply the one thousand years of the millennium. The wedding day of the Lord Jesus will be one thousand years long. Your wedding day only lasted one day, but the wedding day of the Lord will last a thousand years. To the Lord a thousand years are just like one day (2 Pet. 3:8). The millennium will be the wedding day to the Lord, and that day will be the wedding feast. If you are **ready**, if you are **ripened**, if you are **victorious**, **the Lord will invite you** into that wedding feast. That wedding feast is also the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

Suppose you are **not ripened and victorious**, yet you die before the Lord Jesus comes back. When He comes back, **you will be resurrected**, and the Lord will tell you to **go and buy** the oil. You will not be ready to enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. You will not be ready to go into the wedding feast, so you will have to **pay the price and suffer something**. Why did the Lord tell them that He did not know them? In Matthew 25:12 the Greek word is translated into "know," but in Romans 7:15 the same Greek word is translated into "acknowledge." If you translate this word into "acknowledge" in Matthew 25, it will be easy to understand. It means "I do not acknowledge you." It means the Lord never approved. The Lord did not approve of what they had been doing after they were saved. For the Lord to say that He did not know them means that He did not acknowledge them. They did many things, but it was not the Lord who allowed them to do so. What then shall the foolish virgins do? They will have to pay the price to gain the other portion of oil, to become ripened and matured.

Suppose a person **believes** in the Lord, but after he has believed in the Lord and been saved, **he does not** seek the Lord and love the Lord. Rather, he lives just like a worldly person. After twenty years he dies, without being ripened, without being matured. When the Lord Jesus comes back, surely He will deal with that person. Do you think that he is ready to meet the Lord? The apostle Paul is ready, but **that person is not**. The apostle Paul is matured and ripe, but he is not. In principle, surely the Lord has to do something to make that person ripe and mature. In principle, he must **pay some price** to become ripe. Although the Lord does not give us the details, we can see in principle that the defeated Christians will not be ready to enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. They will have to pay something and suffer some loss in order to be matured.

### THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

The second parable in Matthew 25, the parable of the talents, shows the same principle. All are slaves, and yet some are not allowed to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Let us read from verse 22: "He who had received the two talents also came and said, Master, you delivered to me two talents; behold, I have gained another two talents. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master. Then he who had received the one talent also came and said, Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow. And I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the earth; behold, you have what is yours. And his master answered and said to him, Evil and slothful slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he shall abound; but from

him who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away from him. And cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” The **faithful slaves** were **invited** into the **joy** of their master, but the **slothful slave** was **rebuked** by the master and cast into the outer darkness where he would experience **weeping** and **gnashing of teeth**. The slothful slave was punished **so that he might become ripe and matured**.

### A SERIOUS WARNING

The kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly ruling, the heavenly government of the Lord Jesus. After we have been **regenerated**, we have to be **under this ruling**. If we are under this ruling, we will be **victorious** and **overcoming**. We will be in the **reality** of the kingdom of the heavens, and we will **enter** into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to rule and reign with the Lord. But if we are **defeated** Christians, when the Lord Jesus comes back, we will **suffer a loss**, and we will be **punished** so that **we may become mature**. When the Lord returns, we will be rewarded or punished according to our exercise in the kingdom. If our exercise has been **proper** in the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord will **reward** us with the manifestation of the kingdom. If we have **not exercised** in the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord will render a certain kind of **punishment** to us. This does not mean that we will be lost but that we will suffer something to help us ripen. We are the Lord’s children, His crop, His cultivated land (1 Cor. 3:9). As the Lord’s crop, **we must eventually be matured**, whether in this age or the next. If we are **not willing** to be ripened in this age, when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will **deal** with us, and we will be forced to be ripened in the next age. On the one hand, we have eternal security; once we are saved, we are saved forever. But on the other hand, there is a serious warning. Today the Lord gives us the kingdom of the heavens as an **exercise to test us**. When He **comes back**, He will give us the kingdom of the heavens as a **reward if we exercise ourselves properly**. Otherwise, He will **render a certain kind of punishment** to us so that we can pay the price to be ripened. May the Lord be gracious to all of us.

*(The Kingdom, Chapter 48)*