

## Living for the Kingdom of God

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*As his divine power has given to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us by glory and virtue, through which he has given to us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust... Wherefore the rather, brethren, use diligence to make your calling and election sure, ... (II Peter 1:3-4, 10)*

*Lord, we thank You and praise You that You have given us another chance to gather before You. Lord, we acknowledge that the reason You have not come back is because You have long-suffering for us. Lord, we pray that You do not let us indulge because You have been patient with us. We pray that because of Your patience and tolerance we can be more diligent and that we can truly be a people who wait for and hasten Your coming. Lord, we put this time before You. We pray that You use this time to do Your work. We give all glory to You, Lord. In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.*

Our risen Lord, because He loves the Church, has given the Church ministries. If we summarize and categorize the nature of the ministries the Lord has given to the Church in the New Testament, we say that there are primarily three categories. Three persons represent these three categories. There is the ministry of Peter. His ministry is especially related to the kingdom of God. We also see the ministry of Paul. His ministry is related to the temple of God. We also see the ministry of John. His ministry is especially related to the House of God.

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According to the characteristics of the ministry, Peter's ministry is the beginning, because he preaches the kingdom of God. When people hear about the kingdom of God, they believe in the Lord Jesus. Today we not only believe in the Lord Jesus, but also submit to Him, because His gospel is the gospel of the kingdom. So we not only believe in the kingdom but we also obey and submit to Him, because we believe in Him and obey Him. Then the Church, that is the temple of God, can be built. Today the reason that the temple of God cannot be built is because although many believe in Him, very few submit to Him. Therefore we see the temple of God cannot be built. If we believe in the Lord and submit to Him, then the ministry of Paul can start. Now with the temple of God, we can see the House of God. Then we can see brotherly love. Therefore, according to this order, the ministry of Peter comes first; then the ministry of Paul and the ministry of John follow.

Of course we know these three ministries cannot be separated. We cannot accept one ministry and reject the other two, because our Lord has given ministries to His Church. For many years in the past, it seems that God's children have paid attention to Paul's ministry and have received much teaching. But in the last few years, we have seen the preciousness of the ministry of John. When God's Church seems to be struggling and falling, we need the ministry of John to restore her. So we have started to pay attention to John's ministry.

But, brothers and sisters, in me there is another feeling. Isn't it true that in this end time we have to come back to the beginning? Isn't it that at the very end of these end days, we need to go back to look at the ministry of Peter, the ministry of the kingdom? It is because our Lord is returning. The kingdom is to appear. It seems then and now that we have to pay more attention to the ministry of the kingdom. Isn't it that our Lord has told us in Matthew 24 the gospel of the heavenly kingdom will be preached all over the world and then the kingdom will come?

Brothers and sisters, we have some knowledge of Paul's ministry. And we probably also have some knowledge of John's ministry. But how much do we know about the ministry of Peter? In the feeling of many brothers and sisters, it seems that they do not

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know what is the kingdom of God. We know we should believe in the Lord Jesus. We know we should be built up together as the temple of God. We also know that we should love one another in the house of God. But how are we related to the kingdom? What is the kingdom of God? What is going on in the kingdom of God? Are we related in any way with the kingdom of God? Maybe it is very vague in our concept. So I think today we should pay more attention to Peter's letters, because the ministry God entrusted to Peter is the ministry of the kingdom.

The term 'kingdom of God' has a very broad definition. Our God is from eternity to eternity. This is what Moses told us in Psalm 90. From eternity to eternity He is God. What about 'the kingdom of God'? The kingdom of God is the realm where God has authority. It is the realm ruled by the authority of God. So we can say from the time when God created the heavens and the earth, the kingdom of God began. From that time until eternity, that is the scope of the kingdom of God. His authority rules all over the whole world. His throne is established forever. And this is the kingdom of God. So we see that the realm of the kingdom of God is immense. And the kingdom of God includes the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God includes also the kingdom of our Lord Jesus. It includes the eternal kingdom. Wherever the authority of God rules, there is the kingdom of God.

But the Bible also shows us there is a narrower definition of the kingdom of God. The narrower definition of the kingdom of God is this: the scope where the character of God gets expressed; that is the kingdom of God. The authority of God rules all over heavens and earth; there is nothing that is not under His authority. But not everyone under His authority is willing to submit to His authority. Actually we see much rebellion towards His authority even under the scope of His authority. Not every thing under this realm declares His character and His glory, because we see many things contrary to His nature and His glory. So, narrowly defined, strictly speaking, those that oppose to His authority or His glory cannot be included in the kingdom of God. Although they are not in the strict definition of the kingdom of God, they are still in the realm of the kingdom of God in the broader definition.

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When God created heavens and earth, the heavens declare the glory of God. All things express the glory of God. At that time, there was no difference between the wider definition of the kingdom of God and its stricter definition. Wherever the authority of God is, His glory is also expressed. His authority and His character is fully expressed in His realm. We thank and praise God. At that time, everything is harmonious. All things are summed up to one in the Son of God.

However, after a number of years, -- we do not know how many years -- in the world before this one, something happened. In the previous world, within the creations of God, the highest was the angels. God created the angels to rule all things under His authority. Through the services of the angles, the glory of God can be expressed. According to the Bible, there were different levels among the angels. There were the chief archangels. Among the archangels, probably there was one who was first made. Although the Bible did not say so explicitly, all Bible students acknowledge that Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:11-18 tell us rather implicitly what happened in the previous world.

In the previous world, one of the first archangels who was called Lucifer was the most beautiful and perfect of all creations of God. God gave Lucifer many gifts and a high position. He was one of the cherubim that covered the arch of God. When God told Moses to build the arch, right on top of the arch was the mercy seat. On both sides of the arch there were two cherubim covering the arch. They were there protecting and maintaining the righteousness and holiness of God. God possibly wanted to use these two cherubim to lead the whole universe to praise and worship Him, because when we come to the Book of Revelation, we see that all the praises in heaven are led by the four cherubim.

According to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, when Lucifer was first created, he was perfect. He was doing the duty as one of the cherubim that covered the arch. He also led all the angels in the universe to praise and worship God. By the abundance of trade, he did a lot of business and received many trusts from God. Then pride arose in him. His eyes no longer focused on God. He looked at himself only and saw his own beauty, his gifts and his own position. He saw the many trusts

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and power that God had given him. Then his 'self' arose in him and he aspired to rise to the utmost high. He said, 'I shall sit on the council of God.' God is a trinity God, and the three meet on the council. But now Lucifer said, 'I want to join the council and I want to be equal with God.' Because of this covetousness in him, he was not willing to stay in a position of the created. He wanted to be equal with the Creator. He did not do his duty faithfully. As a result, he committed unrighteousness, violating God's ruling. So, as the Bible tells us, God drove him out of the Garden of Eden. This is the origin of Satan, a name which means the adversary.

So we see that God did not create Satan. God only created a beautiful archangel, but he turned himself into the adversary of God, because he was not willing to submit to the authority of God. So the judgement came to him. He was expelled from the Garden of Eden in heaven. In the Gospel according to Luke, our Lord Jesus said, 'I saw Satan as lightning falling out of heaven.' This remark refers to this incident.

When Satan was cast out, as the Bible hinted to us, onethird of the angels followed him and rebelled against God. The realm in which he ruled went into void and confusion. Probably our planetary system was under the rule of this particular archangel. Genesis 1:1 says, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' Then immediately it tells us 'the earth was waste and empty'. The earth had entered into curse and judgement.

After Satan was cast out, he established his own kingdom of darkness. The kingdom of God is bright and righteous, reflecting the character of God. But Satan, according to his own nature, created his own kingdom, which is dark and unrighteous. He created his kingdom of darkness to oppose the kingdom of God. But, although Satan has his own kingdom, it does not mean that he is no longer under the authority of God. He remains under the judgement of God. His separating himself from God does not mean that he is free. Even his working in this world could not have been carried out without God's permission. So we can see he is still under the authority of God.

But God desires to restore his creation. So in Genesis 1:3 we

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read: 'The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.' The Spirit of God is like a mother hen covering the corrupted, damaged earth, restoring it with His love. Why did God want to restore this earth? The purpose is to render this earth habitable. But why did He want to make the earth habitable? Because in His will, He wanted to create man. So when the earth was restored in six days, on the sixth day, He created man in His own image and gave man dominion over birds in the sky, animals on earth and fish in the ocean. God told him to multiply to cover the whole earth and to tend to the garden. The word 'tend' in the original language means to subdue. God wants man to subdue the creation which became corrupt, so that it can come back to the authority of God, and all creations can be restored to their original harmony to express the nature and glory of God.

So God created man in His own image with a purpose. When God created angels, He did not create them according to His own image. Only when God created man that He created him according to His own image. He had great hopes for man. He plans to use man, who is slightly lower than the angels, to subdue the whole earth to accomplish His will. This is the amazing work of God.

But our ancestors Adam and Eve did not subdue all things to God according to God's eternal purpose. They were tempted and sinned against God. Not only did they not subdue all things, they themselves were subdued. They gave up to Satan the dominion that God had given to them. So now Satan is called the king of this earth. God did not give this dominion to Satan. He gave this dominion to man. But man gave this up to Satan. Not only did man not cooperate with God but they threw themselves to the adversary's camp. So curse came to earth. Thorns came out of the ground. Thorns are actually aborted trees. A plant should bear fruit. But when it does not bear fruit, it becomes thorns. It fails to accomplish the purpose of God.

However, God did not give up His original purpose. He still wants to get His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In heaven, there is no problem in His kingdom, because those challenged Him have already been cast out. All the angels in heaven are in one unity obedient to God. They worship and praise God. But on earth, it is

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different. So God wants His kingdom to be on earth as it is in heaven.

Originally, God wants man to accomplish this job. But the first man failed. In the fullness of time, God sent the second man to earth. He still needs a man, but this time the man is not Adam. This man is the Christ. Therefore our Lord came to this world to become a man, the one originally created by God. He came to this earth completely obedient. He completely laid down Himself and absolutely obeyed God. The glory of God is in Him. The character of God is expressed by Him. The power and dominion of God is also expressed from Him. When He was nailed on the cross, He accomplished the work of God. Not only did He bear all our sins on the cross so that our sins could be cleansed because of His blood and bring the whole race of Adam to the cross to be crucified, He also brought an end to the race of Adam. He started a new race, a race chosen by God. Also, when our Lord was nailed on the cross, He put to death Death itself. He crushed the devil that was holding the power of death. The Bible tells us that, when He was on the cross, He took captivity all the principalities and the power-holders and publicly put them to shame. In other words, when our Lord was on the cross, He totally defeated His adversary and His kingdom. And when He was raised to heaven, God crowned Him to be the king of kings and lord of lords, with honor and majesty to be His crown. The grand deed of the earth was given to Him by God. He is now in heaven executing His victory and is completing His work of restoration through the people on earth whom He has redeemed.

Why are we talking about this? It is because our calling is closely related to the kingdom of God. Oftentimes we do not understand why we have been selected. We do not understand the reason why God called us. Christians ordinarily think that God has chosen and called them because He wants them to be saved, so that they can be spared of the pain of hell and go to heaven to receive His eternal blessings. Of course these are all included in salvation. But if we think that we are called and selected merely because of this, then we are still very selfish and self-centered, thinking only that 'God is for me'. But the Word of God tells us how God has chosen us. In Ephesians 1, it says that God has chosen us before the foundation of the world. Before the universe, including the earth, was formed and

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before God created anything at all, in the eternity past, God has chosen you and me in Christ. This is indeed a mystery, a glorious mystery. When there was no shadow of us, before the foundation of the world, God already saw us and knew us, and chose us in Christ.

I often feel that it is truly a solid foundation that God has chosen us. If God had chosen us according to our own merits, then this foundation would never cease shaking. But God has chosen us according to His fore-knowledge and according to Himself. II Peter 1:3 tells us that we are called according to God's glory and virtue. The Book of Romans tells us that we are called by God not according to our works but according to the Lord that calls us. It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. Today God calls us according to His mercy, His glory and His excellent virtue. Do you think that the mere fact that we do not have to go to hell but can go to heaven would be worthy of the glory of God? Is the glory of God so trivial? But if God calls us according to His glory, this calling must be glorious. He also calls us according to His excellent virtue. What is His excellent virtue? He calls us according to His righteousness and His holiness. In other words, He has to be satisfied with His righteousness and His holiness. It is not to satisfy this pitiful man.

In the English translation of II Peter 1:3, there are two versions. One says that He has called us by His own glory and His virtue. In other words, through His glory and virtue, God has called us. He is the God of glory Who appeared to Abraham. God used His glory to draw Abraham. In the same way, God uses His own glory to draw us to Him, so that we see the glory of God as expressed in the Lord Jesus. Then He draws our hearts to Him. This is one version. Another translation is: 'to His glory and virtue'. God calls us into His glory and His virtue; His calling is to such an extent that we can enter His glory and His virtue, so that we can be partakers of His glory and His virtue. It is by His mighty power that He has called us and selected us.

So God's calling to us is closely related to His kingdom. His Son is the first born, and we are the sons whom He brings into glory. Those of us chosen by Him may then be conformed into the image of His Son. The Book of Romans tells us that whom He has foreknown,



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He has also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Whom He has selected and chosen, He calls. Whom He has called, these also He has justified. Whom He has justified, these also He has glorified. So God calls us to become a holy nation, to be the co-heir with His Son, partakers of His kingdom, to the extent that we can reign with His Son. So we see that His calling and His selection is for His kingdom.

Then how can we just consider ourselves as nothing and think that it is good enough to be just saved and be able to go to heaven one day? The mind and the heart of God towards us is so great. He desires for us to reign in His kingdom with His Son. God not only calls us in this way, He also has given us sufficient grace to accomplish this call. His divine power has given us all things which relate to life and godliness. Because He has called us in this manner, He has given also all things relating to life and godliness through His great power. Why do believers have eternal life? Why did God give us the life of His Son? What kind of life is this?

In the Gospels, we can find an answer. From one's daily living, we can see life. This life is endless, victorious, holy and glorious. This is the Lord Himself. God has given us this life. Would He want this life to be restrained in us and to start functioning only after we die? No! This life in us will enable us to grow into the image of our Lord by following the nature of this life.

What is godliness? Godliness is to be like God. How can we become like God? It is not through external learning. It is by the life within us that grows. When it grows and matures in us, naturally we will become like God. For this is the very life of God Himself. We need to let this life grow and mature in us. For the sake of the growth of this life in us, God has given us the greatest and precious promises. In the Bible, we can see how God has given us all these greatest and precious promises, one after the other. For example, Romans 8:31 tells us: If God be for us, who can be against us? God has not spared His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also grant us all things? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? This love is in His son. Ephesians 1:3 says that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. The Bible also tells

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us that our Lord is now at the right hand side of God, living forever and interceding for us. Also He is able to save completely those who approach God through Him, always living to intercede for them. The Bible also tells us that in everyone of us there is this anointing that will enlighten us in everything. This is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as our comforter. The work of the Holy Spirit is to conform us into the image of the Son of God. All these promises encourage us.

So Peter here exhorts us to use all diligence. We have to be diligent before God so that we can trust and receive these promises. Then we can live on this earth by obeying this spirit of life. Indeed we have to deny ourselves and to take up the cross to follow our Lord. God has already laid before us His own promises and His own grace. So we have only to partake it. There is no reason for us to consider ourselves slightly. We have no reason to retreat; we have no reason to fail. We should press on, so that we can enter the kingdom of God with abundance. This is the will that God has predestined. If we can do so, then we are the people who wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God.

In Peter's concept, he pays particular attention to the kingdom that is in the future. But we know those today who are willing to put themselves at the feet of our Lord and to be trained to be His disciples are already living in the kingdom of God. But one day, that kingdom shall come on earth. Who can reign with the Lord in that kingdom? These will be those who are now living in the kingdom of God. These will be the ones who are willing to accept the discipline of the Lord today so that the character of the Lord can be formed in them. These people can reign with the Lord when the kingdom of God comes in the future.

By the mercy of God, we aspire to be these people by grace. Let us never be like the kind of people, as described in a hymn, who just sit in armchairs to be carried into heaven. We should follow the footsteps of the Lamb. We have to walk the way of the cross, so that the character of the Lord Himself can be accomplished in us. This is the true meaning of hastening the coming of the kingdom. It is not work, but life. It is not through whatever work you have done for the Lord that you can hasten the coming of the kingdom; it is you yourself,

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the person, that can hasten the Lord's coming.

Let's bow down and pray: *Lord, when Your kingdom is at hand, we pray that on earth now we can live in the kingdom, so that we are not only prepared to enter the kingdom, but also used by You to bring in the kingdom. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.*