

Sermon August 29, 2021 Spirituality of the Cross XII Two Kingdoms, Part 2

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is part two of the part of this sermon series looking at the two kingdoms, or reigns God has established on earth. Jesus refers to these two kingdoms in his famous line to the Pharisees;

“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” Matthew 22:21

Jesus had no objections to the people honoring the governmental authorities. We may find that surprising, especially as we consider all the greed, waste, nonsense, and corruption typical in any governmental system. But here Jesus instructs to obey the government. Earthly kingdoms, as we might call them, are indeed God’s plan for the world. Even though most people are not in the church, in his justice, God stills wants to take care of all people. This is difficult to do without earthly governments, because without them bad people are free to do bad things: rape, hurt, kill, slander, be dishonest, break oaths, cheat, steal, etc. The function of the government is to curb evil in society. It bears the sword (punishment) on God’s behalf. The rule of government, therefore, is based in the law. The law flows from morality. Morality has its source in the conscience.

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. Romans 2:14-15

Our relationships with each other in society is based on God’s law. This law is inscribed on our conscience. Note here that we are not talking about anything written in the Bible. Therefore, we Christians can go and speak and work for the good of people in society not waving our Bibles over our heads. Rather, we reason from the common morality shared by all sane people. No one can accuse us of trying force our religion or beliefs on anyone when we argue from basic morality.

The main purpose, then, of earthly kingdoms is law and order. All people have evil in their hearts. Many will do evils works. The fear of punishment will help to reduce these crimes. Also, with our clear insights into people's propensity for evil, we will avoid being taken in by any grand scheme to bring about some sort of utopian society on earth. History lessons teach the folly of such doomed efforts. It seems the harder people try to bring heaven to earth, the more they turn it into a hell.

Since society is based on the law, and the main business of earthly kingdoms is morality, then what of the church? The church's main business is the Gospel. The church calls earthly people from temporal kingdoms into God's eternal kingdom to live under his rule and reign.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Hebrews 13:14

In society we are bound by many laws. In the church we are free from the law. We are guilty of many trespasses against God and neighbor, but Jesus has balanced the scale of justice on our behalf with his crucifixion. God's law no longer holds any judgements against us. However, we still have that old evil nature lurking in our hearts standing ready to louse everything up. So God purposefully calls us to turn to his goodness and in light of his love for us offer ourselves in loving service of our neighbor by praying for them, befriending them, and doing what we are able to do to fill their needs.

God's gospel is embodied in the church's proclamation of the good news and the sacraments. God's law is embodied in us as we faithfully live out the responsibilities of our individual vocations in our families, church, and the world. Martin Luther writes about this dual life of God's people;

"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." (Treatise on Christian Liberty)

What an interesting and fresh vision God gives us for our lives! Luther works out what this looks like as he continues;

“As long, however, as he [worker, family member, citizen, etc.] is faithful in these two particulars, namely, in the word of faith towards God, by which the heart becomes pure, and in the word of the knowledge of what he is to do towards his neighbor in his calling, everything is pure to him, even if with his fists and his whole body he is busy with dirt.” (Commentary on Sermon on the Mount)

God has arranged the world, his church, and our lives in such a way that everything can be seen as sacred. We are brought into his presence in his house where he greets us and speaks to us his good word and cleanses us from every spot and stain. This is holy. He sends us into the world to be his masks, serving our neighbor in his name and with his love in our ordinary lives and work. This, too, is sacred. All of life is bound up as the work of God and everything takes on divine character and purpose.

All thanks and praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ, who, being in his very nature God, took upon himself human flesh. In his vocation as Savior, offered himself as our servant. He suffered God’s judgement against our sin in his death on the cross. In his resurrection, ascension, and reign, we live in the hope of the promise of reigning with him as the people of God in his eternal kingdom yet to come.

God bless you as you continue pure in heart because of the forgiveness of God in his gospel, and as you love your neighbor as yourself, faithfully fulfilling the tasks to which he has called you. Amen.

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