

Entering into the Kingdom of the Heavens (1)

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From beginning to end the Bible shows that God has a consistent goal to obtain a kingdom as a realm for His reigning where His glory can be expressed (Matt. 6:13). After God created the universe, He allowed an archangel to rule for Him (Luke 4:6). Later this archangel rebelled against God (Ezek. 28:13-17; Isa. 14:12-15) and became Satan, God's enemy; thus, God's authority was challenged. In order to deal with His enemy and to express His authority, God created man and appointed him to rule the earth on His behalf with authority over everything (Gen. 1:27-28). However, not long after man was created, Satan deceived and corrupted man (3:1-7), which frustrated the establishment of God's authority on earth. In response to man's corruption and fall, God established a way of redemption (v. 21; 4:4) so that man could be saved, and His original intention to express His authority on earth through man could be accomplished. Then Satan invented culture and influenced man to rely upon himself for his living so that man would ignore God's means of salvation (vv. 3, 5, 16-22). Eventually, man became utterly corrupt and was judged by God through the flood (6:11-13). Noah, however, found favor in the sight of God, accepted His way of salvation, walked with Him, submitted to His authority, and was ruled by Him (vv. 8-9). After Noah left the ark, God gave man authority to govern other men (9:6), but Satan used man's God-given authority to establish many nations. Satan caused man to leave God's rule to the extent that man fully rebelled against God at Babel in an attempt to overthrow His authority (10:32—11:4). God immediately came in to judge mankind (vv. 5-9), but from among men He chose and called out Abraham so that He could exercise His authority through Abraham's descendants as a nation (12:1-2).

After Abraham was called by God, he stood in a heavenly position under the rule of God, and God's authority once again had a way on earth. Soon, however, Abraham's descendants went down into Egypt, losing their heavenly position and authority and falling under Satan's authority in the hand of Pharaoh. Then God came in to save them

out of Egypt in order to make them His kingdom wherein He could exercise His authority and express His glory (Exo. 19:4-6). However, they followed the way of the nations not long after they entered Canaan, and they asked for a man to be their king, rejecting God's rule and authority (1 Sam. 8:4-7). Ultimately, God chose a man among them who was according to His own heart, David, and through him God exercised His authority and reigned among them (Acts 13:22). Soon after, however, Israel and the descendants of David again rejected God and His authority. At this time, they lost their kingdom to the Babylonians, and God lost the realm on earth where He could exercise His authority. Later Ezra, Nehemiah, and a group of Israelites were raised up, so God again gained a place on earth where He could exercise His authority. But a short time later, Israel again fell and became desolate. This frustrated God from exercising His authority among them until the Lord Jesus came.

When the Lord Jesus began to minister on earth, He said, "The kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent" (Mark 1:15). When He met a demon, He would cast it out so that the authority of God and the kingdom of God would be extended (Matt. 12:28). Even though the Lord Jesus manifested the authority of God, which is the kingdom of God (Luke 17:21), through signs and wonders among the Jews in His three and a half years of teaching, they were unwilling to repent, to turn to God, or to submit to His authority. Consequently, the Lord told them that the kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to another group of people—the church (Matt. 21:43).

Today the kingdom of God, the realm where God exercises His authority on earth, has passed from the Jews—the Israelites—to the church. On the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius (Acts 2:14-41; 10:34-43), Peter, through the power of the Holy Spirit, used the keys of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 16:19) to open the doors of faith to both Jews and Gentiles so that all who repented and believed could enter the kingdom of God. Those who receive God's salvation through regeneration (John 3:3, 5) are delivered out of the authority of Satan and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13). Collectively, they are the church. The church is the realm where God can exercise His authority on earth; it is God's "holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9).

This kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); it is heavenly. It is not physical but spiritual; that is, it is not a matter of physical things, such as eating or drinking, but a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). When the early church was in a proper condition, God was able to exercise His authority and express His glory in the church through the Holy Spirit.

Soon, however, the church on earth became degraded and desolate. Inwardly, she was full of sins, human opinions, and the world, giving Satan ground and frustrating God's authority from freely moving. In this situation God came in to call out overcomers to return to the original position of the church (Rev. 2—3). The overcomers represent the church to deal with Satan's authority of darkness so that God can freely exercise His authority. These overcomers will bring the kingdom of God, God's authority, to earth, which will cause the Satan-usurped kingdom on the earth to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (12:10; 11:15). Then the overcomers will reign over the earth with Christ in the millennial kingdom (20:4-6), allowing God's authority to freely reign over the entire earth and filling the entire universe with God's glory.

At the end of the millennial kingdom, after the Lord destroys the authority of Satan in his last rebellion, He will give back to God the kingdom that He received from God (1 Cor. 15:24). At that time there will be a new heaven and new earth, and God will obtain an eternal realm in which He can rule and reign with His Son and with us, the saved ones, as His Son's counterpart. His authority will be unchallenged, and His glory will be expressed for eternity.

This has always been God's heart's desire, and this has always been God's goal. To enter into the kingdom of the heavens is to participate in the heavenly reality of God's goal so that we can enter into its heavenly manifestation in the millennial kingdom and enjoy God's authority and glory. This is clearly revealed in the Bible, and it is intimately related to us. Thus, we must spend time to study the topic of entering into the kingdom of the heavens. If we are patient, many questions will be answered spontaneously as we examine this topic. First, we need to see the definition of the kingdom of the heavens.

The Definition of the Kingdom of the Heavens

According to Matthew, the kingdom of the heavens is divided into three aspects. If we want to understand the kingdom of the heavens, we must be clear concerning these three aspects.

The Appearance of the Kingdom of the Heavens

The first aspect of the kingdom of the heavens is the

appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. This is Christendom, comprising the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox church, and Protestant churches. Within the sphere of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, Christendom, there are genuine believers and false believers, righteousness and unrighteousness, truth and heresy, and things of the Lord and things of the devil. The Lord spoke of these matters in His parables in Matthew 13:24-42.

1. "The kingdom of the heavens has become like a man sowing good seed in his field. But while the men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares in the midst of the wheat" (Matt. 13:24-25; see also vv. 30, 36-40).

According to the Lord's words, He is the kingdom of the heavens coming to the earth to sow Himself as the seed of life on earth. True believers, who have His life, are portrayed as wheat that grows up from this good seed. However, the Lord also spoke of His enemy, the devil, sowing false believers as tares among the true believers. These false believers, who do not have the Lord's life, are mixed among true believers, but they have not truly repented or believed from their hearts to receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior. They have not been regenerated with the Lord's life. Thus, they do not have an inward relationship with Christ based on His life. They have only an outward relationship with organized Christianity. They are pew-warmers, blind followers, seekers of base gain, traditional followers, religious leaders who do not believe in Christ, and superstitious ones looking for blessings. The devil mixes these false ones among true believers in order to corrupt the church as the kingdom of God, the realm in which He exercises His authority on earth today. Although they cannot participate in the kingdom of the heavens, they give a false appearance to the kingdom of the heavens because they are mixed together with true believers.

2. "The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, and which is smaller than all the seeds; but when it has grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches" (Matt. 13:31-32).

In this parable the Lord said that the kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed planted in the field. Just as in the previous parable, the seed represents the Word of life. Since every seed should reproduce according to the nature of the life within it, the kingdom of the heavens, like an annual mustard seed, should not be deeply rooted in the earth. The church should sojourn like a pilgrim on the earth but also be full of the element of life and the function to nourish and feed people. In this parable, however, the mustard seed grew up and became a

great tree, like Christendom, having great size, deep roots in the world, and a perennial expression. In this way it lost its nourishing element and grew large branches where the devil and his angels could roost. This is related to the devil mixing false believers into the church, which caused her nature to change and enlarged her outward organization. With tens of thousands of false believers mixed into it, the church, which should have been small like an herb, became Christianity, a large tree. Christianity is great on the earth today. It truly is a large tree. With such a large outward appearance, many of the works, occupations, organizations, and institutions of Christianity are simply branches in which Satan and his angels can roost. As a great tree, Christianity represents the false, worldly, and outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens on earth today.

3. “The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened” (Matt. 13:33).

In the preceding parable, the Lord spoke of the abnormal development of the kingdom of the heavens. In this parable He spoke of the inward corruption within the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. The Roman Catholic Church, signified by the woman, has brought all kinds of heresies and evil things, as leaven (cf. Gal. 5:8-9; 1 Cor. 5:6-8), into the church and mixed them with the teachings of Christ. This has leavened and corrupted the entire content of Christianity. Today’s Christianity has teachings that are full of the leaven of heretical doctrines and unbelief, just like those of the Sadducees in ancient times (Matt. 16:12); its actions are full of the leaven of evil and hypocrisy, just like those of the Pharisees in ancient times (Luke 12:1); and its positions are full of the leaven of corrupt power and injustice, just like that of King Herod in ancient times (Mark 8:15). These different kinds of leaven have caused all of Christendom in its outward appearance to be inwardly corrupted.

The parables concerning the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven all refer to negative matters, but since the Lord said, “The kingdom of the heavens is like,” in reference to them all, they speak of matters related to the kingdom of the heavens. However, they do not refer to the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Rather, they refer only to its appearance since they are related to negative matters. These parables speak only of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens and the condition within its outward appearance. In its outward appearance, there are false believers as well as true believers. These false believers are Christians in name only, not in life. In the kingdom’s appearance there is outward worldly development and inward heretical corruption. This is the first aspect of the kingdom of the heavens.

The Reality of the Kingdom of the Heavens

The second aspect of the kingdom of the heavens is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. In order to know the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, we must know what the kingdom of the heavens is. A kingdom is a realm where authority is exercised. Thus, the kingdom of the heavens is the realm where the heavens exercise authority. Daniel 4:25-26 shows that the heavens rule; that is, the Most High is the Ruler. This means that God rules and exercises authority from the heavens as His dwelling place (1 Kings 8:39). The throne of God’s authority is also in the heavens (Psa. 103:19). Therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is the reign of the heavens where God dwells; simply speaking, it is the rule of the heavens. This heavenly ruling is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The reality is the ruling of the heavens, which governs us, restricts us, and causes us to submit to God’s authority in all things so that we may be one with God in the heavens in all situations. Thus, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens involves the heavenly authority that true Chris-

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tians submit to today; it is the heavenly control and exercise that they accept today. Only overcoming believers know this reality; everyone else—including both defeated, genuine believers and false Christians—have no part in it. The words that the Lord spoke on the mountain in Matthew 5 through 7 are related to the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

1. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 5:3).

According to the Lord, the kingdom of the heavens belongs to those who are poor in spirit. When a person is poor in spirit, he is under the ruling of the heavens, and he is in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. To be poor in spirit means that one feels poor and empty in the depths of his heart and spirit. He is dissatisfied with his condition and even more dissatisfied with the things of this world. By being poor and empty in spirit, there is a constant pursuit of spiritual growth and of God’s riches, which are simply God Himself. Such a person is under the governance of the heavens, and he is in the reality of the

kingdom of the heavens. Consequently, he does not have to wait to enter into the kingdom of the heavens, because the kingdom of the heavens is his already.

2. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 5:10).

The kingdom of the heavens also belongs to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. To be persecuted for the sake of righteousness means to be persecuted and troubled by others because one refuses to do unrighteous, improper things in order to keep himself in accord with God’s ways. This is possible only when one submits to God’s authority and lives under God’s heavenly governing in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Such a one is in the kingdom of the heavens, and the kingdom of the heavens is his.

Verses 3 and 10 speak of the heavens ruling in a person in reality today; therefore, they both speak of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. However, these are not the only verses that speak of this reality. All the teachings of the Lord on the mountain in Matthew 5—7 relate to the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and reveal the situation of those who are under the heavenly ruling.

1. Those who are under the governance of the heavens are poor in spirit (5:3). Such ones feel empty and lacking in spiritual matters, especially in God Himself, and thus are desperately seeking. They are mournful in heart (v. 4). Such ones repent and mourn for their poor and desolate condition. They are meek (v. 5). Such ones are as lambs led to the slaughter, suffering persecution without resisting and enduring opposition, shame, and attack. They hunger and thirst for righteousness (v. 6). Such ones seek to have their actions and behavior according to God’s righteous ways and to keep themselves righteous. They are merciful (v. 7). Such ones are sympathetic to the sufferings of others, making allowances for others’ weaknesses, being broad and gracious toward them, while requiring strict righteousness for themselves. They are pure in heart (v. 8). Such ones have no tendencies or hopes apart from God and His will. They are peacemakers (v. 9). Such ones end disputes, restrict the flesh, and hold their tongue. They are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (v. 10). Such ones pay a price for the sake of righteousness and suffer loss to be righteous. They rejoice when reproached, persecuted, and slandered for the Lord’s sake (vv. 11-12). Such ones endure and consider it a joy to be persecuted and cruelly treated by others for the Lord’s sake. The living of those who are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and under the heavenly ruling comes out of the first six items, which are conditions of the heart and spirit; such ones also display the last three items as conditions of their outward behavior.

These nine items show who is under the governance of the heavens.

2. Those who are under the governance of the heavens are salt on this corrupted earth, eliminating corruption (v. 3). They do not lose the holy, heavenly flavor of a Christian or the power of God that kills the germs of sin. They maintain a heavenly nature and a separation from worldly people. They are also light in the dark world, eliminating the darkness (v. 14). They live in a heavenly realm and do not allow the light of Christ in them to be hidden by anything earthly; instead, they are like a light shining in a dark place (v. 15). Through their actions, they shine out God—who is light—before men, causing others to see God and the light of His glory in them (v. 16). These matters refer to their influence on the world from their living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. They are salt to corruption and light to darkness.

3. Those who are under the governance of the heavens are not under the law, but their living and actions are not lower than the righteousness of the law. On the contrary, their living exceeds the standard of the righteousness of the law, being absolutely holy with a surpassing righteousness (v. 20). They not only refrain from killing others, but they do not even hate others. Their flesh is not provoked; they do not become angry with their brothers, nor do they curse their brothers (vv. 21-22). They strive to be reconciled to their brothers and at peace with men (vv. 23-25). They not only flee from the act of adultery but refuse even adulterous thoughts (vv. 27-28). They restrict the lusts of the flesh, putting to death the members of their body (vv. 29-30). They do not defile themselves or cause their wives to be defiled (vv. 31-32). They do not speak loose words; their speaking is accurate and honest: Yes is yes and no is no, without additional words (vv. 33-37). They do not oppose others; if someone slaps them on the right cheek, they turn the left to be slapped also (vv. 38-39). If someone takes their inner garment, they give him their outer garment (v. 40). If someone forces them to walk for one mile, they go with him for two miles (v. 41). If anyone asks anything of them, they give it to him. If anyone wants to borrow something from them, they do not refuse to lend it (v. 42). They are not touched inwardly by earthly things; they live entirely apart from the things of the earth. They do not love only their neighbors but also their enemies. They pray for those who persecute them, do not look on others with enmity, and do not blame others (vv. 43-44). In loving others, they do not have their own choices or preferences but are perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect (vv. 45-48). These points speak of the restrictions on those who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, which come from the law of the life within them and which far surpass the requirements of the outward law of letters.

4. Those who are under the governance of the heavens do good and act righteously. They are watchful and careful to refuse the actions of the flesh. They do not boast, make a show, or brag (6:1). When they give alms, their motive is pure, so they do not let their left hand know what their right hand is doing. They do things secretly before God and not before men (vv. 2-4). They pray often in their private room, but they do not exhibit themselves in their praying (vv. 5-6). Their prayer and words are clean, so they sanctify God's name and pray for His kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth before asking for their own needs (vv. 7-11). They also confess their sins before God and ask Him to keep them from temptation and to deliver them from the evil one. The goal of their prayer is completely for God's kingdom, power, and glory (vv. 12-13). They forgive others so that God may forgive them (vv. 14-15). When they fast before God, they do not show others that they are fasting; they are spiritual without appearing to be spiritual (vv. 16-18). They are not falsely spiritual, nor do they make much of their spirituality. They do not have a spiritual façade; on the contrary, they live and act like ordinary people. Those who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are restricted by the heavens, and in the matter of good deeds and righteous acts, they are simple and pure. Because they are restricted, they not only avoid sinning but also restrict their flesh and their self from being mixed into their good and righteous actions.

5. Those who are under the governance of the heavens do not store up riches on earth; thus, they have nothing worthy of clinging to on earth and are completely turned toward the heavens so that their eye may be single and bright, causing their entire being to be full of light and without darkness (vv. 19-23). They do not serve mammon; they serve only God (v. 24). They do not love money; they love only God. They do not allow earthly riches to entangle their hearts; they allow only the God of the heavens to fill their hearts. They do not rely on earthly riches; they rely only on the living God in the heavens. Others cannot see the power of money in their lives; they see only God's care. Thus, they live for God's concerns and not in their anxieties, like the birds of heaven and the lilies of the field (vv. 25-29). Although they give alms, pray, and fast secretly, they enjoy God's care openly. Their faces do not show the effects of fasting; instead, they are clothed with the glory of the lilies. They hide their own goodness and righteousness, but they express God's grace and glory (vv. 30-32). They seek God's kingdom and His righteousness more than the clothing and food for this life (v. 33). They strive to submit to God's authority, to be according to God's ways, and to not care for the needs of their living. They know only to submit to God's authority, to be according to God's ways, and to not worry about how they will live tomorrow. While they are faithful today, they are not anxious for tomorrow (v. 34). These items

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6. Those who are under the governance of the heavens do not judge the mistakes of others but think only of their own shortcomings (7:1-2). They do not see the splinter in their brother's eye, because they see only the beam in their own (vv. 3-4). They deal with themselves first, then with their brother (v. 5). When they preach the Word or give a testimony, they have no fleshly interests and do not follow their own desires. They do not loosely speak with others about God's truth, that is, about the holy things of God or about their own subjective experiences, their own "pearls" (v. 6). They ask for the Lord's grace, pay the price to seek the Lord Himself, and spend time to knock in prayer; they live before the Lord (vv. 7-8). They are willing to treat others as they would be treated themselves (vv. 9-12). These points show how those who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are principled in

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their dealings with others—they do not loosely follow their own will, they are not careless, and they treat others as they wish to be treated.

7. Those who are under the governance of the heavens enter by the narrow gate and walk in the constricted way, refusing the self, the flesh, human will, and the world (vv. 13-14). They do not desire human greatness, nor do they allow themselves leeway; they constantly live in life and take life as the goal. They guard against false prophets and do not easily believe human reasoning; they examine the fruits of preachers and test their behavior (vv. 15-20). To pursue the kingdom of the heavens, they obey the will of God (v. 21). They make the will of God the center of all things; they do not make preaching the gospel, casting out demons, working miracles, doing spiritual work, or doing good deeds the center of their lives (vv. 22-23). They single-mindedly seek God's good pleasure; they do not ask to be welcomed by man nor do they follow their own desires. Their behavior and actions, their living and work, are wholly according to Christ's words, not according to the traditions of men, the thoughts of men, the

ordinances of men, the trend of the world, or their own views (vv. 24-27). These points show how those who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens base their work and life on the narrow gate, the straight way, the will of God, and the Lord's Word.

The items mentioned in the preceding seven points represent the condition of those under the heavenly rule. Thus, they represent the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Living in these things equals living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

The Lord's teachings on the mountain show that the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is our living according to the heavenly rule within us, which causes us to leave sin, to overcome our temper, to deny our flesh and our self, to reject the world, to oppose Satan, to submit to the heavenly authority, to receive the heavenly restriction, and to live on the earth today without any flavor of the earth, bearing only a heavenly likeness.

In the Old Testament age God required the children of Israel to wear fringes on the borders of their garments with a cord of blue on the fringe of each border (Num. 15:38-39). Blue is the color of the heavens. God wanted them to have a cord of blue on the fringes of their garments to surround their steps. This signifies that their walk was to be restricted by the heavens so that they would not follow their own heart and eyes to commit fornication, because they were God's people and should be separated from all the people on the earth.

In the New Testament age God wants us to be separated from the earth, to leave all earthly things behind, and to live in a heavenly situation to an even greater extent than the children of Israel. This is because His salvation saves us to the extent that we are able to live under the reality of the heavenly ruling in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. He regenerates us with His heavenly life from the heavens (John 3:3, 5; *born* can be translated "born from above"); He gives us His heavenly nature (1 Cor. 15:47-48), makes us citizens of His heavenly kingdom (Phil. 3:20), and causes us to sit together with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). Thus, although today we cannot go up to the heavens, the heavenly life is within us and can abide in us. We are on the earth, but we are heavenly. We are people of the heavens who enjoy the heavenly authority and who can live in a heavenly atmosphere and obtain the heavenly supply, as mentioned in Hebrews (see 12:23; 11:16; 6:4; 3:1). This is similar to an American citizen who was born in China. Although he has not been to America, he has the American life within him. He is in China, but he is American and belongs to America. He is a genuine American who can enjoy the privileges of being an American and live in an American family with the American life supply and flavor. As heavenly citizens on earth, we are heavenly

people, even though we are on earth. We have the heavenly life and can have a heavenly living on earth with the heavenly supply and flavor. If we live by the heavenly life within us, we will live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, submit to the heavenly authority, receive the restriction of the heavens, and be separated from sin, our temper, the activities of our flesh and self, the world, Satan, and the flavor of the earth. Our living, work, speaking, and actions will bear a heavenly likeness and be full of a heavenly flavor.

One who lives in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens submits to the heavenly authority, receives the heavenly restriction, and does not need man to govern him. He can keep the law and be orderly much more than other human beings because the heavens rule, govern, and restrict him. The governance of heaven is stricter and more thorough than the governance of man. What national laws, household rules, school ordinances, or regulations from superiors can govern us more strictly and more thoroughly than the rule of the heavens? The need for these kinds of regulation proves that we are not up to the standard of a Christian because we do not allow the heavens to govern us and do not live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. If we can be loose when no one is ruling us and if we can do things that are unethical or illegal, we are not under the ruling of the heavens. If we can lose our temper at will or argue with others loosely, we are not restricted by the heavens. If our fleshly temper is easily excited and we can speak and act in the flesh, we are living outside of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, and we have lost our heavenly position and fallen into an earthly condition. We must be completely free of the flesh and the self; we must reject the world and live in the heavenly realm—submitting to the heavenly authority, receiving the heavenly restriction, living a heavenly life with a heavenly appearance and flavor on earth—in order to be in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

Although the kingdom of the heavens has not yet been manifested, we can live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today. If we pursue to overcome, to please the Lord, to submit to God's heavenly authority, and to accept God's heavenly governing and exercise, we will participate in this reality. This is the second aspect of the kingdom of the heavens.

The Manifestation of the Kingdom of the Heavens

The third aspect of the kingdom of the heavens is the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens on earth involves the reigning and governing of Christ and His overcoming saints on the earth with heavenly authority for one thousand years. The Lord spoke of this in the prophecies on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24 through 25.

1. **“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master”** (Matt. 25:21, see also v. 23).

The Lord’s words in these two verses relate to the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Whoever is faithful in serving the Lord today will be called by the Lord into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens when He returns; he will be in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, ruling the world and entering into the joy of the Lord.

2. **“You who have followed Me, in the restoration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”** (Matt. 19:28).

The twelve disciples who left everything to follow the Lord will sit with the Lord on thrones in the day of restoration and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

3. **“He who overcomes....to him I will give authority over the nations; and he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces, as I also have received from My Father”** (Rev. 2:26-27).

The overcoming believers who keep the Lord’s commandments today will receive authority from the Lord in that day, and together with the Lord, they will rule over the nations who are on earth in the millennial kingdom.

4. **“I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them...And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years”; “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection;...they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years”** (Rev. 20:4, 6).

Those who have been martyred for the Lord in every age and the overcoming believers who have died will be resurrected in that day and given authority in the millennial kingdom to reign with Christ, rule the nations, and judge the peoples, bringing the authority of God and Christ to men. They also will be priests of God and of Christ, offering men’s worship to God and Christ. In addition to these verses, Matthew 20:21, 23; 24:46-47; Luke 19:17, 19; 2 Timothy 2:12; and Revelation 3:21 speak of the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. The believers who are faithful, who endure, and who overcome for the Lord today will obtain authority to sit on the throne with the Lord and to reign with Him over everything when He comes again.

The Bible shows that when the Lord returns, the kingdom of the heavens will come to earth to reign and rule over the earth. The Lord Jesus will establish His kingdom on

earth and rule the earth for one thousand years. Christians who leave everything to follow the Lord and who are good, faithful, long-suffering, and overcoming will reign with the Lord Jesus during this one thousand year period. They will sit in glory on thrones together with the Lord to reign and enter into the joy of the Lord in the kingdom.

Despite the fact that both the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, which is so-called Christendom, and the reality of the ruling of the kingdom of the heavens in the overcoming Christians are present on earth today, the kingdom of the heavens is still a hidden mystery to the world. Christendom is merely the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, not the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Even the submission of the overcoming Christians to heavenly authority is not the full manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens but only a small, mysterious reality of the kingdom of the heavens that is hidden from the worldly people. Although worldly people today can see the outwardly great and magnificent appearance of Christendom, they cannot see the authority and

One who lives in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens submits to the heavenly authority, receives the heavenly restriction, and does not need man to govern him, because the heavens rule, govern, and restrict him.

glory of the kingdom of the heavens, and although they can see overcoming Christians who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens with pureness, brightness, goodness, meekness, unselfishness, and with no attachment to the world, they have no understanding of the source of this reality. The kingdom of the heavens is hidden from the worldly people, but it will be manifested when the Lord Jesus returns to rule the earth. Then all will see the authority and the glory of the kingdom manifested before them.

According to the Bible, Satan and his angels are presently ruling this dark world (Eph. 6:12). In the future the Lord will return to deal with Satan (Rev. 20:1-3), and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of the Lord (11:15). Then the Lord and the overcoming Christians will take back the earth, which has been usurped by Satan and his angels, and they will reign over the earth in glory. Then the kingdom of the heavens will be manifested. The Christians who will participate in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens are those who have lived in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens by submitting to

the heavenly authority, receiving the heavenly restriction, and overcoming. In the glorious appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, there will be no portion for defeated Christians, much less for false Christians. This is the third aspect of the kingdom of the heavens.

In conclusion, when the Bible speaks of the kingdom of the heavens, there are three aspects. First, the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens includes all who are called Christians, both believers who are saved and false believers who are not saved. Second, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens includes the overcoming Christians who submit to the heavenly authority, receive the restriction and governance of the heavens, and allow the heavens to exercise authority in them today. Third, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens includes the overcoming Christians who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today by allowing the heavens to rule them, by receiving the heavenly restriction, and by overcoming to the end, even unto death. When the Lord Jesus returns, only they will enter into the manifestation of the kingdom.

The Difference between the Kingdom of the Heavens and the Church

The church is neither a physical building, nor a place, nor an organization, nor a denomination, nor an evangelistic group. The word *church* in the original language is *ek-klesia*, which means “the assembly of the called-out ones.” The church is a group of people whom God has called out from the world. The totality of this people, on one hand, is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23), and on the other hand, it is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). The Body of Christ denotes both the relationship and function of the church to Christ. The house of God denotes both the relationship and the function of the church to God. Related to Christ, the church comes out of Christ and has His life. Hence, the church is the Body, the fullness of Christ—His continuation, extension, and spreading. It is able to express and testify Christ anytime and anywhere. Related to God, the church is born of God and has His life. Hence, the church is God’s household, His dwelling place, enabling Him to have a place on the earth where He can rest, express His desire, fulfill His purpose, and manifest His glory.

We have to be clear about one thing: the church is different from Christianity. In the world’s eyes, Christianity is the church. But in the eyes of God and in the eyes of those who know God, there is a great difference between Christianity and the church. Christianity is that which men have organized in the world; the church is that which God has delivered out of the world. Christianity is a religious organization, that is, the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens; the church is a living

organism, that is, the Body of Christ and the spiritual dwelling place of God. Only rituals are required in order to join and participate in Christianity and to become a nominal Christian. To participate in the church requires regeneration through repentance to God and faith in Christ, causing one to become a member of Christ and a child of God. In the world’s eyes those who are in Christianity are in the church. However, in God’s eyes all those who are in Christianity may not be the church. This is because in Christianity there are many who have not been regenerated through repentance to God and faith in Christ. Hence, they are not members of Christ nor the children of God.

The church is the Body of Christ and the house of God, and the kingdom of the heavens is a heavenly kingdom. The church denotes a believer’s position and blessing along with his life and function; the kingdom of the heavens denotes a believer’s living and responsibility today with his authority and glory in the future. The church is the grace that a believer receives; the kingdom of the heavens is the training that a believer receives today and the reward that he will receive in the future. A believer in the church is a member of Christ, enjoying Christ as life, and also a child of God, enjoying the blessing in the house of God. A believer in the kingdom of the heavens is a heavenly subject submitting to the heavenly authority and receiving heavenly control and discipline today, and in the future he will be a heavenly king exercising heavenly authority to rule over the world and to enjoy heavenly glory and joy with Christ. As long as one has the life of God, he is in the church, but he must have a heavenly living in order to be in the kingdom of the heavens. All the saved ones are in the church, but not all the saved ones are in the kingdom of the heavens. This is because not every saved one is living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today and receiving the discipline of the kingdom. Nor will he be in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future to receive the reward. Only those believers who are presently submitting to the heavenly authority, receiving the discipline of the kingdom of the heavens, are in the kingdom of the heavens today and will be able to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future to reign as kings. Those who participate in the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the reality and the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, naturally participate in the church, but those who participate in the church may not necessarily participate in the kingdom of the heavens. A saved one participates in the church; a saved and overcoming one participates both in the church and in the kingdom of the heavens. To participate in the church requires only salvation through faith, but to participate in the kingdom of the heavens requires further seeking to overcome, submitting to heavenly authority, and receiving heavenly control and discipline after experiencing salvation.

*A Comparison of the Kingdom of the Heavens,
the Kingdom of God, and the Church*

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens has a very wide scope, including all who are called Christians, regardless of whether they are real or false. Not all of those who are in the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens are in the church because not all of them are saved. Only the saved ones among them are in the church. The scope of the church is therefore narrower than the scope of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. The church includes only those who are true believers, who have the life of Christ.

All those who are in the church are also in the kingdom of God, because during the dispensation of the church, the church is the kingdom of God. The scope of the church and the scope of the kingdom of God during the dispensation of the church are the same. However, not all of those who are in the church are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, because not all of them are overcomers. Only the overcomers in the church are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is narrower than that of the church and the kingdom of God. It includes only the believers who are living a heavenly life and are overcomers.

Those who are being disciplined today in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are those who will reign in the future in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is equal to the scope of the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, Christendom, is related to the nominal Christians; the church and the kingdom of God are related to the saved ones. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens and the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens are related to the overcoming believers. A nominal Christian is only in the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, that is, Christendom. A person who is merely saved is in the church and in the kingdom of God. Only those who are saved and seeking to overcome, submitting to the heavenly authority, and receiving the heavenly discipline are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today and can enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future.

According to God's original intention and salvation, there should not be these differences and comparisons. God's original intention was to make the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church the same in scope during the dispensation of the church. The church is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 16:18-19). Those who are in

the church are those who are in the kingdom of God; those who are in the kingdom of God are also those who are in the kingdom of the heavens. The scope of the three are the same, but their definitions differ. The church denotes the position of the believers—called out of the world and standing outside of the world. The word *church* is *ekklesia*, meaning the called-out ones assembling together. The kingdom of God denotes the life of the believers, which is of God and is capable of living within the realm of God. All those who are in the kingdom of God are born of God (John 3:3, 5). The kingdom of the heavens denotes the living of the believers who are submitting to the heavenly ruling and receiving heavenly discipline. The kingdom of the heavens is the ruling of the heavens. According to God's intention, the definitions of these three may be different, but their scope should be absolutely the same. All those who are in the church should be in the kingdom of God, and all those who are in the kingdom of God should be in the kingdom of the heavens. This is God's intention, and God's salvation has saved us to such an extent.

*Those who are being disciplined
today in the reality of the kingdom
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Why then did the scope of these three parts become different? Why is the scope of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens wider than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God? And why is the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens narrower than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God? These differences are due to the confusion caused by Satan and the degradation of the believers. If Satan had not brought in the false believers and if the real believers had not become degraded, then the scope of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church would be the same.

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is wider in scope than the church and the kingdom of God because Satan has put many tares, false believers, into Christianity. These false believers are apparently different from the worldly people, but actually they are not. They are still worldly people with no change inwardly; they have merely put on the name of a Christian outwardly. Apparently they are in the church, but actually they are outside the church. The church differs from them just

like she differs from the worldly people. Because these false ones have joined Christianity, Christianity has grown enormous and has become wider in scope than the church and the kingdom of God.

The scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is narrower than that of the church and the kingdom of God because a great number of the believers in the church, that is, in the kingdom of God, have become degraded and have not met the standard of the kingdom of the heavens. Although all saved believers are in the church and in the kingdom of God, many have fallen from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Although the believers who are defeated and the believers who are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are both in the church and in the kingdom of God, the defeated ones have lost the heavenly position of the church and have neglected the divine life of the kingdom of God. The salvation of God has delivered them into the kingdom of the heavens, placing them in such an exalted position, but due to their insubordination to the ruling of the kingdom of the heavens and their disobedience to the heavenly ruling and discipline, they have fallen away from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The heavenly position of the church is as exalted as the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly position of the church. The defeated ones' falling away from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens cannot reverse the fact that they are in the church, but it can cause them to lose the heavenly position of the church. Although they are still children of God, they are children who have fallen away from God's standard—the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Although they are heavenly people, they do not live like heavenly people. They are heavenly people who have fallen away from the heavenly ruling. Oh, how many fallen Christians there are today! Believers who have fallen from the standard of God's salvation, from the heavenly position of the church, and from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens can be found everywhere. How many among the saved ones have lost their position in God's salvation, the heavenly position of the church, and the nature of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens? A great number of Christians have fallen away from these. Therefore, the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens has become narrower than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God.

May the Lord be gracious to us that we may stand on or return to our position in His salvation to be Christians according to His original intention. May we not lose the heavenly position of the church nor neglect the divine life of the kingdom of God but be disciplined in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today so that we may reign with Him in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future.

The Meaning of Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens

Most believers today think that entering the kingdom of the heavens means to be saved, that is, to obtain eternal life. According to the Bible, however, this view is not accurate. We need to see the scriptural meaning of entering the kingdom of the heavens.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being Different from Obtaining Eternal Life in This Age

1. **“Believes...has eternal life”** (John 3:36; 5:24; see also 3:16; 6:47; 20:31); compare with **“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens”** (Matt. 5:20; see also 7:21; 18:3).

All the verses from the Gospel of John speak of eternal life being obtained through faith. Obtaining eternal life is totally a matter of faith alone. If one wants eternal life, he does not need to do anything but believe, because faith is the only requirement for obtaining eternal life. If a person believes, he obtains eternal life; if he does not believe, he will not obtain eternal life.

Entering the kingdom of the heavens, however, is different. The verses from the Gospel of Matthew speak of entering the kingdom of the heavens based on righteous acts, doing the will of God, and having a changed living. This shows that entering the kingdom of the heavens is a matter of works, righteousness, and a change in living. In order for a person to enter the kingdom of the heavens, his righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees; he must also do the will of God and have a changed living. It is not enough to merely believe but have no works.

The difference between obtaining eternal life and entering into the kingdom of the heavens can be seen from the different emphasis in John and Matthew. John speaks of believing in order to receive eternal life. Matthew speaks of having a surpassing righteousness in order to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. John says that we obtain eternal life by faith, and Matthew says that we must do God's will to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. John says that he who believes has passed out of death into life, and Matthew says that we must turn and become as little children in order to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. John says that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord of life, that life is in Him, and that He came that men may have life, which is received by faith. Thus, John repeatedly speaks of believing in order to obtain life. Matthew says that Jesus is the King of the kingdom of the heavens who came to the earth to establish a heavenly kingdom and who needs people to follow Him so that they may enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Matthew repeatedly

speaks of following Him, of taking up the cross to follow Him, and of leaving everything to follow Him. John shows that we only need to receive the Lord of life by faith in order to obtain eternal life. Matthew shows that we must faithfully follow the King of the kingdom of the heavens in order to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Eternal life is obtained by receiving the Lord through faith; the kingdom of the heavens is entered into by faithfully following the Lord.

In order to obtain eternal life, we only need to believe, but in order to enter the kingdom of the heavens, we must have righteous acts and a changed living. Every time the Bible speaks of the matter of eternal life, it speaks of believing rather than doing, but whenever the Bible speaks of entering the kingdom of the heavens, it does not speak of faith. Rather, it speaks of righteousness, doing the will of God, or of something related to our living. Therefore, according to the Bible, we should realize that obtaining eternal life and entering the kingdom of the heavens are two different things.

2. “Children of God” (John 1:12); compare with “Reign” (2 Tim. 2:12).

John 1:12 speaks of being children in the household of God, whereas 2 Timothy 2:12 speaks of reigning in God’s kingdom. Being children is a matter of receiving eternal life; reigning as kings is a matter of entering the kingdom of the heavens. If we want to have eternal life and be children of God, we only need to receive the Lord by believing into Him. But to enter the kingdom of the heavens and be kings, we need to endure and overcome. Thus, these two verses in the Bible also prove that obtaining eternal life and entering the kingdom of the heavens are two different matters.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being Different from Eternal Salvation

1. “By grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:8; see also 2 Tim. 1:9); compare with “The crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me” (2 Tim. 4:8).

Ephesians 2:8 and 2 Timothy 1:9 show that salvation is by grace on God’s side and through faith on man’s side. Consequently, salvation is not at all related to our works. Grace is given by God freely, and we receive salvation freely by faith. We only need to believe and receive in order to receive God’s salvation; we do not need to do even the smallest work.

However, 2 Timothy 4:8 shows that when the Lord comes, the crown that we obtain will be based on righteousness. A crown is the symbol of a king. Thus, to

obtain a crown is to enter the kingdom of the heavens to reign. Therefore, obtaining a crown is based on God’s righteousness, not grace. It is called a “crown of righteousness,” not a “crown of grace.” This crown of righteousness will be given by the Lord, the “righteous Judge,” to His overcoming believers. This is absolutely different from being saved by grace in Ephesians 2:8. “By grace” is based on our faith; “of righteousness” is based on our works. God gives us grace for our salvation, and this has nothing to do with our works. We only need to receive God’s salvation by faith, and we are saved. But the Lord will give us a crown based only on righteousness, according to our works. In order to receive a crown, it is not enough merely to have faith to receive God’s grace; we must also have works that correspond to the Lord’s righteousness. Thus, these two portions of the Bible show that we are saved by God’s grace today and that we will obtain a reward and enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens according to God’s righteousness in the future. These two matters are different from each other.

Believers who have fallen from the standard of God’s salvation, from the heavenly position of the church, and from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens can be found everywhere.

2. “Saved through faith...not of works” (Eph. 2:8-9; see also 2 Tim. 1:9); compare with “Not everyone...will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens” (Matt. 7:21).

Ephesians 2:8-9 and 2 Timothy 1:9 both say that salvation is entirely by God’s grace, not by works. This grace was given in Christ by God to us before the ages, before any of our works had been done, so it is completely unrelated to our works. Matthew 7:21 tells us we must do works that carry out the will of the Father in order to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, this also shows that entering the kingdom of the heavens is different from being eternally saved.

3. “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13); compare with “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 7:21).

Romans 10:13 says that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Calling upon the Lord’s name in

this verse is related to faith. As long as we believe in our heart and confess the Lord's name with our mouth, we will be saved. We do not need to do anything else to be saved. Believing in the Lord and confessing with our mouth are sufficient for our salvation.

In contrast, Matthew 7:21 says that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," will enter into the kingdom of the heavens. This is very different from Romans 10:13, which says that calling on the Lord's name is all that is needed for salvation. According to the verse in Matthew 7, a person who calls, "Lord, Lord," may not be able to enter the kingdom of the heavens. While it is enough to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation, this is not sufficient to ensure that one will enter the kingdom of the heavens; it is also necessary to do the will of God. Thus, these two portions of the Bible also show that being eternally saved and entering the kingdom of the heavens are two different things.

4. "Such fornication...that someone has his step-mother...Such a one...may be saved" (1 Cor. 5:1, 5); compare with "Neither fornicators...will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

In 1 Corinthians 5:5 the apostle spoke of delivering a brother who had committed gross fornication to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord. This shows that a saved brother, even one who commits a terrible sin, will be saved in the future despite the destruction of his flesh in this age. This is because salvation is based on God's unchanging grace, which will never change, even if a believer's actions are evil. If a believer's actions are evil after he is saved, he is still saved. This is what the apostle clearly tells us in 1 Corinthians 5, but in the very next chapter the apostle says, "Neither fornicators...nor adulterers...will inherit the kingdom of God" (vv. 9-10). This should be a clear indication that salvation and inheriting the kingdom of God are two different matters. If they are not different, then the apostle's words contradict each other. Since salvation is not based on man's works, even a brother who becomes involved in fornication and adultery will not lose his eternal salvation, but at the same time he will not inherit the kingdom of God, which requires a surpassing holiness, because of his living as a fornicator and adulterer. Therefore, in these two portions, the apostle says two different things, because being eternally saved and entering the kingdom of the heavens are two different matters.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being Different from Entering into the Kingdom of God

1. "Unless one is born anew...he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5); compare with "Unless you turn and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 18:3).

In John 3:3 and 5 the Lord showed that entering into the kingdom of God is based on regeneration. Regeneration means to obtain the life of God in addition to one's natural life. Thus, entering the kingdom of God is a matter of life. Our entrance into the kingdom of God depends on whether we are regenerated. If we have the life of God, we can enter the kingdom of God.

In Matthew 18:3, however, the Lord said that we must turn and become like little children in order to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. This is different from what He said in John 3. There He said that anyone who is regenerated can enter the kingdom of God. Here He said that only those who turn and become like little children can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Being regenerated is to obtain the life of God. Turning to become like a little child is to have a living that is humble like that of a little child. Therefore, entering into the kingdom of God is a matter related to *life*, and entering into the kingdom of the heavens is a matter related to *living*. The kingdom of God is the whole realm of God's reign, whereas the kingdom of the heavens is a part of that realm. The kingdom of God is general, whereas the kingdom of the heavens is specific. Those who enter the kingdom of the heavens spontaneously also enter the kingdom of God; however, those who enter the kingdom of God do not necessarily enter the kingdom of the heavens. To enter the kingdom of God, one must be regenerated and have the life of God; to enter the kingdom of the heavens, one must turn and become like a little child with a humble and overcoming living. Thus, these two portions of the Bible prove that entering the kingdom of God is different from entering the kingdom of the heavens.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being to Obtain Eternal Life in the Coming Age

1. "There is no one who has left...for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time,...and in the coming age, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30; see also Matt. 19:29; Luke 18:29-30).

Here the Lord tells us that what a person leaves for His sake, for His gospel's sake, for His name's sake, and for His kingdom's sake, he will receive a hundred times as much at this time, and in the coming age, eternal life. It is easy to understand what a hundred times as much at this time means, but it is harder to understand what eternal life in the coming age means.

According to the Bible, we can obtain eternal life in three different time periods: in this age, in the coming age, and in eternity. To obtain eternal life in this age is to obtain the eternal life of God today, which we also will enjoy in the new heaven and new earth in eternity. To obtain eternal

life in the coming age, however, means to enter into the realm of eternal life in the millennial kingdom and to reign together with the Lord. Thus, to obtain eternal life in the coming age is equal to entering the kingdom of the heavens. This is different from obtaining eternal life in this age. Obtaining eternal life in this age means that *eternal life enters into us* to be our life; obtaining eternal life in the coming age means that *we enter into eternal life as a realm* and enjoy the blessings therein. To obtain eternal life in this age, we only need to believe. To obtain eternal life in the coming age, we must give up things in this age for the sake of the Lord, His gospel, His name, and His kingdom.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being the Salvation of the Soul

1. **“Whoever will lose his soul-life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it”** (Mark 8:35, see also vv. 36-38; Matt. 16:25-27; 10:37-39; Luke 21:19; John 12:25).

The word translated “soul-life” or “soul” in these verses is *psuche* in the original Greek. Saving the soul, finding the soul, possessing the soul, and keeping the soul all refer to the salvation of the soul. According to Mark 8:35-38 and Matthew 16:25-27, whether our soul has been saved will be determined at the Lord’s return. If our soul has been saved, we will enjoy the glory of the kingdom of the heavens together with Him. Thus, the salvation of the soul is related to our entrance into the kingdom of the heavens to reign together with the Lord and to obtain eternal life in the coming age. This is different from the salvation of our spirit. The salvation of our spirit occurs when our spirit is enlivened through our believing in the Lord. The salvation of the soul is related to our soul’s future entrance into the glory of the Lord’s kingdom to receive special privilege and enjoyment because we were willing to deny ourselves and lose our soul-life today.

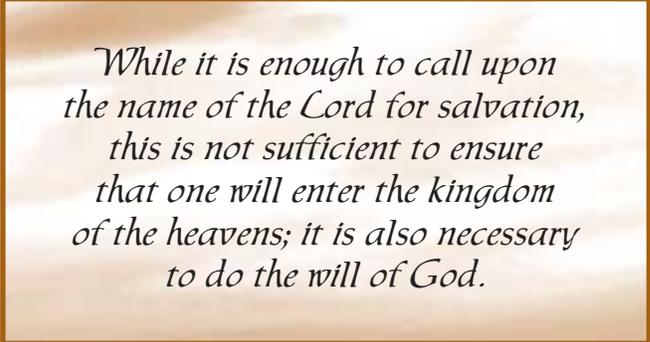
The soul is the part of man that is most sensitive to enjoyment and desires. Human enjoyment and entertainment are especially related to the soul. When we suffer persecution, give up the entertainment of the world, lose the love of our relatives, and give up many desires and amusements for the Lord’s sake, our soul suffers greatly. Losing our soul-life means to lose the things that our soul loves and enjoys. If we are willing to lose our soul-life for the Lord in this age, that is, if we hate our soul and cause it to suffer pain and loss, our soul will be saved in the coming age of the millennial kingdom. Losing our soul in this age preserves our soul in the coming age so that our soul will be able to enter into the realm of eternal life to know its glory and enter into its enjoyment and joy. If we are not willing to allow our soul to suffer pain and loss in this age for the Lord’s sake, our soul will be saved in this age for its enjoyment of today’s entertainment and desires. However, in the coming millennial kingdom, we will lose our souls, that

is, the enjoyment of our soul, because of extreme suffering at that time. We will suffer because we will not be able to enter the kingdom of eternal life to reign with the Lord in glory and enjoy His joy; instead, we will be shamed in the outer darkness and weep and gnash our teeth.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being to Obtain the Reward

1. **“I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward”** (Phil. 3:13-14; see also 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Paul says that he did one thing: he pursued toward the goal for the prize to which God called him. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, he says that all believers are like runners on a race-course who must run in a specific way to win the prize. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 he says that the Lord will reward him



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with a crown of righteousness because he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. For the Lord to reward us with a crown means that He will give us the kingdom with the enjoyment of its glory as a prize. Therefore, to enter the kingdom of the heavens is to obtain the reward. This is something we should pursue, after we are saved.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being to Reign with the Lord

1. **“If we endure, we will also reign with Him”** (2 Tim. 2:12; see also Rev. 20:4, 6).

Second Timothy 2:12 and Revelation 20:4 and 6 speak of reigning with Christ through endurance and overcoming. To reign is to exercise authority in the kingdom. Moreover, Revelation 20 shows that this reigning will be in the millennial kingdom, that is, in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, so it can be considered as entering the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, entering the kingdom of the heavens will be to reign with the Lord.

According to the Bible, the overcoming believers will enter the kingdom of the heavens for the purpose of reigning with the Lord and ruling on the future earth with Him for a thousand years.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being to Enjoy the Church's Birthright

1. "The church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23).

We Christians, born of God, are the firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18) that He has reaped in His creation. In that sense, we are the firstborn sons of God. Hence, the church, composed of us, is called the church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23). The birthright of the firstborn includes at least three blessings. The first is the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:10; 1:6). To be a priest is to serve God, to live before Him, to be filled and saturated with Him, and thus to be completely one with Him. This is a great blessing in the universe. The second birthright is the kingship. Second Timothy 2:12 and Revelation 20:4 and 6 speak of the believers as being kings. To be a king is to rule for God, to rule the earth, and to bring God's authority to men. To be a priest is to represent man before God, and to be a king is to represent God in ruling men. The third birthright is to inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5; Heb. 2:5). In Matthew 5:5 the Lord promised that the meek overcomers would inherit the earth. This refers to ruling the earth in the coming age.

These three blessings are obtained by the church as the firstborn. In this age the believers are priests serving God by bringing man's need before Him, and they rule and reign over their environment, bringing God's authority to men. However, the believers cannot fully enjoy these privileges and inherit the earth until the coming millennial kingdom.

Romans 8:17-23 shows that believers obtain the sonship in the future with the redemption of our body when we enter into glory. This will occur during the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. The blessings that the overcoming believers will enjoy in the kingdom of the heavens are related to the three blessings of the birthright of the church of the firstborn: being priests and kings to God and inheriting the earth. Thus, to enter the kingdom of the heavens is to enjoy the birthright of the church.

2. "Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one meal gave up his own birthright" (Heb. 12:16; see also 1 Chron. 5:1-2; Gen. 49:3-4).

Hebrews 12 tells us that the church is God's firstborn and uses the example of Esau as a warning for us to not give up our birthright. If we love the world as Esau did,

we will lose the birthright and not be able to enter into the kingdom to enjoy the blessings therein. Although Reuben was the firstborn, he also lost the birthright because he indulged his lusts. Therefore, the three items in his birthright: the priesthood, the kingship, and the double portion of land were divided among the descendants of Levi, Judah, and Joseph. This is a warning to us. If we indulge our lusts like Reuben, we will lose the church's birthright and not be able to enter into the kingdom.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being to Enter into Rest in the Coming Age

1. "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God...Let us therefore be diligent to enter into that rest"; "Let us fear therefore, lest, a promise of being left of entering into His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it" (Heb. 4:9, 11, 1).

There is a rest that we must be diligent to enter into. This rest is the blessing of the coming kingdom. The Holy Spirit in Hebrews 3 and 4 compares the Israelites' entering into Canaan with the believers' entering into the coming kingdom. Although the Israelites received the redemption of the passover and escaped from slavery under Pharaoh, they still needed to enter into Canaan to enjoy its blessings. This is a type showing that even though believers have received redemption by the Lord's blood and escaped from slavery under Satan, they still need to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to enjoy its blessings. This requires believers to strive to overcome so that they may enter at the Lord's return. Since believers will fully enjoy glory, blessing, and joy in the coming kingdom, the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 4 calls this coming kingdom—the millennial kingdom—a rest. Those who enter the coming kingdom will enter into rest since they will be freed from the feeling of suffering and will feel joyful and wholly satisfied. Thus, the believers' entering into the coming kingdom will be their entering into the rest of the coming age.

Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens Being to Enjoy the Lord's Complete Salvation

1. "A royal priesthood"; "Purchased for God by Your blood...and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth" (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:9-10).

These two portions show God's complete salvation, which causes us not only to be redeemed by the Lord's blood but also to become priests and kings to God. If we only have salvation but are not priests and kings to God, we have not experienced God's complete salvation. Although we can be priests to God and serve Him today and also reign with

Him with heavenly authority over our environment today, we must wait to enter the kingdom of the heavens in order to be fully manifested as priests and kings to God. Despite the fact that we have received God's complete salvation, we have not yet fully enjoyed His complete salvation. Today we are enjoying a part of God's salvation, not all of it; we have not enjoyed the highest part of His salvation. Not until we enter the kingdom can we ascend to the highest peak of God's salvation and enjoy its highest part. Thus, entering the coming kingdom of the heavens is for our enjoyment of God's complete salvation.

2. "The Lord...will save me into His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18).

The apostle Paul spoke this word immediately before his death. It expresses his faith and reveals his hope. Paul was redeemed by the Lord and enjoyed many spiritual blessings, but at the end of his life he still had a deep aspiration that the Lord would save him into His heavenly kingdom. This is because the completion of God's salvation, the highest part of God's salvation, involved his entrance into the kingdom of the heavens to fully enjoy all the aspects of God's salvation, which he had a foretaste of on earth. Thus, to enter into the kingdom of the heavens is to enjoy the Lord's complete salvation.

In conclusion, entering into the kingdom of the heavens involves more than simply receiving life for our eternal salvation, as most Christians think. Entering the kingdom of the heavens is different from being saved and receiving eternal life. Entering the kingdom of the heavens is more than being saved and more than receiving eternal life. Salvation and eternal life are obtained when one believes in the Lord. Entering the kingdom of the heavens will be obtained in the future when the Lord returns. Salvation involves the forgiveness of sins and justification by God

today; entering into the kingdom of the heavens is to escape from all sufferings in the future and to enjoy God's glory. Salvation enlivens our spirit today; entering into the kingdom of the heavens gains our soul in the future. Receiving salvation is by grace through faith; entering the kingdom of the heavens is a reward for work. Obtaining eternal life is to obtain the life of God and to be children in the household of God today; entering the kingdom of the heavens is to enter the kingdom of eternal life and to be kings in the kingdom of God in the future. Obtaining eternal life is to have the eternal life enter our spirit; entering the kingdom of the heavens is our entrance into the realm of the eternal life. In the future everyone who enters into the kingdom of the heavens will be saved and have eternal life; however, not all who are saved and have obtained eternal life will enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, we must not think that all our problems are solved simply because we are saved. After our salvation we must face the matters related to entering the kingdom of the heavens. Whether or not we will obtain the reward, enjoy eternal life in the coming age, enjoy the birthright of the church, be priests and kings to God, inherit the earth, enter into the rest in which our souls are satisfied with enjoyment, and enjoy the Lord's complete salvation depends on how we respond to matters related to entering the kingdom of the heavens. If we enter the kingdom of the heavens, we will enjoy all these things; if we do not enter the kingdom of the heavens, we will not enjoy them. If we enter the kingdom of the heavens at the time of the Lord's return, we will obtain the reward, enjoy eternal life in the coming age, enjoy the birthright of the church, be priests and kings to God, inherit the earth, enter into the rest in which our souls are satisfied with enjoyment, and enter into the Lord's complete salvation. If we enter the coming kingdom of the heavens, we will enjoy all these things and fully enjoy God's complete salvation. **LFC**

A CHART SHOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

