

TWO WORLDS

By

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Jesus called His disciples to live at peace with themselves and with God while living in tension with the world. He did not promise peace with the world but conflict, saying that He came to send a sword which separates His followers from all others (Matt. 10:38–39).

One of the false assumptions of this generation is that being a Christian means tranquility and the achievement of one's goals in this world. Many conclude that since this hardly seems possible in the present world, then the kingdom of God has not yet come into being, that it was not established at Christ's first appearing but will begin after His second coming.

One may ask, "If we are already in the kingdom, then why the problems, the conflict, the suffering and the evil all about us?"

The answer is that the kingdom of God is present in a world which is at rebellion against God. The prophecy of David declared, "Rule thou in the midst of your enemies" (Psa. 110:2). At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus said that the kingdom was at hand, even in their midst, as the King walked among them. Yet, His life was one of constant conflict with the world — peace in the midst of tension. When asked point-blank about His kingdom, He answered, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:35). The argument is often made that "world" in this instance means "age" — as if Jesus meant to say that His kingdom was not for the present time. However, in John 8:32 He used the same word in telling the Pharisees, "You are from beneath; I am from above: you are of this world; I am not of this world." Obviously He was not referring to two different periods of time. "Not of the world" meant not of the nature of the present corrupt world. The nature of the unredeemed in the present world is set in opposition to God; the world to come, after judgment, will be in harmony with God. Yet, His kingdom is present now, the redeemed who are in the world, but not of it.

The apostles presented the same picture, that we are in the kingdom but also looking for the kingdom in its glory. Paul wrote that God has "made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with him in heavenly places," and that He has "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His live" (Eph. 2:5–6 & Col. 1:13). At the same time we live in a world that "lies in the evil one" and where we must always be engaged in warfare (I John 5:19 & Eph. 6:12).

The kingdom was at hand, indeed, just as Jesus said. At Pentecost Peter announced that Jesus had ascended to the throne of David, bringing about the miraculous outpouring of the holy spirit. The resurrection to immortality had been accomplished in Jesus, the first fruits of them that sleep. Jesus, the King of kings, had received all power and authority, the gates of the kingdom had been opened, and the powers of this kingdom began to be realized as the apostles went forth announcing it to the world.

But it was the same old world. It is the world under the curse of Genesis 3:17, the world of rebellious mankind, the world where people serve Satan in preference to God, the world in which mammon is worshipped, where disease, war and sin produce misery, pain and death. The kingdom has appeared, but it appears in the fallen and condemned

world. Therefore we live in tension. We serve the perfect and holy King in a society where unholy men hold office; we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom while living in an earthly one; we seek for life and immortality in a world that is to be destroyed at Christ's coming.

After Peter described the day of judgment in which the present earth is to be dissolved in a great fire, he asks, "What manner of person ought you to be, in all holy living and godliness...?" (II Peter 3:11). With his question in mind, I offer these observations.

The truth and purpose of God cannot be changed by the changes in society. Without doubt we will see many great changes in the world of commerce, politics and even in religion in the next few years. But the new creation has already appeared in the person of Jesus, who had demonstrated the meaning of eternal life by His own resurrection to glorious immortality. This is the divine plan for all the redeemed, and nothing can stop God's purpose from being fulfilled. Churches may change and adopt styles and fads to accommodate the changing world, but to give in to such temporal demands of the public is to work toward ultimate defeat.

Although we have a responsibility in trying to provide good government for ourselves, the world will not be set right merely by electing a new set of officials nor by realignment of the old ones. Freedom is derived from God, and He has not promised it to any people who defy him. A nation which rejects God's kingdom by rejecting its King cannot expect to enjoy kingdom blessings! Our nation is filled with those who profess to believe in God but who, by their actions, say that He has no authority over their lives. They seem to think that He will bring the world into harmony with their desires if they can only get enough people to support the "movement," whatever it happens to be. God commands: "love the Lord God with all your heart...and your neighbor as yourself." To love Him, according to Jesus, is to obey Him, not manipulate Him.

The kingdom of God is composed of people who recognize God as He is, not that they believe there is "a god," but that they believe the one God Who has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, Who gives explicit commands and Whose will and judgment are absolutely perfect and just. If we are in this kingdom, we are by nature opposed to the kingdoms of the world and opposed by them. Jesus warned, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:10). Yet, because of godly compassion we endeavor to make those of the world aware of the true God and His revealed purpose.

No matter how much men may unite against God and seek to establish their own rule, this world still belongs to the Creator. His laws still apply, and when they are broken, there is a penalty to pay. This is true in economics, health and social relationships. Men may serve Satan and do his bidding, but they have to answer to Almighty God, in fact, to Jesus, God's Son, Whom He has appointed as judge (John 5:27 & Acts 17:31). Therefore, we dare not be intimidated by the powers of the world. "Love not the world...for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away..." (I John 2:15-17).

The world we see is temporal (II Cor. 4:18). It is to be wiped out in God's great housecleaning (Matt. 3:12 & II Peter 3:7). But "we look for a new heaven and a new

earth wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:13). In it we may dwell forever. This enables God’s people to view the passing scene in perspective, and not giving their lives to the gaining of worldly things but to serving God and learning to please Him. “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the holy spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Even though we must now live in the condemned and temporal world, we need not live in anxiety and fear, for we are already citizens of the new world to come (Phil. 3:20–21). Because we are citizens of the eternal kingdom,, we can set our minds on “the things that are above where Christ is seated on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1).

Our king had not abandoned us, but abides with us through His spirit. He is Lord, both of this world and the next. It is this knowledge of His transcendent majesty, holiness and purpose that give us incentive to press on with peace and hope and the assurance of glorious fulfillment.

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