

# CHRIST

THE CONQUERING KING!

- Is Christ relevant to the life we live today?
- Can what he did 2,000 years ago affect us now?
- What was the victory he is said to have obtained, and how does it figure in a world of brilliant technocracy and so many human 'liberation' movements?
- What then is meant by 'Christ the Conquering King'?

Christ is the one man in all history who cannot be banished from contemporary human thinking. No matter how much we argue about him, or even against him, we cannot undo the confrontation of his person.

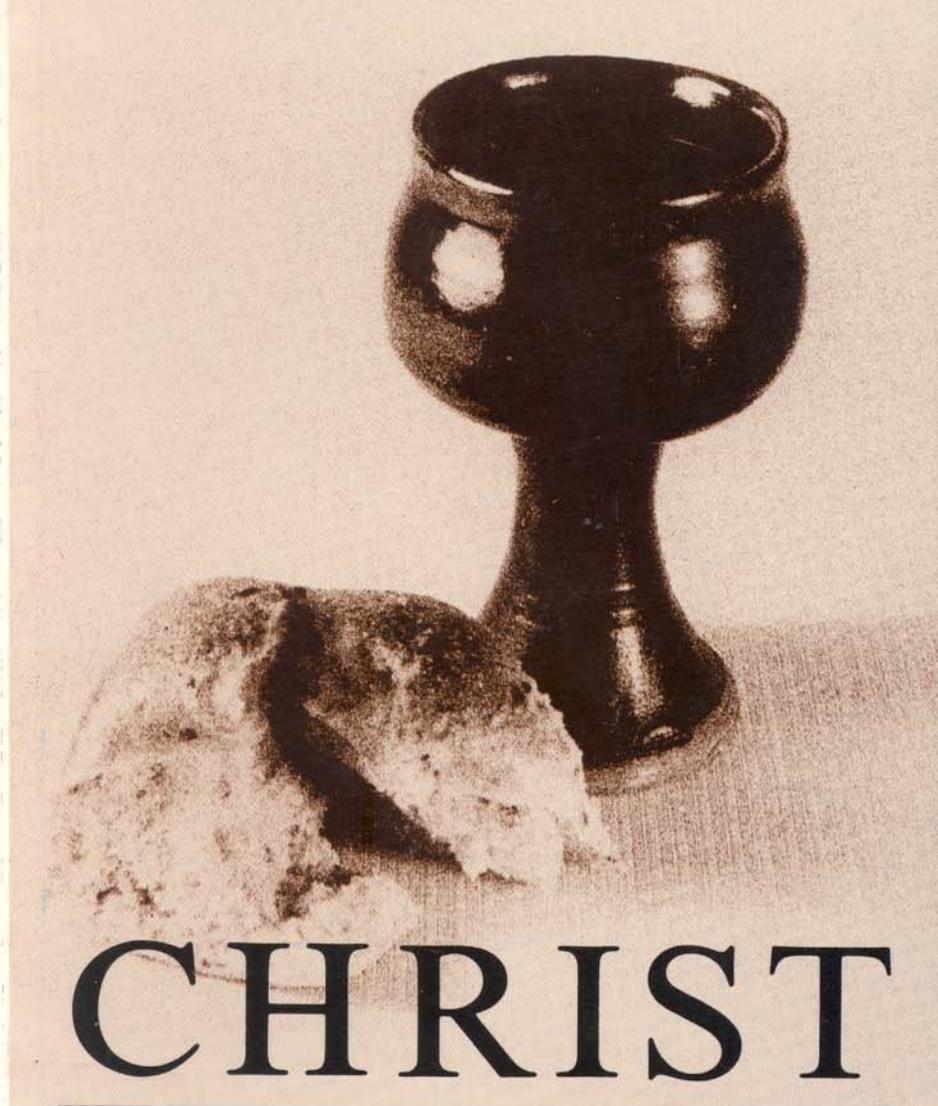
Men such as Moses, Abraham, Confucius, Buddha, Mahomet, Karl Marx and others have left their imprint on human history, but not in the way this man has. No human being ever had so many songs and anthems composed in praise and adoration, nor anyone so many books about his life and death.

Jesus is unique, but his uniqueness is intensely practical, touching every facet of human life today. If we study his coming, his life, death, resurrection and ascension as set out by the author of this book, we will discover the ways in which he conquers today. His is the conquest of the human heart, and not only of persons, but of nations also.

This book is worth the time and patience it both demands and inspires.



new creation publications inc.



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GEOFFREY C. BINGHAM

# **C H R I S T**

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**G E O F F R E Y C . B I N G H A M**

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## FOREWORD

In our busy world of today we rarely give time to thinking about Christ. He seems to fit worship situations on Sunday and the occasional Bible study we have at home or church, but we rather imagine him out in some world of his own, a world that is for the main part religious.

Of course we are wrong, terribly wrong. Every molecule and atom of the universe is sustained and has its integrity by 'his powerful word'. All things were created by him and for him. Yet he not only created but re-created that which became fallen through sin and failure.

All about us is this sin and failure. When we have had our world of supermarkets, high tech. society, our social living, our entertainments and our sports, we can still be very lonely, still confronted by a world we do not know, and fearful of what may exist beyond sight. Death too is a threat to any serenity we may have attained by purpose or chance.

It is this world, and indeed the entire universe, which is under the Lordship of Christ. This is not merely cheering to the faithful few, but confronting to the whole human race, and the powers of evil that are arrayed against it. Indeed the evil of our own hearts—when suddenly exposed by stress and circumstances—is devastating to our shocked minds. To live in a universe where there is no sense, no control by a

higher, noble, and wise power, would be a terrifying experience.

Christ became visible in history—'the visible expression of the invisible God'—and he came as man, but came to conquer. His conquest was over all that is evil, and all that would vandalise our beautiful creation. He came to make the conquest of love, to defeat and win the human heart, and to draw out grateful acknowledgment of his Lordship. 'Jesus is Lord!' was the cry of the early church. It is the cry in many a beleaguered spirit, in lands under totalitarian governments, and godless ideologies.

*Christ the Conquering King* is good news to the lonely, the defeated, the cynical, and the beleaguered. This book may not deal efficiently with the theme it has taken, but the materials supplied by the book, however rough and ready they may seem to more polished theologians, are the true stuff by which we can obtain true human freedom, build our lives afresh, and by which we can make both sense and joy of the creation in which we live.

*Geoffrey Bingham,  
Coromandel, 1985*

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SECTION ONE

CHRIST THE CONQUEROR

**1****BEHOLD THE CONQUEROR!**

The disciples were often puzzled as to the nature of their Master, Christ. We need not enter into that here. When he rose from the dead, they were afraid, mystified, and yet joyful. Even so, they were unable to fathom the mystery and meaning of it all—that life, death and resurrection.

What they had not seen—not even after his resurrection —was his person in glory. They did not know his glorified body. Pentecost brought understanding concerning Christ. This was the revealing work of the Holy Spirit. They knew certain facts: they had seen him risen. They had watched him ascend. They were told by angels that he would come again—after the manner that he had gone—in the clouds of glory .

Paul, we take it, saw the glorified Christ. We do not sufficiently understand the nature of visions to know whether he saw Christ in form or figure or in some manifestation. It does not matter: he saw Christ.

When we come to the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation, we have described to us the glorified Christ who was seen by John the Divine. Again we are confronted with the fact that this was a vision. What is a vision? The describing of a sword going out of Christ's mouth does not allow us to see a vision as wholly literal.

It does not matter. The vision communicates the substance it is intending to convey. Look then at Christ!

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

John was deeply moved. He said, 'When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.' It was then that Christ spoke to him, laying his right hand upon John: 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'

John in the preface to his Book (1:5) had already described Christ: 'Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.' He had added, 'Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who has pierced him: and all the tribes of the earth shall wail on account of him.'

The vision, and these other statements, give us a rich view of the glorified Christ, especially as conqueror of death, and as Lord of life. In John's time, this was an accomplished fact, and although at this point in time it was revealed afresh by a vision, it was something well known to the church of the day—i.e. to the apostolic church.

#### THE REVELATION OF THE LORD OF LIFE AND DEATH

When we look at the visionary description of Jesus set out above, we discover that each statement is rich with meaning. The robe and the girdle signify royalty, the brilliant white

tells of the utter purity of the Person, whilst the eyes which are 'like a flame of fire' tell of the burning penetration of this Holy One. The seven stars signify the angels of the sevenfold—ie. perfect and complete—church. Christ is Lord over the church.

The sharp sword which goes out of his mouth is wonderfully powerful. We read later in John's Book that with this sword 'he will smite the nations'. His word is more powerful than any in history, since none other can decide the destiny and movement of nations. His face—'like the sun shining in full strength'—speaks of his great glory, and glory speaks of majesty. So we could go on, interpreting the vision.

What is greatly significant, however, is his statement, 'I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.' This glorified 'son of man' is Lord over all life and death. Everyone must come to him for that decision which fixes his eternal destiny. No one in all the universe is greater than this glorified Man.

How significant his person is, is shown by the use of excerpts from John's description of him, in the letters to the seven churches. We gather that these letters, whilst particularly written to different churches, are to be read—down through the centuries—by all the churches, for they constitute the whole—the sevenfold—church. 2:1, 8, 12, 18, and 3:1, 7, 14 repeat the details John has given, and each description of Christ is intended to confront the church, renew it, and establish it. In other words, the churches live under the sovereignty of this risen, ascended, and glorified One.

#### THE REVELATION OF THE CONQUERING MAN

The Book of the Revelation is the Book concerning Christ, Lord of history. In chapter 5 it is shown that only he can

open the scroll with its seven seals. When we ask what this Book means, we discover that it is the book of history. Christ is 'the Lamb...as though it had been slain', ie. 'Christ crucified', and as such he has power over all history. For him to break a seal is to set in motion certain judgements upon the earth.

The breaking of the seals leads to the successive blowing of seven trumpets—which are also responsible for certain judgements, which, in their course, seem more severe than those occasioned by the initial opening of seals. In turn, the seven trumpets lead to seven bowls of wrath which are successively poured out on the world. In other words, all judgements are under the hand of the conquering Messiah.

The fifth chapter, then, is most important. That is why the celestial beings, and indeed all creatures—including man—give their concerted praise and adoration to the Lamb for having redeemed men out of every tribe, tongue, and nation. Because he has done this, he is worthy to receive such honour and power, and blessing and glory. This, then, shows us Christ as the present arbiter and initiator of all that happens in history.

#### HE WHO CLIMAXES HISTORY

Salutary and fearful as it is to see Christ meting out to the world the just and righteous judgements of God, it is equally sobering to see that there are points in this prophetic account of the Revelation which show Christ as having defeated all evil, so taking his authority and reigning over the kingdoms of the world, as King of the Kingdom of God and heaven.

In 11:15 we read, 'Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord

and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." ' This climactic event is astounding, placing Christ foremost of all creation. The response of the twenty-four elders, who are themselves high-reigning celestials, is:

*We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast,  
that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.  
The nations raged, but thy wrath came,  
and the time for the dead to be judged,  
for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints,  
and those who fear thy name, both small and great,  
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.*

In chapter 12 the battle for supremacy which is waged between the forces of heaven and the forces of Satan is represented. Satan is defeated and thrown to the earth. A loud voice in heaven proclaims,

*Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God .*

The supremacy of Christ is fiercely contested. Chapter 12 shows the dragon—'that ancient serpent the devil'—seeking to destroy Christ's people. Chapter 13 shows the artifices the dragon uses to ensnare the inhabitants of the earth. He mimics the nature of the Triune God, and sets up a system of power and authority, seeking to establish himself in the face of God.

In this battle, many of God's people are martyred, and those who have defeated the beast 'sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb'. Moses' song was sung at the liberation of Israel from Pharaoh's pursuing hordes. The song of the Lamb arises out of the liberating power of the crucified Christ. He is the Conqueror-Liberator. In chapter 17 the great and seductive harlot Babylon, the evil beast, and the kings he has put into power, attempt to defeat the Lamb.

John says, ‘They will make war upon the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.’

The climax to all this struggle comes in the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of the Revelation, where Christ is pictured with a white horse, ‘And he who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.’

At this point, we are given another powerful description of Christ:

His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God... From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is no difficulty for this One to defeat the forces of evil, ie. to defeat and destroy the kings and their armies, the beast, the false prophet, and those who had worshipped the beast and its image. Following the millennium, Satan is also defeated, and he and his hosts are cast into the lake of fire. He who has authority over Death and Hades, now casts them also into the lake of fire.

### CONCLUSION REGARDING THE CONQUEROR

Our brief survey shows Jesus the Christ as Victor over all the powers of darkness, and as reigning over all creation. The brilliant figures of John the Seer portray Christ in his magnificent victory. To the believer, this Book of the Revelation is of never-ending comfort and encouragement. There can be no doubt about Jesus being Lord of history.

It is good as our first step into this great theme to see that all history lies in Jesus’ hands by virtue of his death on the Cross, his victory of the Resurrection, and his authority received from being seated at the right hand of God. We need to explore these things more particularly, and this we will now do, with the Revelation message ringing in our ears that:

‘He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.’

## 2

## CHRIST'S VICTORY IN THE APOSTOLIC WORLD

Again, without trying to prove Christ's Lordship, let us look at the apostolic church and its belief in Christ as Victor. There can be no question about his Lordship—not, anyway, for the early church. Its great cry was, 'Jesus is Lord!' It lived by the truth and reality of what it cried.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came, the apostolic band cried, 'Jesus is Lord!' Later Paul was to say, 'No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.' As promised (cf. John 16:12–15), the Holy Spirit showed the little band of believers the true nature and accomplishment of Jesus. In the day of his suffering and sorrow, his shameful death upon the cross, they could only blush at what he had been represented to be—a blasphemer and a malefactor.

They had been moved to great joy by the Resurrection, and to greater courage. Even so, their minds and hearts had to wait for the day of revelation. It was one thing to witness the stunning event of the Resurrection: it was another to discover its full meaning. The day of revelation was the day of the Spirit, the feast of Pentecost. The apostles based their belief in the Lordship of Jesus on the practical fact of his

resurrection. They made such statements as:

God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it;

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses;

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified;

You . . . killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead;

The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree; God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour;

God raised him on the third day and made him manifest . . . to us who were chosen by God as witnesses;

God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

See Acts 2:24, 32, 36; 3:15; 5:30–31; 10:40–41; 13:30–31.

From Pentecost onwards—if not before—their reasoning was that he whom death could not hold must be Lord over death, and so Lord over life. Since he was more powerful than death, then he was more powerful than sin. This scarcely needed even the revelation of the Spirit. No human being had ever risen from the dead, to stay alive for evermore.

That is why Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost, 'God has raised him up to be both Lord and Christ', and later told the Gentiles at Caesarea, 'He is Lord of all', and why Paul said, 'If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom. 10:9).

There can be no doubt about it: the early Christians were intoxicated with the fact of the Resurrection. For them it was a beautiful obsession. Paul said:

For to this end Christ died and lived again;

that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as

indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords,—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord [or, 'as Lord'], so walk in him.

See Romans 14:9; I Corinthians 8:5–6; II Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 2:6.

Paul, along with the other apostles, referred rarely to Jesus as 'Jesus', but mainly as 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. Lest we think the word 'Lord' is some kind of aristocratic title, let it be known that it can be translated, 'the Lord, Jesus Christ', or 'the Lord—Jesus Christ'. When they said, 'Jesus is Lord!' they meant that the man Jesus, approved by God, and testified to by his resurrection from the dead, is now Lord over all the universe.

They understood nothing, if not that Jesus was Lord of the church, Lord of all life, Victor within his own universe, and triumphant over all evil. This latter point we must see, time and again.

### 3

## THE CONQUEROR COMES – 1

### THE PURPOSE OF HIS COMING

In a later chapter, we will see that Jesus came because the prophetic utterances made that inevitable. Yet it was not so much inevitable as it was indispensable. Man's situation was so dreadful that, without his coming, man was doomed. This doom sprang not only from God's judgements upon evil, but from the corrupting and destructive nature of evil itself.

John wrote, 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.' The works of the devil were many, and Jesus saw them when he came. Men and women were in his bondage. They were caught in demonic entrapment, they suffered sicknesses and infirmities that had to do with evil and unclean spirits.

As Paul later said, 'They were forced to follow the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, who is now working in the children of disobedience.' He—Paul—saw men and women as being in bondage to 'the god of this world'. He thought of 'the world' as 'this present evil age', ie. an aeon or system in which humanity was captured and to which it was enslaved. See I John 3:8b; Ephesians 2:2–3;

II Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4.

John saw that ‘the whole world lies in the evil one’. He also saw the bondage idols bring to humans. They needed to be freed from idols (see I John 5:19, 21). Part of ‘the works of the devil’ was human guilt. The author of Hebrews averred, ‘Men and women through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage.’ He said:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood’ he himself likewise partook of the same nature’ that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death’ that is’ the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

It would appear then that one of the main purposes for Christ’s incarnation was to destroy evil. *How* he did that, we shall see later.

Paul, as we have seen, understood the evil world system. He saw not only Satan as its god, but the power that evil authorities and evil supernatural princes had over guilty humanity. His view was not substantially different from that of John. The writers of I Peter and Jude also understood the grip of these evil powers. Yet it was Paul who knew so well the bondage of man’s will, his rebellion against God, and man’s intransigence when it came to doing the will of God. See Colossians 2:14–15; Romans 8:38; Ephesians 6:12; Galatians 4:8–10; Colossians 2:18, 20–23; Romans 8:5–8.

He saw Christ as the Liberator of man. To liberate man, Christ would first have to defeat evil, and then, also, man. ‘For freedom Christ has set us free’, Paul said. Jesus had said, ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ He also said, ‘He who commits sin is its bondsman. If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.’ In regard to this outcome, Paul said, ‘He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for their sake and rose again.’

### THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COMING LIBERATOR

All of these Scriptures tell us that Jesus came to be Liberator, but before he could be that he must be ‘Lord of all lords’, ie. stronger than all lords. The angel had told Joseph, ‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ Zechariah prophesied over John, ‘You will go before the Lord to prepare his ways’, for God was going to save Israel ‘from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us . . . that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear . . . all the days of our life.’ This was the same John who later said, of Jesus, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ See Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:71ff.; John 1:29.

The Father announced, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matt. 3:17). Surely nothing could be more in the way of Divine proclamation than that! God—to use the language of the prophet—had rent the heavens and come down! Yet it might have seemed to be a minor incident, ie. that of a man going into the waters of John’s baptism, the vision of a dove descending, and then this audible voice! It passed, and Israel did not become a prairie fire, blazing with the news of a new dispensation given by God—His Son descending to the earth! The incident seemed to have been passed over and forgotten.

Then there was the announcement of the Son himself. Admittedly, it happened in a way that was almost proclamation under a veil. Reading the lection in the synagogue at Nazareth, he said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

This prophetic word from Isaiah was well known. When Jesus, closing the book said, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’, his claim was such as to be unbelievable to those of his home town. In anger, they tried to destroy him. He was the one who was virtually claiming to be Messiah! See Isaiah 61:1–2 and Luke 4:18–30.

No less strong was Jesus’ announcement following his temptation in the wilderness:

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel! (Mark 1:14).*

This again, was a claim to be Messiah, King of the Kingdom of heaven! The strength and significance of the claim must be seen in the light of the baptism, and the temptation by Satan. Announced by the Father, he had to close with the leader of evil, Satan; and this he did. He refused to worship the powerful prince of darkness, the one he kept calling ‘the god of this world’. He—Jesus—had come to liberate the captives in darkness, and he would have no truck with winning the kingdoms of the world by departing from the word of God and the way of the Cross.

## 4

### THE CONQUEROR COMES – 2

#### THE BATTLE IS JOINED

Now the battle commenced. It commenced when Jesus refused the temptations of Satan. The first Adam had acceded to rebellious madness. The Second Adam had no wisp, even, of rebellion. ‘I delight to do the Father’s will’, was his constant refrain. Satan no doubt was lacerated by the initial encounter, and ‘departed for a season’, perhaps to lick his wounds! Confrontation by the Holy One of God must have been devastating.

Peter’s later summing up of Jesus’ ministry, in his address to the Gentiles at Caesarea, was:

*You know the word which he [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10:36–38).*

God come upon you.’ See Luke 11:20 and Matthew 12:28. This principle is the same as in Acts 10:38, which we have just quoted above.

Again, in Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–12, he delegates the ministry of the Kingdom of God to his disciples, the first being the twelve, and the second ‘seventy others’. They are to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. What is this, and how do they do it? The Gospel is the good news, ‘Thy God reigns!’ (Isa. 52:7), so that when they lay hands on the sick and heal them, the disciples can claim, ‘The kingdom of God has come near you!’ which is much the same as Jesus saying, ‘The kingdom of God has come upon you.’

This meant that the Kingdom of God, in the form of Jesus himself, moved against sickness, diseases, and demons, liberating God’s people of Israel from these Satanic bondages. The Kingdom of light, as it moved forward, cut a swathe, causing the powers of darkness to retreat or be destroyed utterly.

This joining of the battle is described in slightly different terms in John’s Gospel. He, during his ministry, had looked upon the opposing group of Jewish leaders—which included many of the Pharisees—as ‘the world’. In the Epistles ‘the world’ is that system headed up by Satan which is anti-God and which contains principalities and authorities of great importance. They, together with what Paul would call ‘men of the flesh’, oppose everything that is of God (see Rom. 8:5–8; Eph. 2:1–3).

On one occasion (John 7:7), Jesus told his brothers, ‘The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.’ This ‘world’ was operative in Jerusalem, and so much so that it finally crucified him. He told the Jews who opposed him, ‘You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.’ So vicious was this ‘world’ that Jesus warned his disciples that the world would hate them because it hated him. He said, ‘They

have seen and hated both me and my Father’. He added, ‘The time is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service [worship] to God’ (John 8:44, 15:18–25; 16:2).

In his last days in Jerusalem, and as he spoke of the coming Cross, Jesus said, ‘Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out!’ (John 12:31). On the night of the Last Supper, he said that when the Holy Spirit—the Counsellor, the Spirit of truth—would come, he would ‘convince the world . . . concerning judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged’ (John 16:7–11). He meant of course that the judgement of all evil would take place in the Cross.

Previous to this statement, Jesus had announced to his disciples—and on that same night:

*I will no longer talk much with you’ for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father (John 14:30–31).*

This is greatly significant. In essence, it means, ‘Satan is coming. He has nothing *in* me, because he has nothing *on* me, for I am not a sinner. However, he will have everything *on* me, because I go to the Cross to bear the sins of the world. Then he will have both the right and power to torment me as he torments all sinners.’ This interpretation may appear somewhat forced, but other evidence will be brought to show that the Cross was indeed the place of history’s decisive moral battle. Only if we understand the word of Jesus we have just examined, will we comprehend the truth of ‘*Christus Victor*’.

#### THE BATTLE COMES TO ITS CLIMAX

Evil had some form of authority, right, and power in regard to the event of the crucifixion. In Luke 22:52 we read:

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'

'*This is your hour, and the power [authority] of darkness.*' What a statement! It meant in some way that Jesus was now exposed—as though he had to be—to that which evil could wreak upon him. A key to this is given in Jude 9:

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgement upon him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'

The meaning of this seems clear: 'You, the devil, have right and authority where a man is a sinner. Moses was a sinner —killing the Egyptian, profaning God before the people— and so you claim right to Moses' corpse. I say, "The Lord rebuke you", for in this case He alone is Moses' advocate.'

This strange statement, then, gives us the clue as to the nature of the battle. Satan has power where there is human guilt. Were there no guilt, Satan could have no power whatever. In Revelation 12:10 the devil is shown to be 'the accuser of our brethren'. In Job chapters 1 and 2 he refuses the Lord's claim that Job is a righteous man. In fact he accuses Job of losing integrity under stress. In Zechariah 3:1–5 we read the incident in which Satan stands before the Lord to accuse Joshua the high priest of impurity. God vindicates Joshua by cleansing him.

At the Cross, God-in-Christ will do that which vindicates unrighteous man so that he can be accounted righteous (cf. Rom. 3:21–24; 11 Cor. 5:19–21). We can come to no other conclusion than this, that when Christ on the Cross took the sins of the world upon him, then Satan had everything *on* him, because everything (the sin of the world) was *in* him.

He was the object of accusation because he had made himself the object of the world's total guilt.

This understanding will help us to comprehend the work of the Cross, the true victory Christ wrought, by which he obtained power over Satan, as also he effected the liberty of the creatures within the bondage of the Evil One.

## 5

## THE ACTION OF THE BATTLE – 1

## THE FORCES JOINED IN THE BATTLE

It is a sad fact of Christian history that the fortunes of the Cross are uncertain. The Cross itself is the power of God, but the church has failed, time and again, to grasp its immense significance. Too often it is relegated to Good Friday where a sentimental remembrance of it is made. It seems for the most part to be kept in this closet of Good Friday. In fact it is the great event of God—the greatest ever, especially if we couple the Resurrection with it.

The theological fact is that we do not let our minds and hearts research the grand event. This is partly due to our resistance to grace, partly to our mental laziness in the face of so many attractions which divert us. Somehow all history is linked with that Cross, and we need to be wedded to it in both our thinking and action. It is right then to survey the battlefield of Calvary, looking at the forces which are drawn up against God and His Messiah.

**(i) Satan and His Evil Powers**

What, then, are these forces, and in what manner are they arrayed for the conflict? The first which present themselves

are Satan and his angelic forces known as ‘principalities and powers’, ‘the world rulers of this present darkness’, ‘the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’. Sadly enough, they have been presented to us by grotesque caricatures. They are indeed brilliant fallen celestial creatures. Some see demons as such celestials who have degraded themselves beyond measure.

Whatever they may be, they use their created brilliance to delude, deceive and entangle the human race, and bring it into sin, for human guilt gives them a lever to manipulate man, and a power to oppose God. When Jesus said, ‘Now is your hour, and the authority of darkness’, he was including the battalions of evil powers and demons, now lined up at Calvary to destroy the Holy One of God whom they hated.

**(ii) Man the Enemy of God**

Also aligned with the powers of darkness—wittingly or unwittingly—was man. We may call him ‘Adamic man’, ie. the one so caught in the flesh that he ‘does not submit to God’s law, indeed cannot’. Man is a deadly enemy of God. He may not think he is, but the violence he has done against the Holy God in violating His majesty as Creator is untellable. The extent and nature of his guilt is indescribable.

This Adamic man is most evil of all when he thinks he is well, when he considers himself to be on good terms with God because of his own self-righteousness. Nothing deludes him more than religion, and nothing is more complex than his idolatries. Here—as an idolater—he is at his most dangerous. Such people Jesus called ‘blind leaders of the blind’. Their real sin was that they thought they could see!

The religious brilliance of man blinds him to his deepest blasphemy—that he can co-operate with God to achieve human salvation. This is the most arrogant expression of his pride. Man’s history is a history of religions, of lords, gods,

and idols. His religious rationalisations of God, man, and the creation are quite intelligent, and even brilliant. Man is an excellent builder of shrines. His ignorance, however, on how occultic powers dwell in his temples, shrines, idols and other worship objects, is abysmal (cf. I Cor. 10:18ff.). Man has given himself over to these forces. They compound his guilt and secure him irretrievably in bondage.

As the powers of darkness must be defeated in the battle at Calvary, so must man. God must defeat him and break his pride. He can never be liberated from evil until he is rescued from himself, particularly from his guilt. Man, for his part, has many enemies, and to release him from these —although he by no means deserves such release—requires a powerful work of Christ. It will be useful to consider some of man's enemies.

### **(iii) The Enemies of Man**

We have already seen that Satan and his powerful hosts are enemies of man. 'The whole world lies in the evil one' (I John 5:19). This means that man is in the grip of the world system. If we look at the principle which lies behind such Scriptures as Hebrews 2:14–15, Colossians 2:14–15, and I John 4:18, we see that Satan's power, and the grip of evil powers on man, come from the guilt of man.

Related to the enemies—Satan, the world powers, and the world system—are further antagonists, namely sin, death, the flesh, the idols, and even the law, the conscience, and the wrath of God. Were we to link up these named enemies with their various related Scriptures, we would come to the conclusion that had man no guilt he would have no enemies which could entrap him. Fear of death (the 'sting of death') comes from guilt, hence the dread of the wrath of God, the curse of the law which is penalty, and the inexorable conscience which allows no man to live in true freedom.

It may sound strange to speak of the law, the conscience, and the wrath of God as lined up against Christ, but there can be no liberation of man until their demands are met. The curse on sin must be worked out, in and on the person of Christ, for until then the conscience will not cease to torment man, any more than Satan will cease to accuse him.

## 6.

## THE ACTION OF THE BATTLE – 2

## THE ENEMIES, THEIR WEAPONS AND WARFARE

We might wonder—when it comes to the point—what could be the weapons that the enemies could use against God and His Christ? What, in any sense, could touch him? The answer must partly lie in the fact that Jesus was man, a man. If he was to bear the sins of man, then he must bear them in a ‘man-way’, for they are ‘man-things’. We mean by this that sin invades every area of man’s being, and makes its demands in physical, mental, moral and spiritual ways, although it is difficult to define the exact nature of these.

Since he was truly man, he must suffer for sin as a man suffers, if he would bear those sins for others. There was, of course, a difference. He was man-without-sin. This means he had a pure conscience. Since sin deadens the sense of itself in man—sin being deceptive—then in one sense a pure man would be more sensitive to it, and would suffer more. At the same time, the purity of the man Christ would be incredibly effective—and powerful—in overcoming pollution.

Even so, this man was beset by many enemies. Their weapons were accusation, which bore down upon the guilt of man. Accusation enlarges the *sense* of guilt, although of course it cannot enlarge (objective) guilt. Accusation sensi-

tises man to the wrath of God, to the tyranny of conscience, to the doom of the law, to the coming of death and the judgement which will follow it. Accusation has within it elements of bitterness, astringency, acidic corrosion, and rouses up the anger which is inherent in guilt. Confusion, too, is compounded, and loneliness and alienation are keenly felt. The sense of pollution enlarges, and so misery attends the subject of guilt.

We are all aware, to some extent, of these heart and stomach-sickening elements. Satan is an expert in accusing, in reminding of failure, and in pouring acid upon the already opened hurts and wounds which are so prolific in human experience. Nothing is so devastating as to have guilty creatures accuse of guilt, especially when they make themselves out to be righteous servants of the law!

These, then, are some of the weapons the evil accusers wield. The darts of doubt, the stings of judgemental accusation, the reminders of failures, and the enlarging of the sins and the doom they produce, are all evil ways of destroying the mind of a person. Some believe that Jesus was attacked by Satan in Gethsemane at ‘the beginning of sorrows’, and that when his soul was ‘exceeding sorrowful, even unto death’ (Matt. 26:38, AV), it was because of the hideous accusation that accompanied it.

What we cannot fully know is the suffering which comes with identification. Christ became one with all the sinful world. He was ‘numbered with the transgressors’, and Paul said, ‘God made him to be sin’. The enormity of this is hidden from us, but it must mean Christ was identified with the filth and pollution of the entire human race. Paul said, ‘We are convinced that if one died for all, then did all die.’ That is, Christ died our death.

If, then, death horrifies us, and if we feel painful fear, his suffering was no less because of his innocence. To be ‘made sin’ is to suffer all the horrors of sin and its judgement. It is

also to actually bear the terrible curse which is upon sin. Paul says, 'He became [a] curse for us'. He was the curse, hence he hung on the tree.

### THE POWERS OF CHRIST AND OF GOD

Matthew 4:11 tells us Christ was ministered to by angels in the wilderness, during the time of his temptation by Satan. An ancient manuscript of Luke 22:43 tells us an angel strengthened him in Gethsemane, but when it came to the matter of the Cross no angel could assist him.

What, then, were his resources for a battle so great, a battle which we would rightly call a war? His first resource was the Father. He had prayed on that last night, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee.' The essence of his prayer in John 17:1–5 is this: 'Father, I cannot go to that Cross and reveal You as the God of love, unless You glorify me. To glorify me is to give me Your resources for the time of suffering. These will be seen to be of You and not of me. By this, man will come to know You as You are, and knowing both You and me will thus have eternal life.'

This comports very well with Hebrews 2:9:

But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour for the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

The Authorised Version has '*for* the suffering of death', whilst other versions have either '*because of* the suffering of death', or, '*because* he suffered death'.

It appears to me that the meaning of the verse, in the light of John 17:5 ('And now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made') and II Corinthians 5:19 ('in Christ God

was reconciling the world to himself'), is as follows: 'Jesus. . . was crowned with glory and honour for the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.' That is, unless the Father fully 'Fathered' the Son in the event of the Cross, it would be a separate work of the Son, and would cease—in some sense—to be wholly 'Fatherly'. The Son is anxious to show the Father and not merely himself.

When we ask ourselves the question, 'What glory would the Son need in order to do the work of the Cross?' the answer must be, 'All of the Father's glory', ie. His power, love, holiness, goodness, righteousness and truth. On this exegesis, the Son was not glorified because he suffered death, but was given glory so that he might—*by the grace of God*—taste death for every man, in which case 'by the grace of (God) equals 'the glory of God'.

We read elsewhere that the Father initiated the work of the Cross. It was He who set forth Christ as a propitiation, indeed, who made him to be the propitiation for sins, who made him to be sin, and who laid on him the iniquity of us all. It was the Lord's will to bruise him. See Romans 3:24; 1 John 4:10; 11 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6, 10. How indeed could all this happen to Christ unless the Father *did* it? The resources of the Father, then, were at hand.

If we ask the question, 'Did not God forsake him?' then the answer must be, 'Yes, but he was given the resources (the glory) to sustain that abandonment.' His cry was not 'My *Father!* My *Father!* Why did you forsake me?' but, 'My *God!* My *God!* Why did you forsake me?' He was not crying to God as his Father, but to God as God, for he was 'man-for-men'.

His second resource was the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 9:14 says that he offered himself without blemish 'through eternal spirit' or 'through the eternal Spirit' (Greek: *dia pneumatos*). This could mean 'his [Christ's] eternal spirit' or

‘through the eternal [Holy] Spirit’. For him as man to have ‘eternal spirit’ would mean he was aided in this by ‘the eternal Spirit’. I am sure we have every reason to believe that his manhood was aided by the Holy Spirit. How this would be so is not disclosed. I doubt that the Spirit simply aided him to be ‘without blemish’. I am sure the work went beyond that.

His third resource was himself. His whole life had been one of obedience, and Paul describes him as ‘obedient, even unto the death of the cross’. This obedience assured him that he was one with God the Father. He had all the inner riches of holy love, and what he had could be weighed over and against the ‘weight’ of evil. There is nothing substantial in evil. It has been said that evil has no ontological reality, no true being. This is why its actions in the moral (or immoral) realm have no substance.

It must be seen that the resource of his holy self, his pure conscience, and his immutable love which he brought to Calvary, were the means whereby he could battle with evil. ‘When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; for he trusted to him who judges justly’ (I Pet. 2:23). He was unique in his complete trust in God’s righteousness and justice.

The thing, which baffles evil, is obedience to God. Why too, one should suffer wholly for others, is also unintelligible. If Christ was to be bruised in the encounter with evil on that Cross, then evil was to be crushed forever under Christ’s heel.

## 7

### THE ACTION OF THE BATTLE – 3

#### THE CONFLICT TAKES PLACE

The carrion flocks of evil were poised in their battalions to descend upon the helpless Man on the Cross. So wearied that he could not carry his cross on his own, how would he summon up great moral power to defeat the evil horde?

Because he was the Lamb of God and had allowed himself to be led to the slaughter, he had moral power such as humanity has never known. His humility outfaced the pride of evil. They sought to grasp him, but could not. It was not that he did not suffer, for the Messianic Psalms indicate that his suffering was deep, but it was his refusal to fight evil with evil, violence with violence, vituperation with vituperation, that made him so difficult to destroy.

His suffering was not a charade. It was deep, human, and real. Psalm 22 shows us that. The Psalm that opens with, ‘My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?’ goes on to say:

But I am a worm, and no man;  
scorned by men, and despised by the people.  
All who see me mock at me,  
they make mouths at me, they wag their heads;  
‘He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him,  
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’,

As the carrion crew sweeps in on him, he cries:

Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help.  
 Many bulls encompass me,  
 strong bulls of Bashan surround me;  
 they open wide their mouths at me, like a  
 ravening, and roaring lion.

Now he suffers the heat of the day, the torment of the twisted hanging body, the sweat and perhaps the fever—all elements well known in crucifixion:

I am poured out like water,  
 and all my bones are out of joint;  
 my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast;  
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
 and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;  
 thou dost lay me in the dust of death.

Again the evil ones—be they men or supernatural powers—close in on him:

Yea, dogs are round about me;  
 a company of evildoers encircle me;  
 they have pierced my hands and feet—  
 I can count all my bones—  
 they stare and gloat over me;  
 they divide my garments among them,  
 and for my raiment they cast lots.

He cries for deliverance in the midst of his distress:

But thou, O Lord, be not far off!  
 O thou my help, hasten to my aid!  
 Deliver my soul from the sword,  
 my life from the power of the dog!  
 Save me from the mouth of the lion,  
 my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild oxen!

Psalm 69 is no less pathetic, no less filled with pain and suffering. Some of the following extracts show Messiah's anguish. Verses 19–21 give evidence of the Cross:

Thou knowest my reproach, and my shame and my dishonour;  
 my foes are all known to thee.  
 Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair.  
 I looked for pity, but there was none;  
 and for comforters, but I found none.  
 They gave me poison for food,  
 and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

This Psalm deals with the horror of being cast into pollution:

I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold. . .  
 With thy faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire.

The cruelty of his oppressors is grimly present:

More in number than the hairs of my head  
 are those who hate me without cause;  
 mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies.

Such Psalms give us a window into his suffering. We must not be deceived into thinking the suffering was only, or mainly, physical. By comparison, the physical pain was little enough. The enormous resources required to meet the guilt, pollution, rebellion and shame of the entire human race cannot be computed. The terrible, terrible cry of 'My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?' takes us to the most frightening of all depths. Here is the ultimate wasteland, the dreary dereliction of the human spirit, the horror of utter abandonment.

Yet here, also, is the victory of Christ. By being ‘numbered with the transgressors’, he ‘bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors’.

That is why the same writer—Isaiah—can say:

But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
was bruised for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,  
and with his stripes we are healed.

It only remained for him to cry, ‘It is finished!’ so that we could realise the battle was ended—in his victory. The last cry of all, ‘Father! Into thy hands I commend my spirit!’ was the trustful cry of Psalm 31:5.

## 8

### THE ACTION OF THE BATTLE – 4

#### THE BATTLE OF THE RESURRECTION

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Paul sees the atoning death and the justifying resurrection (Rom. 4:25) as two sides of the same coin. Neither the death nor the resurrection makes sense, one without the other. Paul says bluntly that there is no forgiveness of sins apart from the resurrection, for without the resurrection the death is in vain.

Peter sees the value of the Resurrection. It is impossible to meet the resurrected Christ and not be born again. ‘By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ‘ We not only have new birth—new life—but with it ‘living hope’. The hope relates to ‘an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you’ (I Pet. I :3–4).

Jesus always saw his death, not merely as inevitable

because the prophets had prophesied it, but as indispensable, which was why the prophets prophesied it. By the same token, he saw his resurrection as indispensable. ‘The Son of man must. . .’ This Greek word ‘must’ is *dei*, and points to what has to happen for man’s redemption. Three times in Mark’s Gospel (8:31; 9:31 and 10:33) the *dei* is used.

In John’s Gospel (6:57), Jesus claimed that he lived ‘by’ or ‘through’ (Greek: *dia*) the Father. Again he claimed, himself, to be the resurrection and the life (11:25). He also said (10:17–18):

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life’ that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power [authority] to lay it down’ and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.

This claim seems quite remarkable: his life is not taken from him. He himself lays it down, and he himself takes it again. When he said, ‘Father! Into thy hands I commend my spirit!’, he was saying he was ‘giving up the spirit’. Isaiah 53:12 says ‘he poured out his soul unto death’. This is what Hebrews 2:9 calls ‘tasting death for every man’, and Psalm 22:15 ‘thou dost lay me in the dust of death’. I Peter 3:18 speaks of him ‘being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit’. Someone has said that his death was the springboard of (to) his resurrection.

Whatever we make of the proximity of his death to his resurrection, his death to his new life, we have Scriptures on the one hand which speak either of the Father or the Spirit raising him (Rom. 6:4; Acts 2:24, 32; Rom. 8:11 with 1:4; cf. I Pet. 3:18 where a possible translation is, ‘made alive in the Spirit’), and on the other hand of Jesus himself rising from the dead (Matt. 27:63; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:7, 34; Acts 17:3 II Tim. 2:8). Whilst it may be said that he rose because he was raised, yet this does not take away from the remarkable fact that he was the one man who did not ‘see corruption’.

Because his resurrection is unique, it is not easy for us to follow the battle it represented in the moral–spiritual realm where evil still seeks to destroy the good, and so triumph over it. We do, however, have some indications of what happened.

The first is that Jesus died in triumph and serenity. He said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!’ Luke adds, ‘Having said this, he breathed his last’ (23:46). Mark says, ‘And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last’ (15:37). Matthew records, ‘And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit’ (27:50). The ‘loud cry’ may have been that of ‘It is finished!’ or ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!’, or both cries may have been made loudly, but whatever it was he appears to have had great strength before voluntarily laying down his life.

The cry of commendation in Luke 23:46 is a quote from Psalm 31. It directs us to the dependence of the psalmist upon God:

In thee, O Lord, do I seek refuge; let me never be put to shame;  
in thy righteousness deliver me!  
Incline thy ear to me, rescue me speedily!  
Be thou a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!

Yea, thou art my rock and my fortress;  
for thy name’s sake lead me and guide me,  
take me out of the net which is hidden for me,  
for thou art my refuge.  
Into thy hand I commit my spirit;  
thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

Christ—in the face of death—is dependent upon God, and sure He will deliver him.

The apostles frequently used Psalm 16. In Acts 2:24 Peter says, ‘But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.’

The statement ‘it was not possible for him to be held by it [death]’ is a most significant one. Peter explains this by applying Psalm 16:8–11:

For David says concerning him,  
 ‘For I saw the Lord always before me;  
 for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
 moreover my flesh will dwell in hope.  
 For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,  
 nor let thy Holy One see corruption.  
 Thou has made known to me the ways of life;  
 thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.’

Paul also quotes part of this Psalm in his first recorded sermon (Acts 13:35). He adds to the quote:

For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption.

Are we to gather that Christ’s body did not corrupt? The term ‘see corruption’ is a synonym for human death, involving the destruction of the body. Romans 5:12–21 makes it clear that human death as we know it resulted from the Fall. I Corinthians 15:55–56 shows that death’s sting is sin, and sin’s power is (by) the law, ie. the guilt of sin in the face of law that has been transgressed.

We are sure that death had no ‘sting’ for Christ. He defeated death before he died. As regards the body he died, but in the Spirit he rose, certifying his defeat of death. It is not absurd to say that his body did not even begin to corrupt. He had died to kill death, and this he did.

That does not mean that what to man is ‘the avalanche of death’ did not come upon him: it did, but then it was no ‘avalanche’. It was not possible for death to hold him, and its pangs were no pang. Christ trusted the Father as he went into death. Psalm 16:8 says, ‘I keep the Lord always before

me; because he is at my right hand, *I shall not be moved.*’ He adds, ‘Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices ‘ This is a beautiful state of mind. He adds yet again, ‘My body also dwells secure.’ Why is this? Because, ‘For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, nor let thy godly one [Holy One] see the Pit.’

Although we cannot enter into his experience of the Tomb and of death, yet we can gather it was a joyful one. He later showed to his followers the Scriptures which pertained to his death and resurrection (Luke 24:27 and 44: ‘ . . . everything written about me in . . . the psalms must be fulfilled’), and doubtless that is why the apostles quote Psalm 16—amongst other Psalms (eg. Psalms 2 and 110).

Death, then, through his death and resurrection, lost its sting. ‘He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.’ The penalty of sin—death—is no more. He who dies in Christ does not die the ‘second death’. He does not come into judgement. ‘Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

When the disciples saw Christ risen, they were at first afraid. They trembled, but then ‘they believed not for joy’. The implications of his standing before them must have been immediate. The man who had hung on the cross some days before was now alive! He was so obviously stronger than death, and never had any man been stronger than death ! Thus he must be stronger than sin and all evil. Doubtless his words concerning resurrection then rushed into consciousness. They now knew the utter defeat of sin and death. No wonder ‘they believed not for joy’!

I Peter 3:18b–19 says:

Christ . . . being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit [Spirit]; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

This is a proverbially difficult passage to explain.

The only point we take here is, 'he went and preached to the spirits in prison'. These are almost certainly the fallen (rebellious) angels spoken of in II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. What we know is he preached, that is, 'he proclaimed' (Greek *ekeruxen* from *kerusso*, 'to proclaim'), and this means he informed the rebellious and imprisoned spirits that Christ's death and resurrection had defeated them. If, as some suppose, this happened in the time between his death and rising, then it was in triumph he acted, not in passivity, being bound by death. He was alive when he was dead! We are not bound, however, even to see this as happening between the Friday evening and the Sunday morning.

### Conclusion at the Battle of the Resurrection

In one sense it was no battle, but for us who are human and are overwhelmed even by the thought of the 'avalanche of death', the rushing in upon us of the engulfing waves of dark horror, his simple trust in the Father, and his joy in facing death—as also his utter rest within it—do constitute for us a paradigm of trust, and, more than that, the seal of our own escape from 'the sting of death' and 'the power of sin'.

'Christ', Paul said, 'has been raised from the dead [and become] the first fruits of them that slept.' This means that man is no longer subject to death, hence:

'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

'O death, where is thy victory?

O death, where is thy sting?'

He then goes on to show the victory of the risen Christ:

The sting of death is sin' and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always

abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

## 9

## THE CONQUEST OF HIS ASCENSION – 1

ASCENSION AND SESSION ROOTED IN  
THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have seen that Christ's death and resurrection are 'in accordance with the scriptures' (I Cor. 15:3–4; Acts 17:2–3). So also must the Ascension and Session be 'in accordance with the scriptures'. By 'Ascension', we mean Christ's being taken to the right hand of the Father, and by 'Session', we mean the rule he is now exercising there as 'Lord of all'.

The two Psalms that are used more than all others in the New Testament, are Psalms 2 and 110.<sup>1</sup> In Psalm 2:6 the King says, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.' Whilst doubtless this referred in the time of the Psalm to an older king setting his son newly upon the throne, it is seen—in the

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<sup>1</sup> The apostles must have had a fair survey of the O.T. Scriptures, which related to Messiah, his person and his work. Christ undoubtedly gave this to them. Without this interpreted survey, the apostles would have little basic material on which to work. How then can we understand the apostolic messages unless we have much of the same background? Psalms 2 and 110 are Psalms so clearly used in the New Testament that by understanding them we can work within the frame of reference used by the apostles. It is difficult to know how, otherwise, we can really understand the teaching of the New Testament. If the work seems laborious, yet it will prove highly rewarding. My own personal research—many years ago—into Psalms 2 and 110, has been of immense help to me in understanding the Gospel.

New Testament—to refer to the Davidic (Messianic) King, Jesus.

In Psalm 110:1 we have, 'The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool." ' The verses following show this one at the right hand to be the ruler of his people and conqueror of his enemies. Both Psalms then show a person who is translated from not being a king to becoming a king. This being established, we are now free to look at these two Psalms in the New Testament. When we do, we are surprised at their importance. One assumes that these are some of the Scriptures of the Old Testament to which Christ referred in his post-resurrection appearances (cf. Luke 24:27 and 24:44).<sup>2</sup>

## Psalm 2 In the New Testament

The substance of the Psalm relates to the coronation of Christ. How do we come to this conclusion? In Matthew 3:17 the Father's voice says, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.' Luke, too, follows this form, but one ancient manuscript adds, ' . . . today I have begotten thee', thus making it to be identical with Psalm 2:7. In any case, scholars agree that the baptismal saying is from Psalm 2:7, but add that it is a conflation of this verse with Isaiah 42:1:

*Behold my servant' whom I uphold'  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him,  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.*

The point is that Psalm 2:7 refers to the old king acting in adoption. Whether his blood-son or not, the new king comes of age, ie. is officially adopted,—becoming the son—

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<sup>2</sup> \* See foot note on page 42.

king. Thus the formula ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (see Matt. 16:16; 26:63; cf. John 1:49) means ‘the Messiah (ie. king) of the Kingdom’. This being so, the baptism can be said to be Christ’s coronation.

Even so, this coronation, viewed from another angle, takes in the transfiguration, the death, the resurrection and the ascension. Only then is the coronation completed. In Matthew 17:5 the baptismal formula is repeated: ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ In Mark 9:7 it is, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ In Luke 9:35 it is, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ An ancient manuscript has ‘my Beloved’. The baptism, then, is inseparable from the transfiguration.

It is notable that the subject of the transfiguration is ‘his exodus which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem’. *His transfiguration was with a view to his crucifixion*. Thus baptism, transfiguration and crucifixion are all parts of the whole coronation. This view is supported by Acts 4:26, where Psalm 2:1–2 is quoted:

Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples imagine vain things?  
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and his Anointed—

Those praying and quoting this Psalm (in this ‘Acts’ reference) then relate this action to the crucifixion. They see the ‘Anointed’, ie. Messiah the King, as filling out his regal work in both crucifixion and resurrection, although the resurrection is not specifically mentioned. In Acts 13:33, Paul says:

This he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus;  
as also it is written in the second psalm  
‘Thou art my Son,  
today I have begotten thee.’

In this way, Paul adds to the baptism, transfiguration and crucifixion, the resurrection.

In Hebrews 1:5—in the context of speaking of Christ’s ascension—the writer says, ‘For to what angel did God ever say, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee”?’ Hebrews 5:1–10 needs to be studied, for it speaks of Christ being made a high priest ‘after the order of Melchizedek’. Verse 5 must have some reference to the ascension: ‘So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee.” ‘

In Revelation 2:26–27 there is another reference to Psalm 2:

He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations’ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces even as I myself have received power from my Father.

This quote is from Psalm 2:8–9. Likewise in Acts I :8 there is a reference to ‘the ends of the earth’ (RSV, ‘to the end of the earth’), and this is a quote from Psalm 2:8: ‘Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’

A quite powerful reference to Psalm 2 is in Revelation 12:4–5:

His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

‘Rule all the nations’ is the thrust of Psalm 2:8, and ‘with a rod of iron’, Psalm 2:9. In all of this, Christ’s Kingship is portrayed, and the necessity of his reigning powerfully indicated.

The final reference to Psalm 2 is one partly concealed in

Revelation 19:15, where, speaking of Christ, the ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, it is written: ‘From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and *he will rule them with a rod of iron.*’ This then is the Conqueror, the Kingly one, the true Messiah.

Our conclusion regarding Psalm 2 is that the early church understood him as ‘the conquering King’ in the light of Psalm 2.

### Psalm 110 in the New Testament

The basic quote from this Psalm is ‘Sit thou at my right hand’, and it speaks of ‘Session’ more than ‘Ascension’, but then it must include both. The ‘right hand’ of God is a term used in the Old Testament for the place of authority and reigning. This is what is meant by Psalm 110:1. It is used prolifically, either in full or shortened form, in Matthew 22:44; 26:64 (cf. Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42–43; 22:69); Acts 2:34; I Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 10:12–13; 12:2; cf. Hebrews 8:1.

The Psalm is used by Christ to refer to ‘great David’s greater son’, in Matthew 22:41–46. He is doubtless referring to himself. Yet for our purposes it is his conquering Kingship which figures so largely, particularly in the use of ‘Sit at my right hand until I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.’

This is used in Hebrews I :13 and 10: 13, for Christ’s reigning triumph. In I Corinthians 15:24–28, Christ’s enemies are being put under his feet by the Father. There is also a reference to this in Revelation 3:21:

He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself [Christ] conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Doubtless this kind of reference research does not move

us deeply, but when we see the import of all the references in regard to Christ being King and Conqueror, then it is highly productive and significant. Only in the light of these does the vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1 :12–20 have deep meaning for us. The phrases, ‘the firstborn from the dead’, ‘the ruler of kings on earth’, and ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, come alive in the light of his ascension and session at God’s right hand.

## 10

## THE CONQUEST OF HIS ASCENSION – 2

## CHRIST'S PRESENT ACTION OF CONQUEST

First we need to see certain elements relating to the ascension of Christ. He talked about 'entering into his glory' (Luke 24:26; cf. John 17:5). He told his disciples, 'I go to the Father, and you will see me no more' (John 14:28; 16:10). He said to Mary, after the Resurrection, 'I ascend to the Father' (John 20:17). He had said the Spirit would 'convict the world of righteousness . . . because I go to the Father'.

All of this means that the Ascension is the Father's attestation of Jesus as His 'Righteous One'. Far from being a blasphemer, he was attested as the Son of God. 'Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God', and, 'God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour' (Acts 2:33; 5:31) are statements of extreme importance, pointing to irreversible coronation. Likewise Ephesians I :20–22 tells us that:

he . . . made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church.

What we must see is that Christ has been given a position of authority in order to reign actively. His office is no sinecure, no place of resting or inactivity. By his obedience from birth to baptism, and baptism to the crucifixion and beyond, he has earned the place where, as glorified man and as Son of God, he reigns in glory. But he reigns with a view to fulfilling the victory he won through death and resurrection, and which now he works out by his reigning.

He is King of the Kingdom of God and of heaven. It is the Kingdom 'of the Son of his love', 'of Christ and of God' (Col . 1:13; Eph. 5: 5). God who is 'King over all the earth' has appointed His Son as 'King of kings, and Lord of lords'. For this not just to be position without power, and ruling without action, the Son has to be Lord over all things. This he is, for:

When he ascended on high he led captivity captive,  
and gave gifts to men.  
He . . . ascended far above all the heavens,  
that he might fill all things.

This was because God's 'plan for the fullness of time [is] to unite all things in him, things in heaven, and things on earth' (see Eph. 4:8, 10; 1:9–11). His session at God's right hand, then, is a most dynamic thing.

## CHRIST'S PRESENT CONQUERING

Hebrews 10:12–13 (cf. Ps. 110:1) shows Christ seated at God's right hand 'to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet'. In I Corinthians 15:24–28 (cf. Ps. 110:1) we have a mini-picture of the maxi-operation of Christ from his ascension until his coming again, ie. 'from Pentecost to the Parousia'. It is described thus:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last

enemy to be destroyed is death. 'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet., But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him., it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

This means that Christ is putting all things under his own feet, destroying his enemies in the process, whilst the Father—for His part—is putting them under Christ's feet. How does Christ defeat these enemies? The answer is 'By his people, the church, over whom he is Lord, and whom he directs from his place of reigning.' He had said, 'Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and *lo! I am with you* always. ' We can now see what is the present work of Christ. Having gone from us to the Father, he has come to us to lead us in his work.

We have already called I Corinthians 15:24–28 'a mini-picture of a maxi-operation'. In this we are correct. However, in the Book of the Revelation we have a larger canvas, and a more detailed picture. From chapter 5 through to chapter 20, we see the process outlined in I Corinthians 15:24–28. It is not a serene picture of some Arcadian tranquillity, but is one of a vast and titanic struggle against evil, until it is defeated.

# 11

## THE GREAT CONQUEST OF THE LAMB

### THE WORK OF THE LION WHO IS THE LAMB

We now come to the ultimate of Christ's conquering work. His present work has been described variously as 'The action which takes place between "D-Day" and "V-Day" ', as 'The last mopping-up operation', and as 'The completion of his finished work'. All of these statements mean, 'The victory which was won on the Cross and through the Resurrection is now being outworked in history in every time and place until all opposition is concluded and effaced.'

One of the problems of reading a book such as 'The Revelation' is that the sheer weight of its symbolism occupies the mind as an exercise all of its own. We can become entranced by its beauty and its figures and miss the strong action that is wholly historical and which is always before our eyes—whether we see it fully or not.

Another problem arises from our inadequate views of God. There is so much of judgements in this Book that we shrink from exposure to them, We prefer our more domestic views of God. We like Him as 'Father' and 'the God of love', ie. 'the one who attends to our needs', and we miss the strong actions by which He defeats evil, pursuing it to its last lair and vanquishing it. Some of us have not been raised

on the great holiness of God which demands requital for the violation of His holy Self. We do not see the dreadful and polluted nature of that which is evil. This is why the Book even constitutes an offence to some who make certain attempts to read it.

If, then, we could understand the full outworking of I Corinthians 15:24–28, and if we would understand all the prophetic teaching concerning ‘the Day of the Lord’, and if we would have a full-orbed view of history, and see God as King and Messiah as triumphant Lord, then we must read the Book of the Revelation. We must stay ourselves by a strong Spirit, so that we can—at last—come to understand the true meaning of history. Without this understanding, we will always be floundering, being offended from point to point, or just bewildered and misunderstanding. We need to stay with the exercise of understanding this great prophetic Book, the Revelation.

The essence of the Book is as follows:

In **chapter 5** Christ is revealed as the one who has been slain for all the nations of the earth. This great event places him above all the great humans. Thus in chapter 5 he alone is the one who can open the seven-sealed book. He only—of all great men and creatures of history—has prevailed to open the book, loosing its seven seals. He is called, ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’ (cf. Gen. 49:8–12). When John the Seer looks to see this Lion, he sees not a Lion but a Lamb, and the Lamb is as—though—it—had—been—slain. The rich truth portrayed here is that the humility of Christ defeats the crass strength of evil. When we look at Philippians 2:1–11 and I Peter 2:21–25, we see that love and humility outface the crude strength of self-seeking evil.

The seven-sealed book must mean the story of history. He, who opens its seals and its contents is the one who handles history. He is Lord of all its events. Only by virtue of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension has he won the right and

ability to do this. He who has suffered all the wrath of God upon sin, may now turn that suffering to that wrath against evil which will judge and destroy it.

In **chapter 6** the first five seals are opened, bringing judgement and suffering upon creation. Also in this chapter the sixth seal is opened and the leaders of the nations are terrified by ‘the face of him who is seated on the throne, and [by] the wrath of the lamb’. In chapter 7 there is a significant interlude whilst things are prepared for the opening of the seventh seal, before the blowing of the seven trumpets of judgements. In that intermission the redeemed are seen, freed from tribulation and making pure worship to God.

In **chapters 8 and 9**, six of the terrible trumpet blasts take place, and more terrifying and painful judgement come upon the earth. Whilst reading these, we must keep in mind that the Master of the seals and the trumpets is the Lamb.

In **chapters 10 and 11** there is an interregnum before the blowing of the seventh trumpet. A strong angel pronounces the fulfilment of God’s plan for history, and two witnesses defy the world of evil people, ultimately triumphing over all. Then, in chapter 11, when the seventh trumpet sounds out, the triumph of Christ is acknowledged. The song of the celestial elders is:

We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast,  
that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.  
The nations raged, but thy wrath came,  
and the time for the dead to be judged,  
for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints,  
and those who fear thy name, both small and great,  
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

It is necessary, as well as interesting, to see that ‘The nations raged, but thy wrath came’ is drawn from Psalm 2: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’ (verse 1), and ‘Then he rebukes them in his anger, and terrifies them in his wrath’ (verse 5). The ancient theme continues in its

principle throughout all ages.

In **chapter 12** the battle between the good and evil angels is pictured, and the dragon ('that old serpent the devil') is cast down to the earth. Again Christ's victory is portrayed:

*Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*

Even so, the dragon pursues those who 'keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus'.

Our understanding of the present battle is enlarged by reading **chapter 13**. Here the principle of evil is outlined, and in more detail than we can reproduce in this book. In principle, evil insists—under severe threat of persecution and martyrdom—that all men take upon themselves the 'mark of the beast', ie. the beastly nature of this prince of evil. Man must conform with the world's system.

In **chapter 14** there is a further interlude involving the <sup>144,000</sup>, a reiteration of the Gospel and a command which goes counter to that of the beast, ie. if anyone follows the beast he will come under judgement and suffer endless torment. Then comes the ingathering of the harvest of mankind, particularly for judgement.

**Chapter 15** is important, for it pictures those 'who had conquered the beast', and these are singing 'the song of Moses and the Lamb'. The Song of Moses was the victory song sung when Pharaoh's troops were drowned, and Israel was liberated. The Song of the Lamb is the song which celebrates his victory and rejoices in its reality. At this point of the Book, the preparation for the outpouring of the final bowls (vials) of wrath is made. These bowls of wrath are far more stringent than the previous trumpets and seals. They bring horrific judgements.

Even so, the battle goes on. **Chapter 17** links the gaudy

harlot, Babylon, with the 'mystery of the beast'. Evil still presses on to take power and reign in the affairs of creation, but in chapter 18 Babylon is destroyed. Her commerce has always been evil, and she has ruthlessly slain the righteous. Now she herself is defeated, and God's righteousness is vindicated. The martyrs are avenged, and justice is required.

Perhaps it is **chapter 19**, of all the chapters, which shows Christ as the great Conqueror. A beautiful and powerful description of him and his warfare is given:

*Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings, and lord of lords.*

### THE FINAL BATTLES

Now the victory of Christ's death and resurrection is about to show itself. Had Christ—as Jesus the man—not defeated evil on the Cross and through the Resurrection, then in the final battle the defeat could not be complete. Chapter 19 goes on to show Christ defeating the mighty leaders of the earth and their armies, and it would seem these were the ones who had cowered before the wrath of God and the lamb, as recorded in chapter 6. They are now slain.

Now the beast (and with it the false prophet) is captured and both these creatures are thrown into the lake of fire, ie. they suffer 'the second death'.

The final section of the unending battle is shown in

**chapter 20** where, following the millennium—whatever that may be—the forces of evil regroup for a final and deadly onslaught upon the church, called here ‘the camp of the saints’. They are thwarted in that fire comes down from heaven and consumes them. This fire is generally known as the word or voice of God (cf. Rev. 11:5; 19:15; Jer. 23:29). The devil is now cast into the same lake of fire in which the beast and the false–prophet were interned. Christ’s victory, then, is now complete.

This completeness of victory is shown in the last judgement. All mankind is judged for its works—whether good or bad. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life escape the penalty and judgement. God at last is vindicated, and the victory of the Lamb is perfected so that he is unassailable forever!

This, then, in history, and at its climax, is the victory of the Lamb, of Christ the conquering King!

#### CONCLUSION AS TO CHRIST’S VICTORY

Fascinating as is the prophecy of the Revelation, we are apt to live in a world of near–fantasy, getting caught up in the symbols, in the colour and movements of the events, and lose our sense of the deadliness of the situation. When we bring the symbols into the reality we face in the action of evil, then there is nothing to fascinate us.

The battle of Christ to defeat evil on the Cross is a battle we have witnessed, at least to some degree. It was a time of high horror, of piercing deadliness of accusation, and the deep dread that comes with unceasing terrible happenings. History is really of this nature of things, but spaced out, so that no hour of man’s habitation of the earth is ever a time of peace.

It is in this situation that Christ carries the battle through

to victory. Nothing must be left unvisited by wrath and judgement which is evil: nothing must escape the sharp sword of his discernment and consequent judgement. The powers of evil are urgent with the knowledge of impending destruction, and seek to wreak their anger and hatred with every device and equipment they possess.

How marvellous then is the victory of Christ ! No wonder the Song of Moses is transcended by the Song of the Lamb. The heavens resound to thunderous applause as the Conqueror leads his people in triumph.

We are reminded of Teerstegan’s great hymn:

He plunged in his imperial strength  
To gulfs of darkness down.  
He brought his trophy up at length,  
The foiled usurper’s crown!

Only the Cross could obtain the Crown. Only his humility could baffle the proud mind of Satan, and only love could snatch from evil the very prey that it would destroy.

‘Oh Christ, thou Conqueror, how thou hast defeated the powers of darkness, and oh! how that hast defeated me!’

## 12

## THE CONQUEST OF MAN

## MAN THE PROUD CONQUEROR

He has not understood man who does not know that to the very last the human spirit is proud. In the midst of his alcoholic bondage, the skid row man will try to walk straight and tall. Any human person is elegant in his—or her—native glory. Patronise the human spirit and it will flash out its objections and its resentment. The last thing it will forgive—if ever it does forgive—is the dishonouring of its personhood.

Man is not proud by accident. Somewhere, and somehow, he knows he has been made in the image of God, and he intends to walk in that glory, come what may. When the glory pales, or its beauty fades, then man will rustle up some cosmetic that will refurbish him—he thinks—in his natural dignity and beauty.

God's original mandate to man—given at the time of creation—was:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and every living thing that moves upon the earth.

The Psalmist added in wonder:

Thou hast made him [man] little less than God,  
and dost crown him with glory and honour.  
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;  
thou hast put all things under his feet.

God said, 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.' To this Paul adds, 'Man . . . is the image and glory of God.' See Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:5–6; Genesis 9:6; I Corinthians 11:7.

Man, then, was to be a conqueror. He was to *subdue* the creation. What does this mean but that the creation is most dynamic. It expresses the ever-living and active God. Man has high nobility, being in God's image. Everything was not just to fall into man's lap, so to speak.

## THE EVIL CONQUEST OF MAN

Understandably, man was conquered by trying to go beyond himself. All he desired was to be a creature which could make its own evaluations, and so its own decisions. Doubtless this would put an end to its 'creatureliness', for it would be independent of its Creator. Man then turned from honouring God, and expressing his gratitude, to worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Doubtless 'the creature' includes man and his environment. He sought, within the perimeter of these two things, to create a life of enjoyment and fulfilment.

In fact, he was demeaned. His heart became 'deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt'. His evaluations were to prove worthless. Paul in his inimitable way put his finger on the problem of man. He said, 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' When man falls short of God's glory he falls short of his own.

James sees man's bondage as existing within the realm of himself. Rightly enough he says:

Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death (1:14–15).

Yet man has not been left alone to tempt himself. Pride brought Satan into a fall from his own high dignity. If we understand the language of Isaiah 14 (addressed to the king of Babylon) and Ezekiel 28 (addressed to the king of Tyre), then we understand Satan was captivated by his own beauty and desired to have dignity beyond any other creature, rivalling even that of God!

The curious thing is that the more man seeks to establish his own dignity, the less secure he becomes. Man, in acceding to Satan's temptation, was caught in the grip of the same evil. He had evil affinity with evil. The writer of Proverbs has much to say about man's pride, but had he said nothing we would still recognise that pride goes before a fall. We might even understand, 'He who oppresses the poor insults his Maker.' What we do know is that our human pride comes into conflict with the pride of other humans.

I have come to understand that the test of whether we truly worship God or not is whether we honour man, and honour him even in his fallenness. We must recognise that—all things given in—he is still 'the image and glory of God'. We are told to honour parents, to honour old age: husbands are to honour their wives. In fact we are to 'honour all men' and this is to include rulers, whether in Caesar's world or in the church. We are to seek to outdo one another in showing honour. All of this goes to show the dignity of man, the noble conqueror and subduer of his creation.

### MAN THE DEGRADED

The Scriptures tells us that man is the enemy of God (cf. Rom. I :30; 5: 10; Col. I :21). It is in this state of mind that he

most degrades himself. He is the plaything of Satan, being gripped by him and forced to follow his 'lifestyle' (I John 5:19; Eph. 2:1–3), and he is degraded by fear of death and punishment (Heb. 2:14–15). We have already seen that man is enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Prov. 5:22–23; 11 Pet. 2:19), and that he is a kind of guttersnipe, living in pollution (Mark 7:20–23; Isa. 57:20–21).

When Jesus came, he did so in order to liberate man into his former dignity. He saw man possessed by demons, gripped cruelly in demonic sickness and infirmities, he saw him held by his own terrible guilts and lusts, and often grovelling before death. It seems at least on one occasion that 'he trembled with indignation' (cf. John 11 :33, 38). He desired to bring man back into high dignity, and make him a conqueror of his troubled creation.

Man's great problem has been that he is so dignified, so haughty, that he will not allow even God to help him. He can be in the depths of misery and refuse God's 'loving kindness'. Grace, to him, is highly humiliating. He has his own ways of justifying himself. Equipped with the power to evaluate, he knows (so he claims) what is good and evil. Moreover, he can attain to any goal of holiness, given the inclination! He has enough saints and godly gurus to certify that!

His hostility of God is not mild. He asks, 'Can God really conquer the human heart? Perhaps by threats He will attempt to do this. Paul says, in effect, 'No! Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?' He has already said, 'Do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?' (Rom. 2:4–5).

How often does man humble himself before another? Samuel the prophet spoke out of wisdom to the haughty King Saul:

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

and to hearken than the fat of rams.  
 For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
 and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry (I Sam. 15:22-23).

How then is this proud heart broken? How does it come to true repentance and not the harshness of remorse? How does it achieve 'a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart'? How does it come to the place of mourning of itself, to poverty of spirit, and to hungering and thirsting after righteousness?

### CHRIST COMES TO CONQUER THE PROUD HUMAN HEART

Paul said simply, 'He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.'

There are many ways we could describe this work of Christ which brings human beings to repentance and faith, and so to new birth and new life.

The New Testament way is to reveal the love of God and so confront the proud human spirit with God as He really is. Hostility to God involves anger, and anger never allows human beings to think rationally. Argumentation does not bring to conviction of the truth. It is God's kindness, goodness and forbearance which brings humans to repentance.

Doubtless the incarnation of the Son of God is an indicator to God's love, but the purpose of the incarnation is what really reveals Him as love. He sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world, to give us life, to destroy the works of the devil, and to liberate us from the grip of evil, the misery of our sinfulness, and the power of our lusts. See I John 4:14.

He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, setting him forth in this state, wounding him for our transgressions

and bruising him for our iniquities. He made him to be sin for us, laying upon him the iniquity of us all. All this is summed up in such statements as: 'God so loved the world'; 'God so loved that he gave'; 'In this was love'; 'Herein is love'; 'By this we know the love of God'; 'God, out of the great love wherewith he loved us'; 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation'; 'But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared'; 'Unto him that has loved us and loosed us from our sins'.

There are other similar statements, but when these get home to the human heart it sees that God is not an ogre, not a grim-visaged God, but is in fact Love Himself. His love is holy, destroying the evil that would destroy man, setting the conscience at peace, purifying the heart, cancelling evil's power, and ridding the heart of fear and guilt.

It is this God who is Father, loving His children, giving them the gifts of repentance and faith, forgiveness of sins, purification from pollution, freedom from bondage, love in the heart, and the never-failing presence of the Holy Spirit —himself the gift of grace.

It is when a person hears this liberating word, and understands the grace of the Conquering King and his Father, that the human heart capitulates. Its enmity dies away, its hatred dissolves, and it is flooded with love.

It cries with great joy, 'Oh Christ, thou Conquering King, thou hast conquered. Set up thy throne in my heart. With joy I capitulate to thee. My rebellion is ended. My humiliation is finished. My pride breaks before thy love, and with humility I desire thee, and only thee.'

### THE REBEL HEART UNDONE

Mine was the rebel heart.  
 Ensconced in my lair,  
 I waited silent when the Huntsman came.  
 My mute passion welled and welled,  
 Filling its anger out against  
 The One who had made me, given me life.

Back at the beginning time,  
 The time when the promise was power,  
 When the world about  
 Smiled in delight, and the high love  
 Gripped me. Love was from her,  
 But then—all of it, within and without—  
 From Him the Unending Lover.  
 In those days I say  
 No rebel anger fouled my nest:  
 My lair was but love's delights,  
 A bower of ineffable joy  
 And the beauty of holiness.

Often in the dark reaches of the night  
 When the sea of love swirls out  
 Its long and passionate reaches  
 Until its tide recedes and I am left  
 Alone, and in grim loneliness,  
 Inward I pant for the old serenity,  
 Seeking the ancient tranquillity,  
 And longing with tears  
 To sit at the Huntsman's feet.

None knows the terror of the human anger,  
 None knows as I the fierce hatred,  
 The wrath that divides me from me,  
 And from the implacable race  
 Born of my own rebellion, each outliving  
 The other in hatred and love.

I am every Cain in the midst of all Abels,  
 All Esaus with the Israels too  
 Whose birthborn rebellions anon  
 Yet situates their rebel hearts,  
 Placing their undeserving lives  
 Within the elect of God.

So many nights  
 I have lain panting: in my lair,  
 Head on paws, angered at loneliness,  
 Waiting the accepting touch of love,  
 I have defied the Living One,  
 Hating Him whilst I longed  
 To be done with the destroying wrath.  
 Then has my bitter heart  
 Keened into the silent night  
 In impatient anger  
 Against the Ineffable One.

I then am the one He made,  
 Creating my spirit in the divine glory,  
 Giving me power of worship  
 To live in unending praise  
 For His high designs for me.  
 Whence came this destroying wrath,  
 This rebel heart, its implacable opposing  
 Of the Divine One, the eternal Love?

One night in that far-off lair  
 In the brooding silence,

In the turbulent mind  
 The Vision came. I was destroyed  
 Until it came. I was destroyed  
 By my own implacable denial  
 Of all that He was, and all that I  
 Had been created by Him.  
 The Vision came, and I was undone.

You who have seen will know—  
 You who have caught the sudden blaze  
 Of Golgotha's immolation,  
 Who have known the terror and the pain  
 Of the Man embracing  
 The lonely lairs of all outcasts,  
 The anguish in the hot and bitter nights,  
 The cold alienation of the human spirit  
 From its divine Father and Home—  
 You only will know  
 The Divine Love at work  
 In the howling wastes of the human spirit,  
 Far from its true Origin, its only Ground of being.

I cannot recount without wonder  
 The passion of the incarnate God:  
 Cannot pause and stare  
 Without the high sea within me  
 Becoming my ocean of tears,  
 And surging in Kingtide love  
 To adore the Worshipful One.

I tell you, the great rebellion  
 Died in the dawning of that love—  
 Nails twisting in the painful flesh,  
 Crown dripping blood  
 From the tortured brow,  
 But greater far the incredible deformation  
 Of the abandoned One, the alienated spirit

That sobbed out the corporate despair  
 Of the self-separated human race.

I saw in my dark night of the soul  
 The glory of the undeserved grace,  
 The Divine pity and the Divine love  
 Seeking me out in my self-appointed lair,  
 And laying upon me  
 The tender and loving hands.  
 I tell you—generations of men—  
 That the Huntsman came in the sad night  
 Of Golgotha's groaning,  
 And my eternal pain  
 To free me

## 13

## MAN THE CONQUEROR!

## THE CONQUERED CONQUERS!

We saw in our previous study that man had been created to be a conqueror. He was commanded, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill up the earth and *subdue it*, and *have dominion over it*.' He was then, by created nature, one who could subdue that which needed subduing. He also could exercise lordship over all the creation.

This would be natural to man, seeing he was made in the image of God. Because God was (is) 'King over all the earth', so too would man, under God, exercise human sovereignty. Only for a little time was he made lower than the angels (cf. Heb. 2:7). One day he will judge angels (I Cor. 6:3; cf. Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 21:7; 22:5).

In one way it is difficult for us to see truth as other than an abstract biblical proposition, but it is true! Man was made to rule, but his rule was to be in simplicity. He was to be under God so that he could truly, and functionally, exercise the authority delegated to him as his responsibility.

When, in the Fall, man desired to be 'as God' and not just 'like God'—which he already was—he really proposed to rule apart from God, or, possibly, to rule with God !

Because the drive to rule is part of himself as he had been created, the misuse of this ruling ability put him in conflict with God. In fact it put him in conflict with every order of authority. The authority of others became a threat to him.

We have also seen that from the point of his moral fall, man became the object of many enemies. He became, virtually, the plaything of Satan and his evil principalities and powers. He became caught in the web of the anti-God world system. He was henceforth enmeshed in sin, in its guilt, pollution, and power. Death reigned over him, and the grave was a terror to him. God, it seemed, was his enemy, so that within him his fallen humanity became like an irrational animal, fighting God.

Paul described this irrational fallen human nature. He called it 'flesh' and said, 'The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God' (Rom. 8:7). This made the law the enemy of fallen man, and it visited him with the curse, ie. the just judgement of the law, and execution of that judgement upon him. Thus his conscience became an ever-present tyrant, driving him to despair, and to curious efforts at self-atonement.

Man indeed became a degraded creature, a creature under the heel of evil. Yet, strangely and perversely, man doggedly insisted on ruling. Always rebellious against God, he clung determinedly to rule over his world. Doubtless his efforts were—for the most part—futile. He was a proud creature amidst the ruins of his former glory.

To this proud, angry, and hostile fallen manhood came Christ. He submitted to being made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. Indeed he was 'born of a woman, born under the law'. He became a servant to the human race, and his reward was that he broke the proud human heart with his love, and conquered the unconquerable! Man, as Paul put it, became constrained by the love of God. John said, 'We

love because he first loved us.’

### THE CONQUERED BECOMES THE CONQUEROR

The grandeur of this radical and total miracle of human transformation is that it did not recall the gift of glory given to man in creation, but restored it, re-creating it. All God’s gifts are without recall! (see Rom. 11:29). The mandate given by God at creation has been renewed. Man is to subdue all things, and to have dominion over them.

To this high command has been added another no less lofty, viz. ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’. Paul constantly referred to this as ‘the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations’ (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; cf. Rom. 10:3, 16; II Thess. 1:7–9). The Gospel is God’s proclamation to man which must be obeyed, for by such obedience man, being conquered, then goes forth to conquer.

Christ’s great conquest was not just that he subdued man—which he did—but that he has transformed him into a true conqueror. Paul said, ‘We are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us’ (Rom. 8:37).

What conquest then has—and does—man make? To answer all this, we must first say, ‘He makes no conquest outside of Christ,’ In Philippians 4:13, Paul claims, ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me.’

### THE CONQUEROR RULES UNDER THE RULE OF GRACE

The principle of total dependence was taught to the disciples by Jesus. He kept saying he did nothing of himself, averring that the Father dwelt in him and did the works. He would never venture outside his Father’s will, or do other than the

prophetic writings had said he would. In every way he sought to fulfil the word of God. In all this, he proved to be the conquering King.

So with the Christian person: he (she) must be totally dependent upon God. Christ called that ‘abiding in me’. Paul said, ‘Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God.’ He sees conquest as something given to us by God. He says, ‘But thanks be to God who, in Christ always leads us in triumph!’ and, ‘But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!’ (John 15:1ff.; II Cor. 3:5; II Cor. 2:14; I Cor. 15:57).

Paul sees conquest of evil as something possible to the new conqueror—man, provided he lives under grace. He says, ‘Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. . . For sin will have no dominion [lordship] over you, since you are not under law but *under grace*. The Christian person, then, is not under law, but stands in grace, ie. lives in it and in nothing else (Rom. 5:2). Grace instructs (teaches, educates, disciplines) him (Titus 2:11–14), so that he does nothing but by grace (I Cor. 15:10), ie. his conquests over the enemies are by grace and grace alone.

John also understands the principle of Christian victory and conquest. Like Paul, he accredits the power for victory to Christ: ‘Little children, you are of God, and you have overcome them [the antichrists]; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world’; ‘For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith’ (I John 4:4; 5:4).

Paul, John, James and Peter are one in believing the Christian can—and does—overcome Satan and his forces. Paul speaks of the armour of God, by which, when a man is equipped with it, he can overcome evil forces. ‘Take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’ James—like

Peter—teaches that humility in grace equips a person for successful battle. ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you’ (4:7). Paul’s equivalent to this is, ‘Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.’ He adds:

James and Peter are similar in their words. Peter says:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith (I Pet. 5:6–9a).

John writes to his ‘little children’:

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. . . I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one (I John 2:13b, 14b).

The conquest of Satan and evil takes place under the constant battle of faith. Faith quenches the fiery darts of the evil one (Eph. 6:16). It also takes the sword of the Spirit, not only in defence, but also in aggression (Eph. 6:17). It topples down citadels of evil (II Cor. 10:4; 6:7). Through the Spirit, man puts to death the wrong deeds of his body, and mortifies that which has already been killed. In these things, and by these ways, he is truly conqueror.

As we keep repeating, ‘Christ’s conquest of man has turned him into a conqueror.’

## 14

### MAN THE PERSONAL CONQUEROR

#### MAN SINGLE AND CORPORATE

In detailing the conquest by man of himself, the evil powers, his enemies, the creation, and his own flesh, we need to see the total responsibility and accountability of every man for his own choices and acts. We also need to see that whilst man-as-a-person is intelligible, yet man-as-an-individual is not. By ‘man-as-an-individual’, we understand ‘man-over-and-against-others’, ie. man ‘doing his *own* thing’. By ‘man-as-a-person’, we understand man linked organically and relationally with the whole human race. Man fully finds his personhood in the context of other—indeed, all other—persons .

When then we talk of ‘Man the personal conqueror’, we are not, strictly speaking, correct. Man needs the support of, and interrelationship with, others in order to proceed on his programme of conquest. Even so, his choices will necessarily be personal when it comes to the point of action.

Another difficulty we have in showing believing man as a personal conqueror is that the people of God fight corporately. We will be examining this aspect of things in our next chapter. Here, however, we have to see the responsibility laid upon persons to be conqueror or overcomers (ie. conquerors).

A good place to commence is at Revelation 21:7, where God says, 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son.' The term 'this heritage' signifies 'all things', ie. 'the new heavens and the new earth'. Such a statement is mind-boggling. In other words, to make conquest is to be able to reign over all that is conquered.

What interests us is that God says the conqueror will be His son. In fact His Son was the true Conqueror. We have seen how he made that conquest and presently maintains it, moving towards the climax of the ultimate conquest of all things. The atoning work of the Cross and Resurrection was proleptic victory over all things. In I Corinthians 15:24–28 Christ *subdues* all things. In Genesis 1:28 man is given the order to *subdue* the creation. The principle, then, is established, namely that a conqueror is a son of God, and a son of God is a conqueror. This fact is most important.

In Revelation 2 and 3 the following promises are given to conquerors:

To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.

To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.

He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; and I will give him the morning star.

He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my

God' and the name of the city of my God' the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven' and my own new name.

He who conquers' I will grant him to sit with me on my throne' as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

The seven promises written above are quite remarkable. If each is examined, it can be seen to be very rich. Each is not given specifically to one church, so excluding the others, for (b) the seven churches all receive the one message (cf. Rev. 1:4, 11), ie. they receive all the messages of the seven letters, and (b) the refrain, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Notice that 'churches' is in the plural. We may also add that 'the seven churches', whilst being seven churches located geographically in Asia (1:4), yet symbolise the sevenfold church of Christian history. By 'sevenfold' we mean 'full' and 'complete', ie. the entire church.

All the promises, then, are for each conqueror of 'overcomer'.

At the same time, we have the difficulty, which we mentioned before, that no believer can be a single conqueror on his own. He is dependent upon the whole body of Christ in its operations. Nevertheless he has to make his personal choices, and so the promises seem to be directed to personal conquerors.

This difficulty is seen in Revelation 12:11: 'And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.' Whilst the church may be said to have a 'corporate mind', yet each person has to make his (or, her) own choices. So then, each one conquers, or fails to conquer, as the case may be.

Paul, on one occasion, spoke of his knowledge of the way in which Satan works. He said, 'For we are not ignorant of his designs' (AV has 'devices'). We saw above that the

apostolic writers understood the ways in which Satan works. When we set out to be conquerors, we have good resource material to hand, namely the Book of the Revelation. We noted that it is an enlargement of, and commentary upon, the action indicated in I Corinthians 15:24–28. In fact it is in this Book of all books that the devices and designs of Satan are unmasked. For this reason it is a most valuable Book, and those who do not read it miss great wisdom and blessing.

Because of the difficulty of picking out the threads of (a) personal conquest, and (b) corporate conquest, we will study the Book of the Revelation under the title, ‘**MAN THE CORPORATE CONQUEROR**’.

## 15

### MAN THE CORPORATE CONQUEROR – 1

#### ‘CHRIST’S CHURCH, MILITANT HERE, UPON EARTH’

This description of the church (*Anglican Prayer Book* 1662), is an apt one. We pick up the theme from Christ’s high-priestly prayer in John 17. Militancy is one aspect of the nature and function of the church. Jesus said:

I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world’ even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one . . . As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

This, then, was the launching of the church into the world that was opposed to God. It was given spiritual and moral weaponry, dynamic *materiel* to commence the great push against the powers of darkness. Christ had previously promised that the ‘gates of hell would not prevail’ against the onslaught of the church and its Kingdom of God mission (Matt. 16:18).

On one occasion, Jesus had said, ‘Go your way; behold I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves’ (Luke 10:3). His instructions to them were on simplicity of dress, possessions, and mode of ministry. This ministry of peace was

to conquer the people! While they were ministering the Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus ‘saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’. This, then, was militancy *par excellence*.

Even before his high-priestly prayer, Jesus had warned them:

*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you . . . but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. . . If they persecuted me, they will persecute you (John 15:18–20).*

Once the great event of Pentecost had taken place and the dynamic word of truth had gone out in the power of the Spirit, the warning of Christ was shown to be authentic. Persecution of the church took place rapidly, and became the order of the day, not only from the Jews, but also from many pagan sources. The Book of Acts, and the Epistles, show us this.

It is, however, the Book of the Revelation which prophetically unmasks the ‘devices and designs’ of Satan. In Chapter Ten, we saw Christ’s pattern of conquest, but now we will look both at Christ’s operations through his people, and the plan of Satan to triumph over the people of God.

#### THE MILITANCY OF EVIL, AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE GODLY PEOPLE

Chapter I of the Book of the Revelation shows Christ as Conquering King. He is Sovereign over all things. This is confirmed in the reference to him in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 5 the entire creation affirms his status as Redeemer of the nations. Chapter 5 is most important because Christ is depicted as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and yet is the Lamb as-though-it-had-been-slain, ie. ‘Christ crucified’. We say the chapter is important because it creates the setting for the breaking of the seals and the opening of the book of

history. We are told, virtually, that only Christ is competent to do this.

The opening of the seals—as we have already seen— brings horrific judgements on the earth, and as these ‘seal-judgements’ give way to even more intensive ‘trumpet-judgements’, so these latter—in turn—are succeeded by yet more dreadful ‘bowl-judgements’. Far from these judgements bringing brokenness and humility to the forces that oppose God, they heighten their anger and opposition. For example, 16:8–9 records:

*The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun’ and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; men were scorched by the fierce heat’ and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.*

Again, in 16:10–11:

*The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.*

16:20–21 says:

*And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and great hailstones, heavy as a hundredweight, dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of hail, so fearful was that plague.*

We conclude that far from shocking men and fallen celestial creatures into sobriety and repentance, God’s judgements exacerbate the hatred for God that these creatures hold. Their intransigence is their own judgement. Evil is not existent by chance, or even by mistake, but by deadly intention.

This plunges us into the very vortex of anger and hostility to God. Man and evil princes are so sure of their power to evaluate good and evil that ‘they call evil good, and good evil, light darkness, and darkness light’ (Isa. 5:20–23). The

Jews were ‘blind leaders of the blind’, for they refused the truth of love and mercy and judgement. There is an incredible power in the thrust for justice.

On this basis, the reaction of the ‘great red dragon’ is such that, cast down from heaven, he seeks to destroy the child ‘who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron’ (12:4–5), ie. the Christ–King of Psalm 2. He is shown the power of the Kingdom both by Christ’s accession to the throne of God, and by the believers who defeat him ‘by the blood of the Lamb’ (12:11).

That is why in chapter 13 the red dragon has conceived his strategy. He creates beastliness in the form of ‘the beast’. Without going into detail about the event, it is clear that the beast is the front that the dragon (‘that old serpent the devil’) presents to the world. The dragon gives his authority to the beast. Men worship the dragon, and now also worship the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’ It is the old power–ploy of evil.

Were the people of God and the persons of God allowed simply to go their own way, then there would be little conflict, but evil must ever be at God and at His children. Thus the plan is perpetrated whereby everyone must worship the beast and carry its mark or ‘number’. Non–conformity with this plan will bring savage persecution from the beast. It is in chapters 12 to 17 that the conflict takes place when the people of God are pressed, and when the seductive harlot Babylon, seeks to win the nations by her pleasures and delicacies. Thus Godly mankind is beset around with pressures and temptations to inordinate pleasure.

It is only in the face of this action of evil that we can understand the repeated calls to the believer, and to the people of God to be conquerors. When we are in the midst of the Revelation, we seem to be in a strange world, one which is on its own, and which is typified and explained by the dynamic symbols used, but in fact the action described

in it is no different from that described to us in the Epistles. We need to realise this, otherwise such a world of conflict becomes like exotic flora and fauna that are out of context with what is native and ‘everyday’ in experience.

Take, for example, Paul’s passage, 11 Corinthians 4:3–12. Here Satan is busy trying to blind the minds of unbelievers, ‘to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God’. In this context, Paul

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*

The experience of conquerors in the Revelation will not be other than that of Paul in his Corinthian Letters, and his Corinthian conflict.

He goes on (11 Cor. 6:4–10) to add:

*As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*

This, we repeat, is the way of battle, the conflicts of warfare, and the means and modes of conquering. As though the above account were not enough, Paul adds an intimate account of his sufferings in II Corinthians 11:23 to 28. He says:

*—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been*

beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea' danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Peter's first Letter speaks no less of the sufferings that come with the Gospel. Indeed his whole Letter is occupied with the matter of suffering, presenting it as part of the life in Christ. John warns against the invasion of antichrists and spirits who would seduce and deceive. Jude talks about the invasion of the church by ungodly men, all of which are echoes of Paul's conflict with those who would corrupt the church in faith and practice.

All of this adds up to a 'great tribulation'. How then, in the face of such persecution, pressures and implacable opposition—to say nothing of the brilliant strategies of evil— does the church militant defeat its enemies, conquering them? How, 'in all these things', and not just in spite of them, do persons and all the people of God emerge as 'more than conquerors'?

## 16

### MAN THE CORPORATE CONQUEROR – 2

#### THE TRIUMPH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

We repeat, 'The child of God and the children of God always live in the midst of strife. Always the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, the second beast, and the harlot Babylon, with the powerful kings of the earth, are trying to destroy or seduce the people of God. How then is it possible for them not to be defeated, and in fact to win, to conquer and destroy the destroyers of the earth?'

The answer lies along various lines. Paul said we are more than conquerors *through* him who loved us; that we can do all things *in* Christ. We have seen that not only did he conquer on the Cross and in the Resurrection, but—in line with I Corinthians 15:24–28—he is outworking that victory now, putting down all enemies. When we realise that his church is 'the fullness of him who is filling all in all', then we know he has given that fullness to the church to be his working body in history. As the church militant, it has at its head the one who 'goes forth conquering and to conquer'.

That is, the church militant is not headless but 'Headful'. It never battles apart from its Head. Its strategy is his strategy, planned by him. Its power and authority are his, delegated so that it can carry out his will and plan.

**THE CHURCH MILITANT WITH  
POWERFUL WEAPONS AND MATERIAL**

Mankind has always had some concept of a drastic end to the world. This may simply be from an inherent pessimism, caused by his guilt and sin, but even the Christian view of eschatology is often tainted with gloom. The true Christian senses destiny as against the pagan who senses only fate. The more materially militant of Christian interpreters of prophecy see Armageddon as literally a battle with physical armaments and weaponry. They speak in terms of 'Gog and Magog' as certain nameable nations, all battling against a literal Israel who is 'the camp of the saints'.

We dare not say that such a literal battle may not happen as we have just described it. It does seem, nevertheless, that the battle is 'not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12).

Paul also makes it clear that our weapons are not literal, for, 'If anyone slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain' (Rev. 13:10). Paul says, 'The weapons of our warfare are not worldly [Gk. *sarkiko*, 'fleshly'], but have divine power to destroy strongholds.' He is really saying, 'The weapons of our warfare are spiritual.' What does he mean by this?

If we look at his description of the spiritual weapons, we have such statements as, 'Let us cast off the works of darkness'; 'with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left'; 'having girded your loins with truth'; 'having put on the breastplate of righteousness'; 'your feet shod with the gospel of peace'; 'the shield of faith'; 'the helmet of salvation'; 'the sword of the Spirit'; 'the breastplate of faith and love'; and 'for a helmet the hope of salvation'. Now no one can make physical weapons out of these moral-spiritual

elements. In any case, they derive from Isaiah 59:16-19, where, when God sees there is no moral intervener, He clothes Himself with this great armour so that 'then his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him' (verse 16). Thus He wins the moral victory.

If we look at these 'spiritual weapons', we see they are composed of 'faith', 'hope', 'love', 'righteousness', 'truth', 'peace', 'salvation', and the whole constitutes 'the armour of light' as against 'the works of darkness'. When we say, 'There is nothing physical here', we are saying, 'Whilst these weapons are not literal, they are nevertheless real, for nothing is more real and actual, and—for that matter—powerful than these great elements.'

When we look at the opposites to these things, we discover what are the weapons of darkness, ie. 'unbelief', 'hopelessness', 'unrighteousness', 'untruth' ('the lie': Rom. 1:25), 'strife', and 'lostness'.

By means of these things do evil powers work. Nor have we finished with the subject, for when we talk about 'the sword of the Spirit', we are told it is the word of God', and that 'the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of *soul* and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thought and intentions of the heart' (Heb. 4:12-13). What then could be more powerful?

As if this were not enough, the passage just quoted goes on to say: 'And before him [ie. by reason of the unmasking word] no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' In Revelation 1:16, we are told that from the mouth of the glorified Christ 'issued a sharp two-edged sword', and in Revelation 19:15, 'From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.' 'What shall smite the nations but the word of God, the word given through Christ. How pathetic then to think he must use modern or even supernatural *materiel* in order to win his

victory!

If we probe further, we see that when the beast and the false prophet—together with the great leaders of the earth—seek to fight Christ, that ‘the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth.’ There is a parallel to this, in Revelation 11:5, where the inhabitants of the earth despise and hate the two witnesses (prophets) of God who testify against sinful mankind. ‘And if any one would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed.’

What then is this fire? Fire in the Scriptures sometimes symbolises the Holy Spirit, and sometimes his action (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:2–4; Isa. 4:2–4). It also represents the word of God. Jeremiah felt the word as a fire in his bones, and represents God as saying, ‘Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?’ (Jer. 23:29). Since in the Revelation it is the sword of the Spirit, ie. the word of God which smites the nations and slays the enemy, so the fire from the mouth of the prophets must be the word of God. More particularly it is the word of judgement.

In Revelation 20:7–10 the great last battle of evil against the people of God is described:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

This surely tells us that the great weapon against evil is the word of God. It is by these means Jesus defeated Satan at

the temptation in the wilderness. He simply said, ‘It is written’, and that was enough.

When, then, we review the weaponry that the people of God use in their battle against evil, it is the word which incorporates—as we noted above—the elements of faith, hope, love, peace, truth, righteousness and salvation. These constitute ‘the armour of light’, also known as ‘the armour of God’.

When we come to examine the ways in which battle is made, ie. through love, faith, peace, etc., then we realise it is a far cry from human force, or even the use of what we might term ‘supernatural force’. The Lion of the tribe of Judah may seem a warlike figure, but in reality he is ‘the Lamb of God’, and his power lies in humility, the humility that made him into a servant, giving his life a ransom for many.

The great issues, then, lie in faith, hope, love, peace, truth, righteousness and salvation. Paul says the Gospel is the power of God, and so, too, is ‘the word of the Cross’, ie. ‘the word of grace’. God does not use supernatural force to constrict the human heart, but He does use kindness, patience and forbearance to bring it to repentance. He exposes His heart of love in the incarnation and the Cross. He so loves that He gives, but then His love is a holy love and must suffer, by nature *of* the case.

What God means by ‘conquering’ and ‘overcoming’, is to live in the midst *of* an evil world, an anti-God rebellion, action, hostility and hatred, and hold to the things of faith, love and truth. These in turn will conquer human hearts. Paul said our spiritual weapons are ‘mighty to the pulling down *of* many strongholds *of* evil’. Ultimately only the constraint *of* love truly wins a human heart.

Evil, for its part, has no weapons to counter such warring. It is helpless against humility, baffled in the presence of love, and utterly undone by the grace which God has

towards the human race. Its arrogance is pitiful when pitted against the humility of the Lamb. Its pollution makes it a thing of shame against the ineffable purity of the Holy God.

If we learn this is the way of the King, then we will know, also, that it is the way of the Kingdom. We must also keep in mind that there are great rewards and a rich outcome for truly conquering. The seven promises of rewards in Revelation 2 and 3 quicken our pulses. We hasten to be 'more than conquerors' and 'in all these things', ie. the circumstances that frustrate, the enemies who oppose, and the slander that evil itself brings against us, day and night.

# 17

## CONQUEST AMIDST DEFEAT

### DEFEAT IS SWEET: THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

In our studies, we have noted the fact that 'All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' (II Tim. 3:12). This might lead us to think, 'Oh, suffering is inevitable, but *in spite of it* we shall conquer.' Paul's view is different: he says, '*In* all these things we are more than conquerors'. He has no thought whatever of 'in spite of'. He understands both the value and mystery of suffering. He sees suffering not merely as inevitable, but as indispensable. Suffering is that essential part and element of love which brings about the defeat of evil,

A superficial view held by many is that if one is godly, then God will bless. How one can hold this view in the face of the prosperity of so many who are ungodly is puzzling. Not only do many ungodly flourish, but many godly ones suffer greatly. It is undoubtedly true that the Scriptures speak of the godly being blessed in their obedience, but the nature of that blessing is not always defined. Certainly the principle is not 'Obey and you will be blessed', but 'Obedience is what God requires of you. Obey, not in order to be blessed but to have a heart to do God's will, for that is best.'

Many of the Psalms show the puzzlement of godly people

that the heathen should prosper whilst they—the godly—suffer deeply. Even so, many rationalisations of suffering also appear, such as: ‘Before I was afflicted I went astray’, and, ‘It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes’ (Ps. 119:67, 71). Likewise ‘The Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives . . . he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness’ (Heb. 12:6, 10; Prov. 3:11–12). Suffering, some of us can see, is good for training and discipline.

It is not of disciplinary suffering that we are speaking. It is that suffering which comes upon us from evil, and which we do not deserve, which occupies our thinking. Whilst we may be prepared to accept it because of the nature of things, ie. evil striving against God, and the pride of Satan, evil powers and fallen man, yet suffering is not merely a matter of such inevitability. It is, we repeat, a matter of indispensability.

A good place to commence ‘conquest through defeat’ is Romans 8:35–39. In verse 35 Paul asks, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?’ The implied answer is, ‘Nothing!’ When we examine the elements which are against us, they have certainly been the lot of Paul, as we saw in II Corinthians chapters 6 and 11. Paul then describes the *daily* experience of the Christian:

For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

This is a very strong statement. Is this really the lot of a Christian? It does not sound very much like a modern cult known as ‘prosperity teaching’, ie. God will give almost anything to those who boldly ask it, so that prosperity is a primary sign of God’s blessing. ‘Rightly understood’, this cult tells us, ‘if you are suffering then you have not learned the lesson of great faith. You are defective as a Christian,

for you can ensure—by your faith—that you do not suffer.’ Whilst God does prosper the believer, it is not always with material blessings. Some He loves too much to plaster with riches which can be deceitful. But this kind of thinking is far away from our subject. Paul is asserting that a sign of true godliness is to know every fiend of hell trying to wrench us away from God. If we will not be wrenched then we must suffer from the mindless hatred of evil. Paul concludes this passage by saying that nothing—not anything—can separate us from the love of God. We must keep this firmly in mind as we proceed to examine further the mystery of suffering.

If we take the principle set forth in Romans 8:35–39 and apply it to the Christian battle in the conflict against evil, then we will see that evil exercises a vast power, and effects a large operation in history. We may as well go straight to the point as set out in Revelation 13. The reader needs to take time off to examine it closely.

In the first four verses, the beast emerges. It has affinity with the great beast in Daniel’s prophecy (Dan. 7), but in fact Daniel sees four beasts which approximate to the one beast in Revelation 13. The principle of the beast is ‘unfettered naked power’. It is aggressive, violent, cruel and blasphemous. It makes itself known by sheer force, and achieves its goals by the same principle.

Verses 5 to 10 are important for our study:

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise *authority for forty-two months*; it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. If any one has an ear, let him hear:  
If anyone is to be taken captive,  
to captivity he goes;

if any one slays with the sword,  
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

This tells us clearly that (a) the beast was allowed to make war on the saints, (b) to conquer them, and (c) 'authority was given it', ie. to the beast, so that it had rule over all nations. We rightly ask, 'Where, then, is the victory of Christ?' The answer is that this authority over the nations, authority to make war on the saints and conquer them, is 'given', ie. given by God who is Sovereign Lord of all creation. Sovereignty is never in the hands of evil.

The last statement in verse 10 is, 'Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.' This means that the saints must trust God for the ultimate outcome. If we look at Revelation 6:9–11, we see the martyrs under the heavenly altar. They cry out, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?' The answer they get is, 'Take this white robe and wear it, and rest a little longer until the number of your fellow servants who—like you—must be killed is completed. When all who are to be killed are killed, then will the avengement take place.'

What we have to see is that—by nature of the case—many saints must be killed, evil must have its fulfilment, and when the moment is ripe for judgement, then will judgement suddenly come upon evil. This is why there is 'a call for the endurance and faith of the saints'.

The same principle is found in Luke 18:1–8, where Jesus tells the story of the unjust judge and the importunate widow, The widow refuses to accept the judge's unjust decision and pesters him until he gives in, and metes out true justice. Jesus says, in effect: 'By contrast, God is not only *not* unjust but is wholly just. If an unjust judge, under pressure, will give a just judgement, how much more will the just God give one. You had better believe that as quickly as

possible He avenges His elect.' To this Jesus added, 'And when I return to the earth will I find *this kind of faith*, ie. that God *speedily* avenges His elect?' He was not asking, 'Will I find *faith* on the earth?' but, 'Will I find the faith that *God speedily avenges His elect?*', for human beings, on the whole, think that God is tardy in bringing justice,

We need to press through in understanding suffering under injustice, for it is the first part of suffering to true purpose. Evil, in one sense, must be given full reign, so that in allowing this God must subject His people to what evil does. Such suffering will be tolerable when the believers know the injustice will be requited'

In seeing this, we need to read Revelation 14:9–13. This passage shows evil being judged and punished:

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.'

This, then, shows that evil will finally receive its due punishment. In the midst of suffering it may not seem apparent that this is the due judgement of evil, and the saints may despair. That is why the prophecy adds:

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus and I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!'

The prophecy is telling the suffering saints that they ought to endure suffering, for judgement is coming to their evil persecutors. Even more it is saying the present sufferings

will issue in a most beautiful outcome, namely that the saints will take their deeds with them. Nothing will be lost. Everything they have done will be accredited to them, and they will have their reward.

Rich as is this assurance that suffering is not purposeless, something even richer lies in the experience of suffering. Our chapter sub-heading, 'Defeat is Sweet', means that it is our very suffering which constitutes the way in which we fight, and the means of true conquest. Probably we will never know anything more profound than this.

In order to understand this mystery, we need to go back to Romans 8:35–39, and see especially the statement, 'No, *in all these things* we are more than conquerors.' Whilst Paul does not say 'by all these things', he does mean that the very things themselves contribute to conquest. What then are 'these things'? The answer is 'persecutions', 'sufferings', 'being killed all the day long', and 'being regarded as sheep for the slaughter'.

We have already looked at the nature of 'the weapons of our warfare' and seen that these are neither material nor political, nor even metaphysical, but are moral and spiritual. We saw they constitute faith, hope, love, peace, truth, righteousness and salvation. Where, then, can such weapons best operate—as weapons! —but in suffering and persecution?

This brings us therefore to see why evil can be given authority to make war on the saints and to conquer them, for in fact *they are not truly conquered!* They are living under outward domination, but their persons are unflinching, and they will give no obedience except to God, and have no loyalty except for Christ. They will not wear the mark of the beast, and they will have no commerce with the harlot Babylon' No one can filch their moral-spiritual weapons from them. The warning, then, of Revelation 13:10, is apt and timely:

'If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes.' The meaning is that the saint submits to captivity, for this is part of his 'endurance and faith'.

'If any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.' This must mean, 'If, instead of using his spiritual weaponry, he uses political weapons, then he will be met with political weapons.'

We conclude this chapter, then, by observing that the most powerful weapons are those which are moral and spiritual, not those which are fleshly, worldly, and political. Evil has no answer for such weapons, for its fight is on different premises and principles. 'Faith, hope, love, peace, truth, righteousness and salvation must ultimately undo evil and bring it to judgement.

## 18

## KEPT BY THE CONQUEROR FOR CONQUERING

### THE CONQUERED CONQUER THE UNCONQUERED

We have already seen that we cannot conquer in our own (so-called) strength and resources. Our sufficiency or competency is only of God. The armour we wear is properly called ‘the armour of God’ and our weapons ‘spiritual weapons’, ie. ‘weapons of the Spirit’. For example, ‘the sword of the Spirit’ is not something we forge or fashion. God has done that. Nor do we create the great moral powers of love, faith, hope, peace and truth.

Just as we do not create weapons, so also we do not wage war by ourselves. The odds against us are enormous, and we cannot, from ourselves, defeat them. Yet we can defeat them—and the Scriptures encourage us to believe we can and have—though only in the power of God.

To understand this more fully, we must see that God keeps us: we do not keep ourselves. True, we are commanded, ‘Keep yourselves in the love of God’ (Jude 21), but then it is that love which keeps us! We are given commands to be filled with the Spirit, to be aglow with the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit and to pray in the Spirit;

yet, again, these actions keep us in Him who keeps us.

The reason we are pursuing this course of thought is as follows: ‘If we are most effective in spiritual warfare and in producing true fruit when we are under pressure, persecution, and in the midst of suffering, then we ought to accept the fact of suffering. However then can we sustain it? We cannot, out of our own powers. Evil could quickly defeat us if we opposed it directly. This shows us that we need to be kept by God.’

Jude 24 speaks of God, ‘who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing’; I Peter 1:5 of the saints ‘who by God’s power are guarded [kept] through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.’ These statements are much the same as, ‘He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ’, and, ‘He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it’ (Phil. 1:6; I Thess. 5:24).

The way in which God does this is outlined in Romans 8:3 1–34:

*What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?*

We see here that the Father rejects all accusation against His people. He has justified them, and that is where the matter stands. Would Christ be likely to accuse his people? Not at all! Why? Because he has died for them, and is risen, ie. is alive. Moreover, he is at the right hand of God, intervening for his people. His intercession is better called ‘intervention’, for it tallies with God as Intervener in Isaiah 59.

Both Father and Son are aware of the dark forces of evil as they come upon the ‘helpless’ believers. So they *keep* these

ones who are 'wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil' (Rom. 16:19). These are sent as 'lambs in the midst of wolves'.

God's people are also kept by the Holy Spirit, for 'the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God'.

Given, then, that the people of God are kept by God, for what are they kept? Are they kept just for the sake of being kept, or for the task of being conquerors? Surely it is for the latter. They are the ones who are to make conquest, and they are to make it in a manner similar to him who suffered for the whole world.

That is why Paul majors on the matter of suffering. He does not simply recount his own suffering as though it were something about which to speak, but he teaches the nature and value of it. Because we have an inbuilt revulsion to suffering, we can rarely listen with a rational mind. Often we can only begin to understand the significance of suffering when we suffer!

Paul's teaching runs something like the following:

- (i) If we desire to live a godly life in Christ then we will suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12).
- (ii) The suffering of persecution does not destroy us, but in fact increases our faith, provided of course we accept such suffering without anger (see II Cor. 6:7-14).
- (iii) Suffering comes from proclaiming the Gospel because the Cross, the Resurrection, and the grace of them is an offence to (a) the religious mind, eg. of the Jew, and (b) the intellectual mind, eg. of the Greek (I Cor. 1:17-23).
- (iv) When we suffer, we can understand others in their suffering and as we experience God's comforting of us in suffering, we can extend comfort to those who suffer

(II Cor. 1:3-7). A couple of verses here help us to see this principle:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. . . If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.*

- (v) Suffering is the way to glory, for 'If we suffer with him . . . we shall also be glorified with him.' We must not think of suffering as the price or cost of glory, but as the way to glorification. True love suffers, and suffering is part of love. God, in this sense, suffers, and love truly therefore is to be involved in suffering. We need to study the following passages to fill out this Pauline view: Romans 8:17-25; II Corinthians 4:16.18.
  - (vi) For moral conquest to succeed in this world, there must be suffering. As we have seen in this present chapter, love is one of the great weapons we use against evil, and love is triumphant fully only when it suffers. The extent and action of that love is shown in such passages as John 15:13; 1 John 3:16 (cf. John 10:17), 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' Love that does not lay down its life cannot rightly be said to be love.
  - (vii) To conquer the world means there must be that measure of suffering which will equal and outweigh the evil of man. We have seen that this suffering was experienced by Christ on many occasions, and in particular in his redeeming action of the Cross, burial and resurrection. Matthew 5:43-48 shows this suffering is not only for one's friends, but also for one's enemies.
- Paul said, 'I want to know him, and the fellowship of his sufferings' (Phil. 3:10). Christ suffered at various times, in many ways, and supremely in the Cross. Redemptive suffering is unique to Christ, but sharing in his suffering is open to all who are in him. Paul's statement, 'Now I rejoice in my

sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church', can mean the following: (a) Had I not suffered, the Gospel would not have come to you, but it has come through these sufferings, so I rejoice in them; (b) every one in Christ must take up the measure of suffering he is called upon to give. Often, in the church, there are those who do not share the fellowship of his sufferings, so that others have to make up this leeway of unaccepted suffering. 'My sufferings, then', says Paul, 'help to make up this shortfall.'

Peter also has a view of suffering, much of it similar to that of Paul. I would like to concentrate mainly on one part of Peter which fits with the understanding that the spiritual weapons will ultimately be the undoing of evil, either by winning them to God and His salvation, or by bringing them to that ripeness of their evil which will fit them for judgement.

He says, in I Peter 2:20–25:

If when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

The principle we find here is that we must suffer without anger, seeking for justice, being offended, and in return for being reviled we must not revile, but entrust ourselves to Him who judges righteously, ie. we must trust Him for the ultimate just outcome to this present injustice meted out to us. In terms of what we have said above, Peter is saying that we must not justify ourselves, complain of the injustice, or

seek in any way to vindicate ourselves or take revenge. In Paul's terms, we must not try to overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good. This, we see, is the true way of conquest. God will vindicate: we must submit. In so doing, we 'heap burning coals on the heads of our opponents' (Rom. 12:18–21).

#### CONCLUSION TO 'DEFEAT IS SWEET'

We now come to the end of this part of our book, the section entitled 'CHRIST THE CONQUEROR'. There is, of course, much that we have left unsaid, since the subject is of great dimensions. Much that is lacking we hope to fill out in the second part of our book, the section entitled 'THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM'.

What, however, we need to see is that Christ's suffering is the key to redeeming man. It is also the key to our ministry of love in bringing persons to Christ.

First we must see what was involved in Christ's redemptive suffering. He bore our sins in his body on the tree, he suffered the just for the unjust, and he was made sin for us. These statements will not greatly move us until we look deeply into what happened on the Cross. Some of this we have set out in Chapters Seven and Eight of this section.

We must see, then, that his suffering was most horrific. The pain and anguish of bearing the rebellion, anger, pollution and guilt of the entire human race, is beyond anyone's comprehension, but—by the grace of the revealing Spirit—we can *sense* some of it. What will most powerfully move us will be the comprehension that he totally identified with us in our persons. 'He was numbered with the transgressors'. One cannot make intercession unless one is wholly one with the person who has sinned. 'We judge that if one died for all, then did all die', and, 'God made him to be sin

for us', tell us he suffered our guilt, pain, defilement, shame and judgement, *as though he were the very person each one of us is*.

Secondly, we must see that in his suffering 'He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows', and 'By his stripes we are healed'. This must mean he entered into our hurts, pains, bitternesses and griefs, sharing and absorbing every one of these elements, so liberating us from them.

The long hidden traumas, the forgotten and hidden shocks, the suppressed angers, and the terrifying hatreds have all been cancelled and neutralised. This is of course 'full salvation', ie. full healing, because 'the balm of Gilead' has been applied. Christ is our true Healer, dissolving our sin-wrought sickness, and liberating us in the 'love, joy and peace' of our salvation.

In all of this, how do we figure as 'conquerors'? The answer is that we figure in this way, namely that we can be wholly liberated, wholly healed of the stuff of our foolishness, rebellion, hatred, bitterness, grief, anger, turmoil and guilt. We can stand cleansed before God.

This is what Paul calls 'the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5), adding, 'that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life' (Titus 3:7). In another place, he says, 'They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith' (Rom. 3:24), and ' . . . those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness [justification] reign in life by one Christ Jesus'. In yet another place, he addresses former adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals, alcoholics, gluttons and compulsive thieves, saying, 'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God' (I Cor. 6:11) .

This glorious radical and dynamic work of grace issues

from Christ's suffering. Had there been no suffering, there could not have been this healing of grace. What Christ has wrought and bought by his suffering, the Holy Spirit has effectively applied by his powers, deep down into every recess of man, every nook and cranny of his mind, soul and spirit. In all this, the Spirit is so deeply involved that there are 'groanings which cannot be uttered' (Rom. 8:26). Even so, and in this way, the work is effected.

Now comes our part. If we do not come to men and women with the experience of suffering, we are not fit heralds and carriers of the great message which will conquer the proud and rebellious spirits of human beings. In other words, we will not be conquerors. What grips and holds the human heart is the suffering of God in Christ. That suffering *alone* is redemptive, and so, liberating. It will only carry truth and conviction when we share the sufferings of Christ. Our sufferings are a witness to his. Indeed in some inexplicable way, what we suffer is really a participation in his sufferings. This is what Paul calls 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies'. To this powerful affirmation, he adds, 'For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you' (II Cor. 4:10-12).

Now we understand the mystery of suffering. Unless we are—so to speak—defeated and humiliated in the world of the beast, unless we are persecuted and caused to suffer, we can never effectively witness to the sufferings of Christ, and to the sufferings he underwent which redeem mankind. Out of suffering we share his suffering, communicating it to the world. This suffering conquered our hearts, and we who were conquered thus became conquerors over the evil that had enslaved us.

Now we are conquerors of human hearts, by virtue of,

and in context with, the sufferings we suffer, sufferings which constitute 'the fellowship of his sufferings'. A right conclusion to this are the words of Paul in II Corinthians 1:5–6:

For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

The final thing we have to say is this: 'Christ's sufferings are his own. They are redemptive. Our sufferings are ours, but they are not redemptive. Indeed, whilst our sufferings can rightly be called 'a sharing in Christ's sufferings', yet his sufferings are uniquely his. We can witness to his suffering by our own suffering, for it is linked with his. What we must avoid always is any sense that we mediate salvation. He' Christ himself, redeems. He redeems by the work of the Cross in the fellowship of ministry through the Holy Spirit.

We have no mediatorial role. In witnessing to Christ's effective redemptive suffering, and proclaiming the love of God, we witness to the greatest act in all history, the sufferings which were his in his death, burial and resurrection. We could not do this effectively if we rejected our role in suffering, but we have no mediatorial role. Christ the Conquering King goes forth, personally, to redeem each one of his elect. The healing that comes to them is not from our suffering' but his. We carry that suffering about in our bodies, and we witness—even dynamically—to it, but he alone redeems, heals, and transforms. He is the Conqueror, but with him, we too share, and so have part in the conquest of the human heart, and the world of sinful mankind.

## SECTION TWO

### THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

**1****THE CONQUEROR IS KING****A CRIMINAL RECOGNISES THE KING OF GLORY**

The thief on the cross said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

The episode recorded in Luke 23:32–43 is quite remarkable. The thief who spoke to Jesus, equally with the other thief reviled Jesus (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32; cf. John 19: 18). Suddenly this angry, reviling criminal changes his mind. 'Change of mind' is the meaning of the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*. What then caused *metanoia* to happen in the whole person of the thief?

Could it have been the inscription above Jesus, on the cross, written as, 'JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS'? Had he heard of Pilate's ironic saying to the Jews, 'Behold your King! '? Did he wonder why it should be written in three languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek? Did the mocking of the chief priests somehow horrify him: 'Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe! '? We do not know, for even as the chief priests, the Jews, and the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus, 'Those that were crucified with him also reviled him' (Mark 15:32).

The thief had heard many things, no doubt, about his

fellow sufferer. He had heard the chief priests, the scribes and the elders—a most impressive bunch!—taunt Jesus with, ‘He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, “I am the Son of God.”’ Matthew 27:44 records, ‘And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him *in the same way.*’

At first sight, the repentance of the crucified thief is most puzzling. Criminologists and sociologists would be amazed at so complete a change in a person whose anti-social, anti-establishment attitude was—by nature of the case—so fixed, and so intransigent. Doubtless a number of things were observed by him, and these must have begun to bewilder him, and then, even, to terrify him. His own utterances of blasphemy sprang out of anger and irrationality. After all, what had Jesus done to him that he should express such hatred and contempt for the man?

No, all the events must have suddenly begun to make sense to him. In particular he must have been moved by Jesus’ cry just prior to his change of heart. Luke alone records that Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!’ When a person addresses his own father, any listener can detect the intimate relationship, which exists between a son and his father. Did the thief *know* this was such a relationship?

Again, so far as we can ascertain, no Jew had ever cried directly to God, ‘Father!’ The thief was, of course, a Jew, and he must have known that the Hebrew Scriptures sometimes referred to God as ‘Father’. Did the cry ‘Father!’ send a shock-wave through him, to be accompanied by a thrill that God is Father, and He has a Son? Did the thief suddenly see that Jesus was the Son of the Father-King?

No less stunning was Jesus’ plea for forgiveness for his tormentors, and, perhaps, for the people of Jewry, if not the whole world.

Forgiveness was generally through the use of sacrifices, but this man seemed to bypass that cultic struc-

ture. The thief may have asked himself, ‘Can a man—can a thief—know forgiveness?’ We do not know. What we do know is that Jesus made this cry as he was crucified, perhaps even when they were banging the nails into his wrists and ankles.

The final part of Jesus’ cry was no less startling than the first two. He had said, ‘They know not what they do.’ This may yet be recognised as a brilliant and sympathetic understanding of the nature of sin, ie. of its inbuilt deception. We ask ourselves whether any human being has ever known the nature and extent of his sin. The answer must be ‘No! Man does not realise how deeply, by sinning, he violates the holiness of God, and how he demeans himself, he who was once created in the image of God.’

Something powerful got to the thief. Call it ‘a gut communication’ which evoked ‘a gut understanding’ or not, the thief suddenly knew Jesus was the Son of the Father-King. His words to his fellow criminal certify this. He said—totally out of character with the criminal mind—‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’

It is a fact of history that at some point of time and experience a man will come out of his fuddled human thinking and human evaluations and receive a revelation which will henceforth transform his mind and thinking. This happened with the thief. He knew Jesus was—as the Son of the Father-God—the King of his Father’s Kingdom. He may not have heard ‘Our Father . . . thy Kingdom come!’ but he knew enough, as a Jew, to know he was in the presence of the King-Son.

His statement is generally translated, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come *into* your kingdom’, but it is equally, if not better translated, ‘. . . *in* your Kingdom’, and this would mean, ‘When you come—at the end time—to establish your

Kingdom', ie. 'When you come in your Kingly power'. There is much manuscript evidence to indicate that this could be the case.

In any case, it indicates that the thief knew he was in the presence of the King. This is quite extraordinary, given in the whole terrible scene—the reviling, the cursing, the blasphemy, hysteria and hatred, plus that pathetic figure, hanging by the nails, and seemingly utterly vanquished. For the thief to see into the reality, makes us want to repeat the words Jesus used to Simon Peter on another occasion: 'Blessed are you. . . ! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'

Christ said to the thief, 'Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' This, in fact, was to be the same as entering into the Kingdom of heaven.

We ought to add, in all fairness, that the thief may have known what was common news in all Jerusalem and even Judea, Samaria and Galilee, namely the gossip and claim that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and as such to be the King of Israel. In the beginning, Nathaniel had said to him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' At the end, on Palm Sunday (the Sunday before 'Good' Friday), the crowd had cried, as Jesus rode in on a colt, the foal of an ass: 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Zechariah had prophesied this event:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
 Lo, your king comes to you;  
 triumphant and victorious is he,  
 humble and riding on an ass,  
 on a colt, the foal of an ass (9:9).

If anyone had—perchance—overheard Jesus' conversation with Pilate, and had reported it to the thief, then he would have known Jesus was the King of a Kingdom differ-

ent to that of the world's kingdoms.

Pilate had said to Jesus, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus had then answered, 'My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.' Pilate had then said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus' answer was, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice' (John 18:33–37).

Whatever the case, the thief came to the revelation of Christ's Kingship. Without this revelation, history and creation make little or no sense.

## 2

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD – 1

## SEEING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

On one occasion, Jesus said to a Jewish leader, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew he cannot *see* the kingdom of God.’ He added, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit’ he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God’ (John 3:3, 5).

To know the nature and meaning of the Kingdom of God, then, one must be ‘in the know’ by means of spiritual new birth. Doubtless to *see* the Kingdom is to recognise it for what it is, and to *know* it is to have entered and experienced the Kingdom.

What, then, is ‘the Kingdom of God’, or, as it is sometimes called, ‘the Kingdom of heaven’? It is called ‘the Kingdom of God’ to distinguish it from kingdoms that originate with man or the forces of evil. It is called ‘the Kingdom of heaven’ to distinguish it from kingdoms which originate on the earth.

When we use the word ‘kingdom’, we generally have three things in mind’ (a) a monarchical system, (b) a realm of ruling, and (c) a community of the ruled, ie. the subjects of the king, along with that king. These ideas fit fairly well into the idea of God’s Kingdom. Generally we see a per-

imeter to a kingdom, but this is not so with God’s Kingdom. The realm of His ruling has no boundaries. In fact, the Kingdom of God is simply God ruling, and since He rules all things, and everywhere, ‘all things’ and ‘everywhere’ are in His Kingdom. For this reason, the Kingdom of God has been called ‘the reign and rule of God’.

## THIS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

If, in the Scriptures, we make a quick survey of the Kingdom of God, we could reduce it to the following terms:

(i) *The Kingdom is all creation.* Because God created all things, He is King over them. Psalm 103:19 says, ‘The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.’ Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘I will praise and extol and honour the King of heaven’ (Dan. 4:37). Psalm 145:11–13 has it:

*They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power’ to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of thy kingdom.*

*Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.*

Israel became a kingdom through the grace of God, and its writings are undoubtedly coloured more from redemption than creation, yet they did not seem to differentiate much between the two. To appreciate their view of the Kingdom, we need to read Psalms 10:16; 22:28; 24:7–10; 44:4; 47:2; Isaiah 6:5; 33:22; 43:15; and Jeremiah 10:7.

If we think some of these ideas are those of later Israel, then we ought to read something like Psalm 93:1–2:

*The Lord reigns: he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed: he is girded with strength.*

*Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved;*

thy throne is established from of old thou art from everlasting.

In this regard, we also ought to read I Samuel 8:6; Psalms 96:10; 97:1; Isaiah 24:23; with Exodus 15:18; Numbers 23:21; Deuteronomy 33:5; and I Kings 22:19.

(ii) *This Kingdom remains the Kingdom of God, even though some angels and men have rebelled against the King.* See Revelation 12:1–10; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Genesis 3:1–6; Romans 1:21–25; Psalm 2:1. In any kingdom there will be rebels, but that does not cancel the kingdom. Evil seeks to establish its own kingdom and to vie with the Kingdom of God. See Luke 11:17–18 and Colossians 1:13.

(iii) *In a more particular sense, the kingdom of Israel could be said to be God's kingdom, ie. a special manifestation of His entire Kingdom.* Israel was meant to be a theocracy, ie. to have God as its King. However, in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, provision was made for Israel to have, also, an earthly king. I Samuel 8 (cf. 12:1ff.) shows that Israel, in choosing its king, virtually rejected God as King.

God's intention for Israel was to make it a special kingdom amongst the nations of the earth. Thus Exodus 19:5–6:

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

See also Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19.

We know, sadly enough, that Israel's kingdom was split through the idolatry of Solomon which resulted in the power struggle between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Ezekiel 37 speaks (a) of the revival of Israel as a whole nation, and (b) of the union, once again, of the Northern and Southern kingdoms.

(iv) *The Kingdom to come.* Israel knew it had not succeeded as a kingdom, mainly because of its idolatry. A pro-

phetic body of teaching gradually formed, in which the coming of a better kingdom was predicted. It would involve on the one hand a great King whose Kingdom would be of universal power, and on the other a Suffering Servant who was to be 'a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, and to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison, those that sit in darkness'. That this Kingdom would be Davidic was not in doubt from the prophecies of Genesis 49:10; II Samuel 7:12–14; Psalm 132:11–18; and I Kings 8:25.

To understand the fact and nature of this coming Kingdom, we need to study passages such as the following:

- (a) Isaiah chapters 24–27; 40–55; Obadiah 21; Micah 4:3; Zephaniah 3: 15; and Zechariah 14: 16–17. In Isaiah 40:9–11, God is telling Israel she will be restored, and God will be her Shepherd. Isaiah 52:7 has the dynamic announcement, 'Thy God reigns!' Obadiah 21 announces, 'The Kingdom shall be the Lord's.' Micah 4 shows the Kingdom as universal, Israel being the centre of it, and the source of universal blessing. In Zephaniah 3:15ff., God is in the midst of His people, delighting over them, and in Zechariah 14:1ff., the Kingdom has now so come that, 'The Lord will become king over all the earth: on that day the Lord will be one, and his name one.'
- (b) Hosea 14:3f.; Isaiah 2:10ff.; 9:1–6; 60:1f.; 65:17; 66:22, 24 (cf. 25:7f.; 26:19; 45:22; 51:4–6; 61:1f.) are all prophecies linked with the nature of the Kingdom and the Kingly reign. They involve the person of Messiah, and tell us that Israel's enemies will be destroyed, that salvation will come to Israel, which itself will be imperishable, death being destroyed, the new heavens and the new earth being created and established, at which time the wicked will be judged and punished whilst the redeemed receive eternal bliss. The universal nature of the Kingdom comes to the fore, but with it is the thought of Israel being established as the heart of such a Kingdom.

(v) *Messiah's Kingdom has come.* God's Kingdom can be said to have 'come' and to be 'extant' with the first

advent of Jesus. John the Baptist was its precursor' saying it was on the doorstep. See Luke 1:76ff.; with Malachi 3:1f.; 4:1-5; Matthew 3:1-12.

Jesus followed John's announcement with a similar one, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent and believe the gospel' (Mark 1:14-15). When Jesus came, so too did the Kingdom. Yet this Kingdom in the days of his flesh was still limited to Israel. Intimations of its wider dimensions we shall examine later.

*(vi) With the triumph of Jesus—now crowned King by the Father—the Kingdom was established in a new way.* The real battle for the Kingdom took place at the Cross and in the Resurrection which forever disarmed and discountenanced evil so that it is impossible for it to triumph. By taking the guilt of man, evil no longer has a hold over believers. In this sense the Kingdom had come. In another sense it was not yet complete. In the first section of our book, we saw the nature of this battle, and how Christ accomplished his victory.

*(vii) At this present time, the Kingdom is forging its triumphant way, defeating all things which oppose it.* In I Corinthians 15:24-28 and the Book of the Revelation, the process and progress of this action is described. Ultimately all kingdoms will become the Kingdom of God (see Rev. 11:15). In fact, the history which is now proceeding is the outworking of the victory of the Cross—the Kingdom, so to speak, asserting itself, fulfilling itself, and moving towards the ultimate climax.

*(viii) When the Kingdom comes 'at the last', ie. in the eschaton, the climax of history, then all evil will be judged and banished, the elect will be fully entered into the Kingdom and so inherit it.* The reign and rule of God will be complete in holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love. The King will reign, and the community of the Kingdom will constitute 'a kingdom of priests' (Exod. 19:5-6;

I Pet. 2:9-10), and they will reign upon the earth, and forever (Rev. 5:10; 22:4-5).

These things (above) tell us the nature of the Kingdom, and its steps in history, a history, which is really 'salvation history'.

## 3

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD – 2

## THE KING COMES INTO HIS OWN

By nature of his being, the one who is called ‘the Word’ and ‘the Son’ was always Lord of creation. It is clear from certain passages that he shared with the Father in creation. In I Corinthians 8:6 Paul says, ‘For us there is one God, the Father, *from* whom are all things, and *for* whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things, and *through* whom we exist.’ The reason for this is shown in Colossians 1:16, where it is said of the Son:

For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Much the same thought is repeated in Hebrews 1:1–3 and John 1:1–3.

These descriptions show us that the eternal Son has Lordship or Kingship because he was the Father’s mediator in creation. What we find difficult to understand is why Jesus had to attain to Kingship by way of the work of obedience, and the death of the Cross, along with the Resurrection. The answer is that Jesus, as a man, had to win victory—as a

man—over evil, and so establish his Kingdom, the King of which would be a man, the Man! The cry, ‘Jesus is Lord!’ tells us that for the first time in history a man genuinely became ‘Lord of all the earth’.

## JESUS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ACTION

We now have to retrace our steps, going over some of the material we used in our first section. We saw in Psalm 2 (with Psalm 110) that the Father really crowned His Son in the event of the Baptism: ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.’ We saw also that in his Transfiguration, his Crucifixion, his Resurrection and Ascension, he was further crowned, although that is an unusual way of describing an event which generally takes place at one point in time.

Firstly we must see he was the one who brought in the Kingdom, ie. in the days of his flesh, that is, into the heart of what must be called Israel, the Palestine of his day. We note that the Messiah worked in a given locale in the centre of history. In one sense, he was the King incognito, and in another, unmistakably the King. He said, ‘If I by the Spirit of God [Luke 11 :20, ‘the finger of God’, ie. ‘the power of God’, see Exod. 8:19; Deut. 9:10 = Exod. 31:18; Ps. 8:3; Dan. 5:S] cast out demons, then has the kingdom of God come upon you’ (Matt. 12:28).

The dynamic nature of the Kingdom in its acts is shown clearly when John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus. It seems he had been tempted to doubt Jesus’ *bona fide* as Messiah, for he asked the question, ‘Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ Jesus’ answer was a series of acts: ‘In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight.’ He then sent the two disciples back to

John, saying, 'Go and tell John what you have *seen* and *heard*: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me'. See Luke 7:18–23.

Perhaps through years of somewhat conditioned reading, we have come to accept the fact of Jesus' miracles and other acts. They were, however, unique in all history. In fact they were the Kingdom of God breaking into the created world, and in particular into the world of fallen men and angels. The acts were highly significant. When Jesus told John what he had done, he was directing John's mind to the prophecies which lay behind his (Jesus') acts. They predicted what Messiah would be, and what he would do. Particular prophecies John would have known to fit Jesus' case are Isaiah 29:18f.; 61:1f.; and possibly 26:19.

We speak then of 'Kingdom action', ie. the Kingdom breaking through opposing evil and defeating it. This is assailing the 'strong man' (Satan) and overcoming him, and taking away his armour in which he trusted, and dividing the spoils taken from him (Luke 11:20–23). In the same way, when Jesus sent forth his disciples (the seventy and the twelve, Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–12), they could say, when they healed someone, 'The kingdom of God has come near you', ie. 'Now you see the Kingdom of God in action!'

Even so, the miracles, as such, were not merely miracles. There had been times of miracles in the Old Testament. Jesus' miracles (Greek: *semeia*) were really signs. The Jews kept asking for signs, when so many had been given. These signs were signs of the Kingdom, ie. they were intended to conduct the viewers of them to see and enter the Kingdom. It is only in the light of this understanding that John 2:23 to 3:14 becomes intelligible. Nicodemus had some sort of belief in Jesus because he saw miracles, but Jesus wanted him to read them as *signs* and so *see* the Kingdom and then *enter* it

by new birth.

At first appearance, John's Gospel seems to say little concerning the Kingdom, but this is not so. Nathaniel called Jesus 'the Son of God, the King of Israel', thus acknowledging his Messianic nature. All Jesus' signs are intended to bring readers to 'believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (20:31). Jesus' statement to Pilate about his Kingship (18:33–37) virtually acknowledges his kingship and so his kingdom, the Kingdom of God. He says,

He was saying the methods, modes and ethos of the Kingdom of God are different from that of the world.

The heading under which we are having this discussion is 'Jesus is the Kingdom of God in Action.' By this we have to understand that power and authority which men did not normally see, was seen in the acts of Jesus, as also in his teaching, for his words and his acts were never separate one from the other. When he spoke a command, it happened. When he talked, his words were 'spirit and life' (John 6:63). The writer of Hebrews points to a similar kind of action effected by the apostles, and makes the comment, '[We] have tasted of the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come' (6:5). 'The age to come' is really the eschaton, the very Kingdom of God in power.

We conclude, then, that Jesus as the anointed Messiah, with power and authority, was the Kingdom of God in person, so that as he advanced against the rulers of darkness they retreated, and he defeated them. Jesus makes it clear that he wishes only to do the Father's will, to fulfil His law, and to walk in conformity with the prophecies made concerning himself. This, then, was the Kingdom of God in

action. What we need to ask ourselves is, ‘Did Jesus so act as to utterly defeat the powers of darkness, and that forever?’ If he did not, then the power of the Kingdom is a power against evil with a staying action, but not an action which eliminates it forever.

## 4

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD – 3

#### THE KING COMES INTO HIS OWN

We commenced this second section of our book by showing that the thief recognised Jesus was either ‘coming into his Kingdom’, ie. realising it in fact, or ‘was [going to] come into his Kingdom’, ie. come to set up the Kingdom of God at the end-time, in ‘the Day of the Lord’. If there had been no prophecies, no intimating of a ‘coming King’, no ‘great David’s greater son’ somewhere in the offing, then the crucified thief’s statement would have been unintelligible.

We know, in fact, that Israel, for the most part, looked to the coming of their Messiah. They believed he would break the yoke of Rome and set up a universal Kingdom, at the core of which, and in proud control of which, Israel would be prominent. Jesus did not match up with these quasi-religious, quasi-political images. Even so, few were left unimpressed with his powers, evidenced as they were in signs, wonders and miracles. In particular, his ability to raise people from the dead caused dread in the hearts of the religious leaders, who seemed to be—for the most part— political (John 11:45ff.).

What we need to see at this point is that the breaking in of the Kingdom to Israel and human affairs was not an inno-

vation, a novel but temporary act of God. Rather, it was part of God's pre-history plan for history. Jesus was not—so to speak—coached for a particular and peculiar situation. On his shoulders rested the task and function of bringing the Kingdom into overt operations leading to a conclusive battle with Satan and his forces so that forever, in history, the fate of evil should be sealed, and the triumph of the Kingdom be conclusively established.

When John the Baptist came preaching the Kingdom, it was to say that because it was close at hand Israel as a nation, and its people as persons, should repent and prepare for the highly significant event. Jesus came preaching what is termed 'the gospel of the kingdom'. This, in essence, was the message of Isaiah 52:7, 'Thy God reigns!' Israel was to know that in spite of its judgements by God, it was not forgotten. In spite of the invasions by conquerors, it—Israel—was yet to conquer its conquerors.

We have seen that Jesus was attested by the Father to be the Messianic Son, and that as such he was tempted, he ministered to the people, and in his obedience, death, resurrection and ascension he defeated Satan. We looked at this because we wanted to see whether or not he was truly 'the Conquering King', ie. the Kingdom came and triumphed in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

This then lends added significance to the temptation in the wilderness. Satan is prepared to give the kingdoms of the world to Christ if he will worship him. To worship Satan would mean to acknowledge that the kingdoms under him were there by his right, that this gave him great esteem in creation. Satan also tempted him to set up the way of winning his kingdom by spectacular wonders, (a) to turn stones into bread, ie. the way of materialism, and (b) to win a kingdom by casting himself down from the temple, which was understood by some to be Messianic in significance.

These temptations, including the one of giving worth to

Satan, were political in nature. The same satanic principle is in action when Peter seeks to dissuade Jesus from the way of the Cross (Matt. 16:16–23). The way of the Cross is non-political for it is the way of weakness, and the political way is the way of the beast, the dragon and the false prophet, not excluding the gaudy harlot Babylon. Paul says, of Messiah, 'He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God' (II Cor. 13:4).

### THE CLASH OF KINGS

What we need to see is that the events of the Cross did not even constitute a battle between Jesus and Satan, Messiah and the god (or prince) of this world. It was a clash between two systems. The kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of God went to a test of strength, each determined to destroy the other.

Evil, as we have observed, is not substantial. In the ultimate, it achieves nothing. It always takes, and takes by force and aggression. It gives nothing. Calvary represented, and presented, the love of God. However, that love was a holy, unassailable love. It might also be called loving holiness. In our section on suffering, we noted that suffering is abhorrent to man who is self-saving. That is why love is a mystery to evil. All it can do is seek to defile such a holy thing, and bring it down to a lesser level where it can further demean it. For example, immorality is a travesty of morality which is, itself, a beautiful and functional thing.

All evil could do on the Cross was accuse. It had no other weapon. Where guilt is, there can be accusation. The Kingdom of God is—as is God—holy, righteous, true, loving and good. For this reason, darkness became vanquished. Christ took into himself the filth and pollution of the whole of humanity. He took, also, its other elements of guilt. His

great battle was to wrestle with them—and the accusing powers of darkness—as though **all** sin were his own. None but he could rightly bear such guilt and none but he could vanquish it in his holy mind and conscience.

If we personalise the battle between Christ and Satan— that incredible clash of kings—then we see both the beautiful and horrendous nature of the event. We must see all the pride, greed, ambition, venom, bitterness and hatred of Satan venting itself in a kingtide of accusation against God and man. We must see Satan's insane jealousy of God whom he seeks to rival, as also his envy of man—God's image— whom he would destroy. Remembering that the Cross was 'Your [evil's] hour and the authority of darkness', we can see the maelstrom which descended on Christ, who 'poured out his soul unto death', and 'tasted death for every man'. Christ cried to God, 'You have laid me in the dust of death ! ' Thus it seemed that God was on the side of Satan, or Satan on the side of God, so hot and well-placed was the lava-tide of accusation.

So the kings clashed, and so their strengths were tried out, but the nature of the beast could never vie successfully with the pure nature of the Son of God, the true man-of-all-men. Paul said, 'The Kingdom of God is. . . righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. Such elements are incongruous to the evil spirits, the dark spirits, and the unclean spirits of the kingdom of darkness and nether-gloom. They are repelled by such. They could not cope with his failure to revile when reviled. They knew only a political method, and he knew no political way at all.

Thus, weak though he seemed to be, this very weakness destroyed the hold of evil. Its grip loosened and it slipped away, back into its doom and gloom. This on the sound of the terrible cry, 'My God! My God! Why did you forsake me?' Such sounding out of love was intolerable, and it must have maddened them in their ears to hear the shout of

triumph, '*Tetelestai!*' 'It is finished!' That frightening cry they heard like horrendous thunder that portends the final devastating tornado.

Why was it finished? How did this happen? What had he done? The answer is that the Kingdom is God's. Nothing in all hell or earth or sky is of the same power and quality of that Kingdom as it comes into action in the ministry of the Holy One, the Messiah of God. He—Messiah—always 'reflected the glory of God' and 'bore the very stamp of his nature' (Heb. 1:3). This was what he displayed upon the Cross, what he brought to it in that conflict. He had no astute strategy, no brilliant method of outclassing the clever and cunning devices of the Evil One and his hordes.

He simply submitted himself to the Father. He produced—in those final hours—the native air and ethos of the true heaven. Even so, this process of action had commenced before the millenniums, which preceded the Cross. Before time, the counsel of the Father and the Son had morally blue-printed the hour of Kingdom victory. In time, it was a slow, patient process—from creation, through the Fall, the judgement of the Flood, the covenant with Abraham, the preparation of Israel as the matrix from which Messiah was to come.

Then there was the obedience, the impeccable obedience from the Cradle to the Cross, at which Satan might grasp, and which he might attempt to distort, but which was to thwart him forever. If we wish to talk of God's strategy, then it must be this: that the Holy One of God never fought back with political weapons. He would have nothing of the modes and methods of the kingdom of darkness. *He refused to politicise the glory.* His obedience began before time, continued in time, and from the Cradle to the Cross never faltered. The enormous power of such obedience cannot possibly be computed. The very thought of such obedience baffles fallen man, who knows only the headiness of defying

God, using his own (moral) evaluations, and deciding his own destiny. This he has well learned from the prince of darkness.

What do we mean by the statement, *'He refused to politicise the glory'*? We mean he understood the mystery of suffering. He knew the nature of God. He was crucified, not through strength, but through (or, 'out of', Greek: *ex atheneais*) weakness (II Cor. 13:4). He let all political power have its full right, operation and expression, only to show it that it was doomed to fail and doomed to hell.

The early Christian church, rightly enough, saw this conflict through the lens of Psalm 2. With verses 1 and 2 of that Psalm in mind ('Why did the Gentiles [nations] rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves together against the Lord and his Anointed'), they cried, interpretatively:

For truly in this city there were gathered against thy holy servant Jesus' whom thou didst anoint' both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.*

Had the political power—the principle of the beast—not been in operation at the Cross, the true power of God—His love, His truth, His grace and His peace—could never have been revealed!

The weakness (so-called) of God, and Christ in God' was the true power which destroyed evil. 'The Kingdom of God is not [matters of] eating and drinking, but righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit'. It was this Kingdom which manifested itself in the person of the King *incognito* on the Cross. This being reviled but not reviling again, this positive acceptance, in love, of the enmity which came *upon* it, was the true power which overcame all evil.

What we must learn is that this ever was, and ever is, the true nature and power of the Kingdom. By refusing to see

equality with God as a thing to be grasped at (Phil. 2:6), Christ showed the humility and suffering of God, and so won the day. His 'It is finished!' informed the powers of darkness of their defeat, and his trusting and joyful words, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit', sealed for ever and ever that final defeat. Suffering love had won the day, and had revealed the heart of God, divine love that suffers!

## 5

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD – 4

## THE NEW KINGDOM

Christ's victory forever vanquished Satan, or, as Hebrews 2:14–15 states it, 'destroyed him who has the power of death, even the devil'. Colossians 2:14–15 states it similarly:

... having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands . . . he set aside' nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them' triumphing over them in him.

Because he had been 'numbered with the transgressors', because he had 'borne the sins of many', and in this way taken their guilt, he had snatched from Satan the special weapon 'wherein he trusted', namely the fear of death, by which he had held men in thrall.

In this sense, the Stronger-than-the-Strong Man—Jesus who had been 'crucified through weakness'—had defeated the Strong Man (Satan) and his spoil which undoubtedly was man and the gifts. This spoil now became Christ's. He had ravaged the kingdom of darkness and taken its captives and set them free. Moreover, these became the living members of the new Kingdom. When we say 'new Kingdom', we do not mean the Kingdom of God was ever 'old' or effete,

but that its newest conquest was to be by the Cross, and that something radical happened through this most powerful event.

## THE NEW KINGDOM IN THE APOSTOLIC UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE

In order to understand what we mean by 'the new Kingdom', we need to understand the apostolic mind on this matter. In order to comprehend that, we must first correct a view some have of the present state and action of that Kingdom.

This view is that the Kingdom was indeed powerfully present in the person of Christ, but that this state was only intended to be temporary. With Christ's death, the Kingdom becomes—so to speak—quiescent or in a state of suspension. With Christ's ascension, its active, powerful presence is virtually withdrawn, and will only spring into full action at Christ's *parousia*, ie. his return.

## The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom

There is, of course, an element of truth in the above view, but what we shall now say will disprove it as a theory. Pentecost signalled the powerful present activity of the Kingdom. Scholars have never doubted the essential link between the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God. They see him as one of the prime movers in 'salvation history'. His ministry in shaping this, including the inspiration of prophecy in relation to the Kingdom, is vital to the salvation work of God.

The Spirit was present and powerful in the conception of Jesus, and in his anointing to be Messiah. He led Jesus to the temptation in the wilderness. In terms of Psalm 2 and the Kingdom' the temptation was essential. Entering this

temptation 'full of the Holy Spirit', 'Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee'. He then worked in the power of the Spirit in ministry. In all things he was led by the Spirit. He ministered in the power of the Spirit, his resources being replenished by praying in the Spirit. He went through his passion and death in the power of the Spirit—'he offered himself through the eternal Spirit'—and he was raised from the dead by 'the Spirit of holiness'.

Then, the same power (ie. of the Spirit) that raised Jesus from the dead also set him 'at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come', and so 'he has put all things under his feet'. All of this, in terms of Psalm 2 and 110, relates to the Kingdom, to Jesus' anointing to be Messiah, and the victory of the Kingdom through his life, death, resurrection, ascension and present session at the right hand of God.

There can be no doubt that what we have said immediately above represents apostolic understanding, and a clear indication of this lies in the prayer of the church in Acts 4:24–30. Pentecost brought a definitive understanding of the Kingdom of God, and this understanding is quite traceable in the Acts, Epistles and Revelation.

### Jesus' Teaching Brought to Mind by the Spirit

Prior to the crucifixion, and no less following it, the minds of the disciples were confused. They had received quite a body of teaching regarding the Kingdom of God, but for the most part it was unintelligible. In John chapters 14 to 16 Jesus promised the disciples that the Spirit of God would be their teacher when he was gone. He would renew their memory, reminding them of those things they had been taught, at the same time revealing their meaning. See John 14:16,

17, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7–15. This is also implied in Acts 1:8. When we ask what things there were for the Spirit to remind and teach them afresh, the following elements emerge:

(i) Jesus had announced the imminent coming of the Kingdom (Mark 1: 14–15).

(ii) He had announced his ministry (Luke 4:17–19) in terms of Messianic anointing and appointment, and he had explained his acts of healing, exorcism and proclamation as being those of the gospel of the kingdom .

(iii) He had taught the practical nature of living and acting in the Kingdom of God. This had been clearly set out in the Sermon on the Mount. See Matthew chapters 5 to 7.

(iv) He had taught on the nature of the Kingdom, including its eschatological consummation, by means of the Kingdom of God parables. The bulk of this teaching is found in Matthew 13, although by no means confined to it.

(v) He had delegated the disciples to teach the Gospel of the Kingdom, and then had encouraged them by saying, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32). He also gave to them the keys of the kingdom, by which he must have meant that the opening of that Kingdom to men and women lay within the apostolic power and authority. See Matthew 16:18–19.

(vi) At the time of the Last Supper, he had pointed to the Kingdom. He talked of its triumph and its climactic victory banquet. In respect of these things, he said:

*You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me' a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones' judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

(vii) Whilst we cannot be sure the disciples had immediate reportage of Jesus conversation with Pilate, and with the crucified thief concerning the Kingdom, they must have

heard similar things in his teaching. Such material was at hand.

We conclude then that the disciples had a vast amount of material at hand to ponder the Kingdom of God. It awaited only the touch of the Spirit to bring it to intelligible reality and practical understanding. Even so, Jesus had yet more to teach them.

### Jesus' Final Teaching on the Kingdom

Prior to Pentecost—the time and occasion when the Spirit would bring Christ's past teaching to mind—Jesus himself taught concerning the Kingdom. Acts 1:3 says, 'To them [the apostles] he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.'

This information needs to be pondered, otherwise we might miss its significance. Jesus, we gather, appeared to them many times, and gave them a volume of teaching. In Luke 24:25ff. we have an account of that teaching. He took them through the Hebrew Scriptures, showing how they referred to him, including his life, death, resurrection and 'entering into his glory'. He had also spoken to Mary concerning the nature and fact of his ascension (John 20:17). Luke is telling us here in Acts 1:3 that Jesus' whole teaching was in respect to the Kingdom.

If we read the Acts and the Epistles, it would appear on first sight that comparatively little mention is made of the Kingdom. What we have to understand is that the apostles had been strongly coached in regard to the Kingdom during the time of Jesus' ministry, and following his resurrection it was his (and so their) one subject. The Kingdom then must have been uppermost in their minds. We may be pardoned for observing, 'The message and fact of the Kingdom was forever ringing in their ears!'

This, then, leads us quite naturally to Christ's last words concerning the Kingdom. To know them, we should read Acts 1:1–11. The substance of it is as follows:

Jesus met with his disciples for a number of times over forty days' following his resurrection. In this time he gave them commandments by the aid of the Holy Spirit. His main subject was the Kingdom of God. In conjunction with this he said' at the end of the forty days' 'Don't depart from Jerusalem, for you are about to be baptised in [or, with] the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was in water, yours will be in the Spirit.' The disciples connected two things, ie. the Kingdom of God and being baptised in the Spirit. This imminent outpouring they linked with the Kingdom' so they asked Jesus if he was about to restore the Kingdom to Israel.

His answer was that as far as the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel was concerned, it was not theirs to consider at this point. The Father had fixed that matter as to time and accomplishment. What they were to understand was that they were to witness to him, as Messiah' to 'the ends of the earth'. 'Ends of the earth' was a quote from Psalm 2:7–8. It meant that the Kingdom would possess all the earth, ie. to its very ends. It would not be limited to Israel, although it would include Israel.

The ascension of Jesus was witnessed by the apostles who were told by angels that Jesus' though taken from their sight' would come again' doubtless 'in his Kingdom'.

This passage of Acts 1:1–11 gives the true setting for the understanding of the present presence and operation of the Kingdom of God.

## 6

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD – 5

## THE NEW KINGDOM IN ACTION

First let us comment again on our term ‘the New Kingdom’. As we have said, it was not new. It had continuity with Israel as God’s Kingdom, but it also had discontinuity. As we have just seen, it was not to be confined to Israel, but to be ‘to the ends of the earth’, ie. to include the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles (the nations).

Again the Kingdom was operating in a new epoch, and in a new way. Whilst it was still unseen to the eyes of those not born anew, it was nevertheless an immediate power, and no less than when Christ had visibly shown its works. One of the differences was that John and Jesus had come with a ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’. This Gospel whilst still being of the Kingdom, was now ‘the Gospel of the grace of God’. It did not require Jesus’ material presence or his visible action. The victory of Christ (ie. the Kingdom of God) over the powers of evil, through the Atonement and Resurrection, did away with this need.

Of course the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, though now called ‘the Gospel of the grace of God’, was still the same Gospel, ie. ‘Thy God reigns!’, but expression of it in terms of grace was necessary—and wonderful—in the light

of the accomplished victory of Christ. Whilst we say the visible presence of Christ is no longer necessary, we do not say he is not present. He is present by the Holy Spirit to, and in, his church. His victory is to be established to the ends of the earth, and the instrumentality of this establishment is the church under Christ’s organic and functional Lordship, in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is clear from the passages which are sometimes called ‘the great Commission’ (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–18; Luke 24:44–49; John 20: 19–23; cf. Acts 1:8; 10:42; 26:16–19) that Jesus saw the redeeming and reigning power of the Kingdom to cover all mankind. The Gospel of the Kingdom is, then, the Gospel of the grace of God, and where these two elements are proclaimed as one, there the true Gospel is preached.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM IN ACTS  
AND THE EPISTLES

## The Kingdom In the ‘Acts’

We have suggested that at first sight the Acts and Epistles seem to say little about the proclamation and presence of the Kingdom. This seeming omission is soon dispelled when we see in Acts (a) that the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ is necessarily the proclamation of the Kingdom, and (b) that the modes of the Kingdom proclamation in the Synoptic Gospels is also present in the ‘action’ of Acts.

We take (a) and examine it. Theologians have discovered in the Acts that form of teaching and proclamation which is called *kerugme*, ie. ‘proclamation’. It commences with Israel’s history, shows that the prophecies concerned the Messiah, illustrates how Jesus fulfilled these and so must be the true Messiah. It explains the strange mystery of Christ’s crucifixion in the light of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah

chapters 40 to 66.

It points to the Resurrection as the basis and proof of Jesus' Lordship, and concludes that in him alone is salvation. This *kenagma* must be seen as Kingdom proclamation. Jesus' Lordship is of course that of the Kingdom. Messiah is a word which has no meaning outside the Kingdom context. Whilst the apostolic preachers rarely mention the word 'Kingdom', yet their message is only intelligible in the light of it.

A study of the text of the sermons will support what we have said. Then we see statements such as:

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about [Greek: *peri*, 'concerning'] the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women (Acts 8:12);

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God, (Acts 19:8);

He expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets . . . preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus quite openly and unhindered (Acts 28:23, 31).

We conclude then on point (a) that their message was that of the Kingdom of God.

On point (b), that is, that the same modes of the Kingdom were used, we see Acts 4:30, ' . . . while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus', and this must mean that Jesus as King was still performing 'Kingdom action'. This is a principle for interpreting all such actions in Acts. In Acts 14:3 we read, 'So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands', and again, 'And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul' (Acts 19:11). We conclude then that the signs, wonders and miracles were the Kingdom of God in action, ie. Christ working through the instrumen-

tality of his body, the church.

### The Kingdom in the Epistles

From these it is clear that:

- (i) through the Gospel, believers are 'transferred from the powers of darkness, into the Kingdom of the Son of his love' (Col. 1:13);
- (ii) believers have received the Kingdom. Hebrews 12:28 says, 'Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken'. In 12:22–23, the writer describes this Kingdom: 'You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven'. All of this is a gift to the believer, in much the same way as Christ said to the disciples, 'It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom', and 'I assign to you . . . a kingdom';
- (iii) being in this Kingdom is to experience 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17);
- (iv) it is also the experience of power, for 'The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power' (Greek: *dunamei*);
- (v) whilst believers are in the Kingdom, in another sense they have yet to enter it: (a) humanity in its present state cannot enter it in its eschatological form (I Cor. 15:50, 'flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God'), (b) warnings are given against loose and fleshly living: 'they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5); for (c) the poor in spirit are the true heirs to the Kingdom (James 2:5; cf. Matt. 5:3, 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven');
- (vi) believers are now working for the Kingdom (Col. 4:11, 'my fellow workers for the kingdom of God'), and in

the process suffer for this, 'that you may be worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering' (II Thess. 1:5; cf. Matt. 5:10; Acts 14:22);

(vii) entrance into the Kingdom will be 'abundant' where there is deliberate growth in maturity and obedience, and less than this where believers are slack (II Pet. 1:10–11).

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

The material here is too profuse to cover. Indeed we have already looked twice at this Book in seeing both Christ as Conqueror and his people as the conquering people. We know that such thinking must have been a background to the understanding of the Kingdom of God in the apostolic age. We, for our part, need to soak ourselves in the truths of this prophecy, seeing the clash of two kingdoms, ie. the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

For the moment, we will leave this material' keeping in mind that it was not apart from what we have seen in the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles.

## 7

### THE KINGS OF THE KINGDOM

#### THE FATHER AND THE SON ARE ONE IN THE KINGDOM

At first sight it may seem a puzzle to speak of 'The Kings of the Kingdom'. We really mean that (i) the Father is King, and (ii) the Son is King.

This is not really so puzzling when we look at such statements as 'the kingdom of Christ and of God', 'the kingdom of the Son of his love', 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ', and read that, 'Then comes the end when he [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father.' See Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1: 13; Revelation I 1: 15; I Corinthians 15:24. This must mean that both Father and Son rule in the Kingdom of God. That is, they share in the ruling.

In human affairs, the old King will train the young king until it is time for the former to relinquish office in favour of the latter. It may even be that this form of co-rule only ends with the death of one or the other, generally the older one. In the case of Messiah and God, it can be seen that God rules the universe in and from heaven, whilst Messiah rules the earth. His is delegated authority, and is quite functional.

Some of the Messianic Psalms illustrate this. For example, the writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 45, which is

obviously Messianic. The anointed one, the king of Psalm 2 who is 'set upon the holy hill of Zion', is addressed in Psalm 45:6-7 as follows:

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of thy kingdom.  
Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades

The writer of Hebrews prefaces this quote by saying, 'But of the Son he says . . . ' He thus identifies Messiah as the Son of God, sharing the rule of the Father's Kingdom. This is especially clear in that he quotes Psalm 110:1, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.'

Psalm 89 is another Messianic Psalm in which God is the Father-King setting His Son regally, for in verses 19-37 he is promised an everlasting dynasty. The verses below are quoted in part, in Revelation 1:5: ' . . . *from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*'

I have set the crown upon one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people.  
I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him. . .  
He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'  
And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.

There is really no dilemma or problem in the co-rule of the Father and the Son, for believers are given a share even in this rule. Revelation 2:26-27 has:

He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father.

Again in Revelation 3:21 is a similar statement, 'He who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.' It is interesting to note that Jesus uses the title 'my Father' in these quotes, almost certainly referring back to Psalm 89:26, 'He shall cry to me, "Thou art my Father!"

In all of this co-rule there can be no doubt that the Son is subordinate to the Father. He is not, of course, inferior. John's Gospel deals with the matter of the Father-Son relationship, for 'The Father loves the Son and has delivered all things into his hand' (3:35; cf. Matt. 11:27). This mention of 'love' banishes the idea of a superior-inferior relationship, but insists on a superordinate-subordinate situation. The Father and the Son are one (John 10:30), and yet 'the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise' (5:19). It is in John's Gospel that Jesus acknowledges that he is King of the Kingdom, as we have seen in 18:33-37.

Finally, in regard to this matter of 'The Kings of the Kingdom', we must understand it in the light of Psalm 2. As we have seen, humanity is ranged against God and His Messiah. There comes a point in action, as also in time, when the King effects the ceremony of crowning His Son. Some see this as a proleptic coronation, ie. to take effect when the king would die, as was the case when David, in his old age, crowned Solomon. Others see it as 'adoption', ie. the announcement that the king's son had come of age and was now competent to rule.

What needs to be seen in Psalm 2 is that God and His Messiah oppose the rebellion of men and nations. The King crowns His Son and gives rule over the nations into his hand. Together the Father and Son rule the triumphant Kingdom. In the light of this Psalm, the New Testament presentation of the Father and the Son ruling is quite intelligible.

## 8

## THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHER

## GOD IS FATHER TO HIS PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM

For some of us, the idea of fatherhood carries connotations of authority, and where we dislike authority we dislike fatherhood. It seems a case could be made out on this basis for the violent reaction to Jesus' teaching of God's Fatherhood by 'the world' of Jesus' day, ie. the leading Jews. We cannot pause to press this point. We know they saw Jesus' claim to Sonship as blasphemous, and crucified him for it.

The idea of God being Father is not absent from the Old Testament, although its presentation is vastly different from that of the New Testament. When Jesus said, 'I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world', and, 'I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known' (John 17:6, 26), he was really saying, 'I have shown them that Yahweh is Father', ie. 'Yahweh' = 'Father'. We do not mean the literal meaning of 'Yahweh' is 'Father', but that the Person of 'Yahweh' is that of 'the Father'.

The Old Testament concept of God's Fatherhood was based on covenant. He was both King-Father and Covenant-Father. This idea is in Exodus 4:22, 'Israel is my first born son', and 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' Also in

Hosea 11:1, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'. God is Father to a corporate son, Israel. Even so, in Deuteronomy 14:1 Israelites are called 'the sons' or 'children' of God. There are many references to the personal and corporate sonship of Israel. See Deuteronomy 32:6, 19; Isaiah 1:4; 63:16; 64:8; Hosea 1:10; and (probably) Malachi 2:10' The concept of God's Fatherhood is seminal in the Old Testament, and matured in the New Testament. We may conclude, then, that God was Father to the kingdom of Israel, and this idea should prepare us for the Fatherhood as revealed in the New Covenant.

## God the Father of All by Creation

Before we look at the nature of God's redemptive Fatherhood, we need to examine His creational Fatherhood, if indeed there is any such doctrine in the Scriptures. Some of the Old Testament references point to a creational Fatherhood (cf. Mal. 2:10; Isa. 64:8; and possibly 63:16).

The sonship of believers in the New Testament is always linked with Messiah. One is a son in and by Messiah (cf. Eph. 1:5; John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). The question is whether sonship is a gift of God, not formerly given in creation, or the restoration of redeemed man to what he was at creation.

Luke 3:38 says, 'Adam was the Son of God.' It would seem from this that all humanity constitutes children of God. In Acts 17:28 Paul quotes with approval a pagan poet who had said, 'In Him we live and move and have our being', and had added, 'We are His children'. In the context of his speech at Athens, Paul was fighting against idolatry and says, in effect, 'God is Father, and when we make idols we represent God. Now these idols made by man cannot possibly do that. No one looking at an idol would exclaim, "O my Father!" ' It seems almost certain he had in mind Jeremiah 2:26-27:

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed— they, their kings' their princes' their priests and their prophets' who say to a tree 'You are my father' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.'

Some commentators, anxious to avoid the idea of a universalistic Fatherhood, say Paul is simply speaking about 'origination', but then, can you speak simply about 'origination'? If God as Father originates us, then we are His children. At the same time, by the Fall we have forfeited our sonship in the sense that we have forfeited our creaturehood and our servanthood to God. That is why it has been said, 'God is the Father of all men, but not all men are children of God.' In many passages of the New Testament, the emphasis is that some human beings are the children of the devil. See I John 3:10f.; John 8:44f.; I John 5:19; and Ephesians 2: 1–3.

I believe we have a right to conclude that by creation all men have been given the 'form' of sonship, ie. they are structured as much as sons as they are as creatures or servants. Because they have refused this relationship with God, they have in that sense refused to be loyal subjects of God's Kingdom, ie. to come under His reign and rule. In this sense, they are 'lost' sons and 'dead' sons, as the father of the prodigal pronounced his son to have been. When, by grace, God gives direction to the 'lost' and life to the 'dead', then those come into redemptive sonship. Their natural (created) structure as sons is thus liberated and renewed. There is no need for a miracle of God to make a human being what he never was by creation, ie. a son.

### God 1s the Father of All His Elect by Redemption

By this we mean that God redeems lost humanity, bringing it into sonship, and into the family of God. We have no need to go over this ground, for we have seen how redemp-

tion is effected in, and by, Christ. Even so, we need to see, again, that it is the Father who initiates this redemption. Nothing whatever is initiated by the Son. He comes to do the Father's will, and in delighting in it shows that the Father's will is delightful!

It is good to look at some of the Scriptures which show the Father's initiative:

God set him forth as a propitiation;  
 He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;  
 . . . out of his great love wherewith he loved us;  
 God made him to be sin;  
 The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all;  
 It was the will of the Lord to bruise him;  
 God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;  
 The Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world;  
 In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman,  
 born under the law' to redeem them that were under the law;  
 What the law could not do . . . God, sending his Son in the likeness of sinful  
 flesh and for sin, judged sin in his flesh;  
 God our Father, who loved us, and gave us eternal comfort and good hope  
 through grace.

Such quotes could be multiplied in number, though not in content. Ephesians I :5 says, 'He predestined us in love to be his sons, through Christ Jesus'. So the Father is not 'like a father', or one father amongst many, but *the* Father, ie. 'Father!' He sent the Son to show the Father, and in effecting man's salvation, the Son was doing the Father's will. Indeed Paul could say 'God was in Christ', which meant that the Son was in the Father. What the Father did the Son did, and in this sense the Son was 'the way to the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life of the Father'.

Again: the Father sent the Spirit to bring us to living, intimate and functional sonship. Paul said, 'In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith' (Gal. 3:26). That is,

through Christ we have access to the Father, and that makes us His children.

The term 'adoption' is often used, but the word itself in Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:15 and 23 is *huiosthesia*, from the word *huios*, ie. 'son', in which case 'sonship' may more personally represent the word than 'adoption', although undoubtedly the word is the equivalent of our modern 'adoption'.

The Father, then, not only brings us to redemption but also to sonship. In relation to this, He sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba!' ie. 'Father!' The Holy Spirit thus comes to make real to us the adoption whereby we are irreversibly the sons of God, as also it (he) comes to give us 'the washing of regeneration and the renewal in the Holy Spirit', which, in effect, is the new birth whereby we both *see* and *enter* the Kingdom of heaven. In this act He has 'transferred us from the powers of darkness, into the Kingdom of the Son of his love'.

We are now in the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven, under the heavenly Father. What, then, is it like to live in the Kingdom?

## 9

### LIVING WITH THE FATHER IN HIS KINGDOM

#### THE FATHER IS KING: THE KING IS FATHER

Paul Tillich wrote 'The Lord who is not the Father is demonic; the Father who is not the Lord is sentimental'.<sup>3</sup> In Ephesians 4:6 Paul states, 'One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.' He shows that God's Fatherhood is *above* all things, and especially above the humanity of which He is Father. At the same time He is *through* it, ie. present as to the being and operations of 'all things'. Finally, He is in it all, ie. personally present to all things.

If these concepts are difficult to grasp, we should nevertheless try to understand them, for they are vital to us for our being and our living. In Ephesians 4:6 we cannot be sure whether Paul, in speaking of 'all things', includes other than human things, whether he is talking of all humanity, or whether specifically he is speaking of God's elect people. It does not greatly matter, for we see that God is above us all, and this is His Kingship. We see He is through all, and this is His presence to us as a people. Finally He is in all things; He is present to each of us personally, living in us.

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<sup>3</sup> *Systematic Theology, 3 vols.*, University of Chicago Press, 1967, vol.1, p.287.

It has been said that in every human being, is a 'God-shaped blank', and that until this blank is filled with God, man is never fulfilled, never satisfied, never at peace. If we alter this slightly and say, 'In every man is a Father-shaped blank',<sup>4</sup> then we will be closer to the truth. The heart of a human being cries beneath all pretence and 'cover-up' for the Father who is indispensable to it.

Man's deepest desire is for emotional fulfilment, and he can partly slake this thirst by many things, but never fully apart from coming to God's Fatherhood. God as King meets his need for authority, direction, correction and personal development. He is secure under the reign and rule of the King.

However, if the King is not Father, then the inbuilt propensity for sonship lies unfulfilled and the person is uneasy, unfulfilled, and frustrated. Man not only needs to be able to express his filial being in love to the Father; he needs to experience, continually, the Father's love, care and concern for him. Further, he needs to grow like his Father, to develop his gifts, to mature in the image of that Father. Where this does not happen, man is awry, starved, lacking fulfilment, devoid of true and full being.

When Christ taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer, he had been praying, and they must have glimpsed his intimacy with the Father, with his satisfying expression of that. They said, 'Lord, teach us to pray' (Luke I 1:1). Prayer and worship is made to the Father, as Jesus told the woman at the well: 'And such the Father seeks to worship him' (John 4:19-24). Later Paul said, 'I bow my knees before the Father', for that is the most thrilling and satisfying of human responses to God.

We say, then, that to live under the Father's Kingship,

and under the King's Fatherhood is not only enriching to man but wholly indispensable. Christ as the Son was the living example and paradigm of this fact. He taught the richness of this by his own life, especially in the revelation of his relationship with the Father. He also revealed that Fatherhood by his constant teaching.

### **THE FATHER AND HIS KINGDOM IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

Matthew chapters 5 to 7 is a goldmine in respect to the Kingdom of God, and God's Fatherhood. In this section, we see Him both as King and Father, ie. as Father-King and King-Father.

In order to understand it, we must recognise that the Kingdom of God amongst men is welcomed only by the elect. It represents a threat and an intrusion to the ungodly man. When, then, Jesus speaks of the attitudes required for the life of the Kingdom, he nominates the Beatitudes (5: 3-12). Preparation for the Kingdom is necessary for entrance to it, and living in it carries high responsibility and privilege. When he speaks of the witness of its members, he is doing so in the light of opposition to it. The Kingdom is always under siege to evil.

We cannot understand Jesus' admonitions and injunctions in regard to anger, lust, honesty, simplicity, revenge and love (5:13-48), unless we understand 'for the Kingdom of heaven's sake'. The matters of practical piety, the giving of alms, of prayer and fasting, only have significance in the light of the Kingdom, and relationship to the Father. One's relationship to riches and personal security are determined by one's primary relationship with God. Because of hatred against the Kingdom and the personal anger it entails, one must trust the Father for all things. If one seeks first the

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<sup>4</sup> \* For further reading on this subject, see the author's *Oh, Father! Our Father!*, NCPI. Blackwood. 1983.

Kingdom, then what is needed will surely come to us (6: 1–34).

In the Kingdom, its members do not judge one another; they leave that to the Father. They are foolish to present holy things to angry, unholy men who do not understand or appreciate them. In the Kingdom, we must believe the heavenly Father gives good gifts to those who ask, for filial asking of the Father is natural. This does not mean that things come casually to the Kingdom member. He must be single-minded and earnest.

He must also be wary of those who come to him, for it is highly dangerous to listen to deceivers. Men shall be known by their fruits. Finally (in chapter 7), one must be aware of oneself, ie. whether or not one is genuine and living in the truth. Unusual actions of piety and even miracles do not establish a Kingdom *bona fide* with God. Obedience is the key to true Kingdom living. What one hears one must put into action, or the whole edifice of life that one has built will disintegrate.

As we have said, this Sermon on the Mount is a goldmine from which material for Kingdom living can be obtained. However, we have to keep a number of things in mind. If, for example, we see the precepts Jesus has given as a list of laws, then we will take an ethico-legal view of the injunctions. We may say it is of a higher order than 'of old', but seek to obey that order as a prescription. We will then miss the point that the life of the Father and His children is really what it is all about.

What we must not miss is that entrance into the Kingdom, and life within it is of such nature and character that members of the Kingdom desire to do the Father's will in true filial obedience. They do not look on the Beatitudes and precepts as heavy legal commands and demands, but as wonderful directives for true living. They are grateful for these directives which derive from the wisdom of the Father-King.

We must observe here that there are those who see the Kingdom only as in the future, ie. as wholly eschatological. Some see it as operative only in the millennium, which they suppose will be for a period on earth, after which the saints will inherit heaven, and not 'reign on the earth' and not 'reign forever'. This conveniently rids of present ethical obligation in our way of living, but it is false. Everyone knows instinctively that Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is for now!

### The Heavenly Father and His Holy Kingdom

The word 'Father' is used sixteen times in the Sermon on the Mount, and as such occurs more than any other word, even the word 'blessed' (9 times). The term is often 'your Father' (7 times), and 'your heavenly Father' (4 times). This shows the intimacy of people of the Kingdom with God as Father. It also shows His order of Fatherhood is above human fatherhood, ie. we must never seek to understand God's Fatherhood via man's fatherhood, but, in fact, man's fatherhood via the heavenly Fatherhood. It is a fact that when one understands the King's Fatherhood, then anger against human fatherhood dissolves and true filial, fraternal and familial fullness is achieved, and this is the way of the Kingdom, for in it all are brethren under the one Father. There is no longer any place for anger and critical judgement of another.

The key to Kingdom living is present in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; cf. Luke 11 :2–4), so called not because Jesus prayed it, but gave it to us to pray. It is not merely a pietistic exercise, but a most dynamic one. Let us briefly look at it.

*Our Father who art in heaven.* The address is to 'our' Father, so it is personal and intimate. It gives confidence to those who pray that they are children of God. *Who art in heaven* speaks of God's exalted nature and authority, so

that there is confidence in the worshippers of Him as Sovereign Lord. He alone can answer prayer.

*Hallowed be thy name.* This is the acknowledgement of the holiness of God, and a petition that it may be so to those who pray, and indeed, everywhere. To be reminded of God's holiness is to live by the command, 'Be ye holy for I am holy.'

*Thy kingdom come.* The Kingdom has always been, but the eschatological fulfilment is yet to be. It is in sight, and to pray this prayer means to be in the very action of its fulfilment. Every act of Kingdom obedience contributes to the final end. Its coming is in the face of evil's opposition, so that it is a prayer for the destruction of evil's kingdom.

*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* All forces combine against God and His will, ie. evil powers, the nations of the earth and rebellious human hearts. In God's pure heaven it is not so. Obedience there is a joyful and common thing. Let it be so here. *Thy will be done* means the human heart acquiesces and co-operates in seeing the plan of God fulfilled. One confesses one is under the constraint to obedience.

*Give us this day our daily bread.* It is at first sight a confession that we are dependent upon God for daily life. This is true; but in the Sermon on the Mount we see the Kingdom under siege. Man denies 'daily bread' to his enemies. God the heavenly Father will nevertheless supply His faithful children in their hour of need, and persecution need not be feared.

*And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.* Jesus gave an immediate commentary on this prayer. He said, 'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses' (Matt. 6:14-15). All of this is best understood in the light of Matthew 18:21-35 (the parable of the gracious

creditor' and the ungrateful debtor-servant). It surely means not God only forgives when we forgive others, but because He has forgiven us *so much*, we must forgive other men their (comparatively) *little*. It is incomprehensible that we would not forgive!

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* 'Don't allow us to go into those situations where temptation [and persecution] is so powerful that we will fall. Be with us so that we will emerge unfallen from testing. In this way deliver us from the Evil One who would destroy us: indeed in every way deliver us from the Evil One and his powers.' All of this is, of course, in the light of being members of the Kingdom and opposed by the kingdom of darkness.

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory* is found in some ancient manuscripts but is not included in present translations. It derives from I Chronicles 29:11, and is a fitting close to a prayer which is 'Kingdom' in nature. It reaffirms the greatness, authority, power and glory of God.

This Kingdom prayer has often been called 'the Family prayer', meaning that those in the Kingdom are also the family. This is true enough, but the idea of the Kingdom is God's rule and reign. Yet, as we have seen, He rules as the Father. So His children are content to be in the Kingdom and the family; both. There is undoubtedly an emotional or affectional side to this living. The children are secure in the Father, kept by the Father, taught and disciplined by the Father, and aided by Him as they move towards maturity, ie. ultimate glorification in the image of His Son, and so like the Father (Rom. 8:29; I John 3:1-3).

Whilst it is good to have needs met, and emotional needs fulfilled, the highest need man has is to be obedient to the Father who loves him, who is above and through and in him. He needs to increase his stature and his wisdom so that he might be a true conqueror, ie. overcomer, for he has an inheritance ahead of him, namely the 'all things' of both

Ephesians 4:6 and Revelation 21:7.

It is good, then, to live in the Kingdom with the Father

## 10

### LIVING WITH THE SON IN THE KINGDOM

#### LIFE IN THE SON OF HIS LOVE

‘The kingdom of the Son of his love’ is a good description of the Kingdom under the Son (see Col. 1: 13). Not only does this show that the Son is King, but that he is loved by the Father. .John 3:35 (cf. Matt. 11:27) says, ‘The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand’, ie. the Father trusts the Son. Many indications of the Father’s love for the Son are given in the New Testament, as also the Son’s love for the Father.

Then, too, there are references relating to the Father’s love for His elect, and the Son’s love for them. In addition, there are Scriptures which show the love of the elect people for both the Father and the Son. The term ‘them that love God’ appears at least three times. Of course the theme of ‘brotherly love’ also runs strongly through the New Testament writings.

We may conclude then that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of love. We have seen how members of the Kingdom live under the Father. Now we see how they live under the Son.

### The Leadership of the Son

Christian theology and worship has always thought of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, ie. that Christ is not a prophet, a priest and a king, but *the* Prophet, *the* Priest, and *the* King. As we shall see in our next chapter, that makes the people of the Kingdom a prophetic, priestly and royal people. We propose now to see the Kingdom in relation to these three offices of the Son.

#### (a) Jesus is Lord, ie. Jesus is King

We have seen in relation to apostolic preaching that the cry ‘Jesus is Lord!’ really meant ‘Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God!’ This meant that Jesus had triumphed over death, and so over sin, Satan, his powers and their worldly system; over the flesh, law as a condemnatory power, conscience as a tyrant, and the idol-lords as domineering. Freeing man from this curse, Jesus redeemed and re-established him in God through the reconciliation effected by the death and resurrection.

Not only did Jesus save from death but he also proved to be ‘the Author of life’. ‘For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life’ (Rom. 5:11). He exercised his Lordship in defeating evil, and it is the grace that flows from this Lordship which captures the heart of man. ‘The love of Christ constrains me!’ cries Paul. He urges them ‘by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is your true worship’ (Rom. 12:1). John says, ‘We love because he first loved us!’

In other words, the redeemed person—the member of the new Kingdom—becomes a willing slave of Christ as a response to ‘great grace’. His obedience to Christ’s Lordship is out of love—‘If you love me, you will keep my command—

ments’ (John 14:15). The constraint of ‘Jesus Christ, whom not having seen you love’, was most powerful. In the Gospels obedience to Christ is a yoke which is ‘easy’ and ‘light’. In the Acts they count it all joy that they are permitted to suffer for his sake, and in the Epistles they use the term ‘slave of Christ’ with great ease and joy.

On this basis, the Lordship was not seen as a restraint but as a cause for celebration. To live in the Kingdom under the Son’s Lordship was no stint to be suffered. Since he was raised above every power, authority, principality and every name that is named both in heaven and on earth, then he was (is) ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, ie. more powerful than they. This means his people can feel secure under his Lordship.

Yet they are not merely secure: they are also participators in his outworking plan for history. The Lordship as seen in the Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation is most dynamic. That Lordship goes on putting down all that is at enmity with God, and ultimately ‘every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord’. God’s people, then, are not simply protected: they are sharers with him in his warfare. To be Christ’s people in his Kingdom is to battle alongside Christ, using the gifts and weapons obtained by his victory, since he ‘led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men’. Also, as we saw, ‘The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but mighty to the pulling down of many strongholds [of Satan]’.

The Lordship of Christ also pertained to the way life was lived in the Kingdom, especially in the matter of relationships. This is seen in Romans 14:1 to 15:13. In this passage (as also in I Cor. 8), Paul dealt with the weaker brother, the one with a weak faith and conscience, and exhorted both the weak and strong to love in mutual love. This principle lay in the Lordship of Christ:

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord’ and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then’

whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

When we look at the context of this discussion, we see it is the Kingdom of God. They have been debating matters of eating and drinking—eating meat or not eating meat—and Paul says, 'The kingdom of God is not [matters of] food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. By this saying he gives a window into the life of the Kingdom. When truly lived in the Spirit, how gracious and peaceful a Kingdom it was!

The Lordship of Christ was also the basis for hope. The outcome of his victory was that he was Lord over 'the age to come'. When he comes 'in the glory of the Father', then the Kingdom will be irreversibly established forever. Hence his Lordship is of great comfort to his followers. Sadly enough, this Lordship is often preached as a grim and demanding suzerainty, and Christ is looking severely at the life and conduct of his people, alert lest they do wrong, and judgemental when they fail. This is far from the truth. Living with Christ in the Kingdom, under his Lordship, is a thing of great joy.

### (b) Jesus is Priest, ie. Priest-King

The writer of Hebrews shows that Jesus is a priest 'after the order of Melchizedek, that is, he is a King-Priest, or a Priest-King. This is no fancy of the writer. The Aaronic priesthood is of a temporal order. It is of a passing covenant. It has certain grave deficiencies. The Melchizedekian order is an eternal one. It is efficacious beyond Israel's sacrificial system. It embraces all humanity.

The sanctuary of Israel was an earthly one, and its sacrifices were not ultimately effective. Messiah—the Priest-King—offers himself as the victim: 'But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by *the*

*sacrifice of himself.*' The blood proves to be of exceptional nature, albeit it is human blood (Heb. 2:11–17), and it is brought into the heavenly sanctuary to make an effective 'once for all' sacrifice:

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb. 10:11–14).

The writer of Hebrews shows that Jesus was appointed to this priesthood, not taking it upon himself, and that he had to be trained to become perfect in intercession: 'He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since *he always lives to make intercession for them*' (Heb. 7:25). Whilst this intercession may relate to coming to salvation, it certainly signifies for continuing intercession against the powers that would accuse and separate from God, as in Romans 8:34f.

The writer of Hebrews—as we have seen—speaks about 'receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken'. Within this Kingdom the office of Christ as the Priest-King is very securing to its members. Not only does the true Melchizedek secure his people's salvation, but because 'he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted' (Heb. 2:18). He is a priest forever, and his intermediary ministry gets rid of the need of anyone in the Kingdom to seek to mediate between God and man.

*The Effects of Jesus' Ministry as Priest.* Doubtless the writer of Hebrews is unique in the New Testament in his emphasis upon the ministry of Jesus as priest. It is probable, too, that when Peter speaks of 'a spiritual priesthood' he does not designate one 'after the order of Melchizedek', but it is certain that the early church itself was 'a kingdom of priests' or 'a priestly kingdom' for that is the thrust of

I Peter 2:4–10; Romans 12:1; Acts 13:2; Philippians 3:3; Romans 15:15–16; and Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 22:5. This concept directly derives from Exodus 19:5–6 where Israel is called ‘a kingdom of priests’.

The church, then, in the context of the Kingdom (ie. being a kingdom of priests), offers up spiritual sacrifices. This is part of taking on the ministry and character of Christ. In Peter’s words, the church is to be ‘a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ’. The priestly ministry is via Christ, himself the true priest.

What then are these sacrifices? Hebrews 13:15–16 says:

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

The overflow of the heart is the worship that flows up to God. The horizontal expression of this is ‘not neglecting to do what is good’, and ‘sharing what you have’ (cf. Acts 2: 44; 4:32; II Cor. 8:2–5).

Since worship is the highest gift man can offer to God, and for man, then living in the Kingdom of the King–Priest is the highest and most satisfying vocation man can exercise and fulfil.

### (c) Jesus is the true Prophet

Moses spoke of the *unique* prophet that was to come. In Deuteronomy 18:9–23 he first speaks against the false forms of prophecy Israel knows, or will know. They are linked with idolatry. We have seen in regard to ‘conquest’ that the prophetic word is most powerful. A kingdom without prophecy is dead. Prophecy is not primarily predictive, but hortatory, that is, it exhorts people to right standing, living and worship before God. What is prophesied is never merely inevitable but necessary, ie. indispensable.

Israel as God’s kingdom was a prophetic nation. If Christ

had not been the unique Prophet, then the Kingdom of God would not have been prophetic in this unique sense. It would have lacked dynamic. We have seen in Revelation 11 the power of the prophetic word. It issued from the mouths of the two witnesses as ‘fire’. In Jeremiah 23:29 God asks, ‘Is not my word like fire?’ Jeremiah said the same word was like a fire in his bones.

The subject of Christ’s unique office as the prophet requires a great deal of explanation, which we do not intend here to include. It is sufficient to say that John was ‘greater than a prophet’ because he saw his own and others’ prophecy come into fulfilment in this day. The prophet looked to the time of fulfilment of his prophecies (cf. I Pet. 1:10–11), but John saw them coming to pass.

If John was ‘greater than a prophet’ then Jesus was ‘greater than greater than a prophet’! The prophet is one who is the voice of God, direct (cf. Exod. 7:1–2). Moses, in describing this unique prophet, had said:

I [God] will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him (Deut. 18:18–19).

Peter repeats this prophecy in Acts 3:22–23 and refers it to Jesus, thus making him the unique prophet.

What then is the significance and manner of living in the Kingdom under the unique prophet? It is this, that the entire community of Christ’s people is now prophetic. In the same sense that it is ‘kingly’ (royal) and also ‘priestly’ (‘kingdom of priests’), so it is prophetic (a prophetic Kingdom: a Kingdom of prophets).

Revelation 19:10 says, ‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ This has many facets of meaning, namely: ‘The content of prophecy is Jesus’; ‘When the prophets prophesied it was concerning Jesus’; ‘Jesus himself, in all

his actions, is the fulfilment of the prophets'; 'Wherever prophetic ministry is given, it not only emanates from Jesus and concerns Jesus, but is Jesus himself in his action of truth and witness'.

This leads us to observe that if the Kingdom community is royal because it participates in Christ's Kingship, and if it is priestly because it shares Christ's Priesthood, then it is prophetic because it shares in the prophetic ministry of Christ.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, 'You shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.' We have seen this means they participate in the action of Christ as he wins the kingdoms of this world 'to the uttermost parts of the earth'. Since 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy', then witnessing through the Spirit to Jesus must be the prophetic ministry.

Jesus himself was 'the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and ruler of the kings of the earth', 'the Amen, the true and faithful witness', and 'is called Faithful and True'. Witnessed to by the Father on many occasions, he came to witness to the Father (John 18:37, 'I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth'). Being 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14), and being 'the truth of the Father' (John 14:6), he was wholly prophetic as the voice of the Father. Nothing more could be said of him than that he was 'the word [Greek: *logos*] of God'. The word of God is also 'the word [Greek: *rhēmatos*, 'saying' or 'utterance'] of Christ' (Rom. 10:17).

Living under this prophetic ministry must be dynamical. Out of Christ's mouth continually goes the sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15), ie. 'the word of God' (Greek: *rhēma theou*). How then can the community of the Kingdom not proclaim the word of God?

The Spirit, when he came, would witness to Christ (John 15:26) and would cause the disciples also to witness (John

15:27; Luke 24:48, 49; Acts 1:8). John put it clearly: 'And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth' (I John 5:7). When the Spirit came down at Pentecost, it was to make the new community a prophetic one. Peter (Acts 2:16–21) explained Joel 2:28–32 in the light of Pentecost:

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:  
 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
 and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
 and your young men shall see visions,  
 and your old men shall dream dreams;  
 yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days  
 I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.'

Peter goes on to show that this state will continue 'before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day'. We must assume, then, that the effects and continuity of Pentecost will go on. In Acts 1:8 the coming of the Spirit produces 'witness to Christ', and at the same time 'prophesying', and since 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy', then the outpouring of the Spirit brings the witnessing, ie. prophesying community into being.

The words 'witness' and 'testimony' are met many times in the Book of the Acts. In some way they are always connected with the work of the Spirit. Indeed all the apostolic life and ministry is witness, witness through the Spirit of truth, and so it is prophecy. The proclamation of the word of God (the use of 'the sharp two-edged sword') is the prophetic ministry of the Kingdom-community.

In the Book of the Revelation the matter is clearly defined. John 'bore witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1:2), and 'was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1:9). In 6:9 we see the martyrs 'who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne'. In 12:11 the saints conquer the dragon, 'By the blood of the Lamb

and by the word of their testimony', and are hotly pursued by the dragon who 'went off to make war on . . . those who keep the commandments of God [ie. 'the word of God'] and bear testimony to Jesus'. There is a final mention of the martyrs 'who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God' (20:4).

In chapter 11 we see the two witnesses who are given 'power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days'. The fire which pours from their mouth (cf. Jer. 23: 29; Rev. 20:9) is surely the prophetic word.

This being the case, then we see the whole Kingdom community is constantly sharing the prophetic office of Jesus. The word which the Son gives them they give to the world. This may not often be predictive prophecy, but always it will be hortatory as men and women are exhorted to repentance, faith, righteousness and holiness.

When we hear Jesus saying, 'I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth', then we realise the wonderful and irresistible power of the word of God, the prophetic sword as it is in action. How then could the prophetic community live a static, suave and uninterrupted life under Christ the King, the Priest, and the Prophet? The royal, priestly and prophetic functions of the people of God make their Kingdom the sphere of intense activity, and of great significance.

We might be tempted to look on the Kingdom as a haven for ourselves, a quiet place where the peace and joy of God can be tasted in serenity. This is only partly true. The Kingdom that is 'righteousness, peace and joy) in the Holy Spirit' is also the Kingdom that is 'in power'. The regal, priestly and prophetic demands, which are made keep the elect in constant but useful activity.

This kind of action is in fact preparing them for the eschaton, that last era in which things will come to their climax and the Community of the Sword shall help to smite the

enemies of God. This warring Kingdom shall destroy all war, and bring peace to God's Kingdom and His creation.

## 11

## LIVING FOREVER IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND OF HEAVEN

### THE KINGDOM IS COMING

Superficial readers of the Scriptures are puzzled about the nature of the Kingdom. It seems, on the one hand, that the Kingdom was present with Christ, and then disappeared. Yet it seems to be existent, and yet not be here. They know it is coming, but then how can something come which is already here? So they are confused.

We need to see that the Kingdom always has been extant and in action. God is King over all His universe. That Kingdom has long been contested, and God's enemies have tried unsuccessfully to overthrow it. The Kingdom, so to speak, was localised and specialised in the kingdom of Israel, but it never attained a universal nature. Jews who read the prophecies looked to its universal consummation.

At the time of Christ the Kingdom came with Christ, was effective, and then its moral and spiritual victory was sealed by the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Now the Kingdom operates—so to speak—in unrecognised ways. The day of its consummation is drawing near. This is the same as 'the Day of the Lord' so much spoken about in the

prophecies both of the Old and New Testaments.

Zephaniah describes this Day of the Lord:

The great day of the Lord is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter,  
the mighty man cries aloud there.  
A day of wrath is that day'  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the lofty battlements.

The prophet then goes on to prophesy of even more terrible things.

Zechariah's prophesying does not seem any happier— not, anyway, to begin with. He speaks in 14:1–2 of a ravaging of Jerusalem by an invading power. But then the Lord will go into battle against the nations opposing Israel. The Lord's feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, and strange things will happen.

Then the Lord your God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.

*And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one (Zech. 14:5b–9).*

In the New Testament the Day of the Lord does not come without prior conflict. Much of this we viewed in the first half of this book. II Thessalonians 2:1–12 is a 'little apocalypse'. Mark 13 gives Jesus' teaching succinctly on the 'end things', and Matthew 24 enlarges it. We have seen that Christ is putting down all enemies under his feet until 'the

kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ'. Then shall the end come, and all things will be established forever, as planned by God.

Prior to these climactic events there will be increased activity by evil powers. It will seem for a time that 'the son of perdition' has almost convinced the elect that he is worthy to be worshipped as God. However, all evil will be defeated by the great Conquering King, the Messiah of God, and the time will then come for the last judgements to take place. We have seen that Christ will go forth 'conquering and to conquer', and will effect the defeat of the powers that oppose God.

It is then that the Kingdom will be seen to be established forever. This will be 'the kingdom which cannot be moved'. It is pictured in the final chapters of the Revelation as 'the holy city, the new Jerusalem'. The writer of Hebrews says:

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel (12:22-24).*

The writer speaks, then, of 'receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken', meaning that this Kingdom to which we have come is ours, although we, of course, are subject to that Kingdom.

Other New Testament writers speak about a future entering into this Kingdom which they call 'inheriting the Kingdom'. Paul says to the new churches of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22). He says to the church at Thessalonica who are suffering, 'This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering'. We

have seen that those who do evil are warned that they will not enter the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:21).

When Paul says, 'I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the imperishable inherit the imperishable', he is saying that we do not enter into the fullness of the Kingdom before our physical death or the transformation that would occur should we be living at the time of Christ's return.

In another place (Phil. 3:21) Paul says that the Lord Jesus Christ 'will change these bodies of humiliation to be like his own body of glory, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself'. This is much the same thing as saying, 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death' (I Cor. 15:26), and 'then Death and Hades shall be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire' (Rev. 20:14), and Jesus' words to the church at Smyrna were, 'He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death', for even 'the first death' has lost its sting, and the Christian may die without fear of death.

Hope of the Kingdom, then, is a mighty constraint to godly living, for it is 'hope of sharing the glory of God' (Rom. 5:2), and is based on the fact and experience of God's love' (Rom. 5:5). It is in fact 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27), for God planned this glory before time (I Cor. 2:7), and we will know it at the coming of the Kingdom.

Another way of saying this is, 'By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (I Pet. 1:3), and that living hope is for 'an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you' (I Pet. 1:4). Because of this, Peter urges, 'Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ' (I Pet. 1:13).

This grace which is 'coming' and on which hope must set

its mind, is 'bursting abundantly into the Kingdom' (II Pet. 1:11) by resurrection from the dead, being glorified, and taking up the new inheritance which comprises 'all things' (Rev. 21:7), ie. 'the new heavens and the new earth', in fact the New City, the New Jerusalem, 'adorned as a bride for her husband'. 'Here', John the Seer says,

He [God] will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

When all this happens through Christ's coming 'in the glory of the Father', and when every knee bows and every tongue confesses Christ as Lord, 'to the glory of the Father' (Phil. 2:9-11), then it will be that the Son will give the Kingdom to the Father that 'God may be all in all', or 'everything to everyone' (I Cor. 15:28). The trumpet cry will announce,

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign forever.

All heaven, no doubt, shall sing its praises to God for His eternity, His holiness, His acts of creation, and they shall worship the Lamb that was slain for all peoples. They shall also worship God that His 'judgements are right and true altogether', ie. they are just, and that Christ has not stayed upon the order of his coming, and that God has 'speedily avenged His elect'.

Nor will that be all. Those who have entered the Holy City, ie. 'inherited the Kingdom of God', will share in the river of living water which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, that is the living waters of healing and of eternal life. The tree of life which grows on either side of the river will heal the nations. The true people of God will see His face, and be like Him.

What is more, this 'kingdom of priests' will now come into its own. Its members shall be 'kings and priests unto their

God', ie. they shall worship Him acceptably because He has first created and then redeemed them. In these 'ages to come' he will 'show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards them in Christ Jesus', and they shall be 'to the praise of the glory of his grace'. They shall be fully to the praise of His glory, for they shall be like Him.

It is then the Kingdom will have come in its fullness; then, when all evil shall have been vanquished and have vanished from the creation. Then the Father and the Son will reign together in glory. Fatherhood, Christ's Brotherhood, and the new divine Family shall be one. All that we have tasted and sensed by faith, hope and love shall then be present to true sight. This will be the Kingdom come!

We will see the Conquering King in all his glory, he who invaded the worlds of evil, intrigue and wickedness, and defeated them, not by cunning politics or clever conniving, but by his artless humility and love. 'Crucified through weakness he now lives by the power of God' (II Cor. 13:4).

The Father also will look with love upon His children of the Kingdom. Doubtless the great cry 'Abba!' ie. 'Father!' will burst from countless lips, and flood countless hearts with joy and fullness of being as they are 'filled unto all the fullness of God'. Knowing these things, we cannot do better than be one with the writer of Hebrews, when he says:

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.