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The Heavens Do Rule

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First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Feb-Mar 1931 Vol. 9-2.

"The heavens do rule." (Dan. 4:26).

The Gospels were written many years after the things recorded in them had taken place; there had been a considerable lapse of time. It is important to note *why* they were written. The Apostles had been witnessing a long time to the things here recorded, and had brought those things also among men, and had sought to establish the spiritual truth behind those things. Thus having borne witness to those things and brought them amongst men, and having sought to establish the spiritual truth in the hearts of men, they now write by way of confirming that to which they have borne testimony; that is the meaning of having these records.

The great thing is this, GOD had broken into this world in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus. He had intervened in the course of the history of this world with one main intention—to assert the fact of His rights, to bring in His prerogatives in this world; these had been disputed, challenged and refused.

Israel had been raised up to be an embodiment of these rights, and Israel as a whole had failed; failed as an instrument through whom God's rights were testified to and maintained on the earth; Israel did not represent in any concrete public way the Divine rights and prerogatives; although there were still those faithful ones here and there, secret for the most part.

That intervention of God to bring in His rights was fourfold:—1, His rights in the matter of Sovereignty, as seen in the Gospel of Matthew; 2, His rights in the matter of Service, as seen in the Gospel of Mark; 3, His rights in the matter of Grace, as seen in the Gospel of Luke; 4, His rights in the matter of Love, as seen in the Gospel of John. Those four Gospels represent one breaking-in of God

in Christ Jesus. They represent ONE PERSON with one object: to manifest the rights of God and secure those rights for Him; and the Gospels were written to confirm by permanent record in permanent form that to which the Apostles had been bearing witness: 1, Sovereignty—God's rights in sovereignty and the nature of that sovereignty made known; 2, Service—God's rights in service, and what is the nature of the servant and the service; 3-4, Grace and Love—God's rights and prerogatives in these.

These were the things by which they called men to recognise the claim's and rights of God and to respond to them; and wherever they went proclaiming this Gospel of His Son, there were added to them those who came to accept the rights of God and so become living witnesses to those rights and prerogatives.

The Gospels bring in four aspects of the rule of the Heavens; Matthew introduces the King and the Kingdom of the Sovereignty; "The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David" (Matt. 1:1 marg. A.R.V.) And it is most striking and worthy of note how Matthew finishes his Gospel "And Jesus came to them... saying all authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth, go ye therefore and make disciples of (out of) all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20). Matthew's Gospel finishes with "*All nations*".

Mark's Gospel ends with the whole creation: "He was manifested as they sat at meat... and He said unto them, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the *whole creation*" (Mark 16:14,15). Hence servant and service.

Luke had *the race of men* in view, the context clearly shows this. The key word of his gospel is "Son of Man." He is writing to the race of men. "All things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms concerning Me... Ye are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:44-48). Hence the grace of God to all men.

And in John's Gospel, it is not all nations, neither is it the whole creation, nor the race of men, but it is the testimony to *the world*. "God so loved the world that He gave His Son" (John 3:10). "For God sent the Son... that the world might be saved through Him." (17). "This is indeed the Saviour of the world" (4:42). Hence the message of love.

Each of those four Gospels have their own great importance, a vital rich and significant importance to the ONE GOSPEL in its fourfold aspect.

For real adequate effectiveness in the preaching of the Gospel the first supreme need is the absolute assurance of the sovereignty of the Lord in government; that is basic, If you have not got that you have not got your foundation; *you must* know that the sovereignty is in the hands of the Lord Jesus *now*. It is the Gospel of His Son—"For God is my witness whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son" (Rom. 1:9). And to serve in the Gospel of His Son you have got to have full assurance of the sovereignty of that Son in the matter of government. He HIMSELF has declared "All authority... has been given unto ME"—*it is now* in the hands of the Lord Jesus.

In Matthew's Gospel the Church is introduced in the New Testament, and introduced in relation to the sovereignty of the heavens;—Jesus asked—"Who do men say that I the Son of Man am? (A.R.V. marg.). Who say ye that I am? ...Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God! ...Blessed art thou Simon... for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but My Father who is in heaven.... and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it... whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16).

Here are several important and significant features in this first introduction of the Church in the New Testament. The Lord is the Builder of His Church; "I will build my Church" (Zech. 6). Hell is against this building of the Church but the Sovereign Lord says: "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This implies that there is conflict. The binding and loosing in His name on earth and in heaven speaks of sovereign authority, and makes the Church to be the administrative instrument on earth of that sovereignty as it [the Church] is in touch with the throne in heaven: and this in relation to government.

The vital and all embracing fact is that the Church is built on the *revelation of who the Lord Jesus is*: He asks "Who say ye that I am?" "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God"; "On this rock I will build." The Church is the administrative instrument of that sovereignty.

It is striking that the Church is introduced as the Lord Jesus turns from Caesarea with set purpose towards the Cross, by which He will secure the Church and the consummation of the purpose of God. Link Matt. 16 with Rev. 1, and there we see the Lord Jesus with the sovereignty in His hands, and there it is connected with the Church; why? Because the Church is intended to be the Administrative Instrument of that sovereignty. "I saw in the midst of the candlesticks ONE like unto the Son of Man... when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead... He laid His right hand upon me, saying fear not... I am alive for evermore and I have the keys of Death and Hades, write therefore... and send to the seven churches." (Rev. 1:13,17,18,10,11).

All the political divisions of this earth come under the hand of Christ, for nations represent the political divisions of this world, and His authoritative commission is "therefore go ye to all the nations." He does not say they will not kill the messenger, or that evil does not exist; but the issue is secured and revealed as already possessed. The book of the Revelation sees it already in being, for Revelations is the issue of Matt. 16, "I will build My Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on the earth" (Matt. 28:18) "Therefore go to the nations, I have all authority, and I send you unto them; Hell shall not prevail against you."

Pass to the Epistle to the Ephesians, and we see that God the Father hath made the Lord Jesus to "sit at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named... and He *hath* put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body." (Eph. 1:20). "God being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us... made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4,6). He is seen far above all authority and every name that is named: now we have to see the link between Him and ourselves in this; it is necessary and vital. We have always got to see the instrument of government—the Church in relation to its spiritual elevation, as seen in the Ephesian letter, "far above all". It is very significant that the rule of the Heavens is so emphasised in Matthew and brought out in various ways; and Matthew is the Gospel that introduces the Church in the New Testament.

Symbols of Spiritual Ascendancy

1. Mountains

Mountains have an important place in Matthew's Gospel, and this is significant in the Gospel which introduces the Church: for the Church has got to be seen in spiritual altitude, out of the world in spirit, and out of the world as to voluntary connection with it: for a true seeing of the Church it must be seen from the standpoint of its altitude, which is—"with Christ far above all," that is how God

sees it, and only so is it the instrument of the administration of that sovereignty invested in the Sovereign Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus.

Mountains are mentioned fourteen times in Matthew, and mountains in the Scriptures represent spiritual ascendancy. The Lord is governing things from the mountains in Matthew; we read of Him spending nights of prayer in the mountains. He appoints a place in a mountain to meet them when risen from the dead, and He, risen, has put His Church in the mountains: "The disciples went... unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them... and Jesus came to them... saying, all authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth... go ye therefore... lo, I am with you all the day even unto the consummation of the age." (Matt. 28:16-20, A.R.V.)

"And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow into it," (Isa. 2:2). The Church in its administrative position is always related to the heavens, and the Lord meets the Church and commissions it in the mountains before He passes up in glory. Judgment is also from the mountains: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together... and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37-38).

The end of Matthew's Gospel sees Jerusalem set aside, ignored—"The eleven disciples went into Galilee unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them" (Matt. 28:16). Here the Lord is speaking to them of sovereignty: but sovereignty as related to the nations. Galilee is a question of sovereignty, not grace: it is grace that takes Jerusalem in—"He led them out until over against Bethany, and lifted up His hands and blessed them, and was carried up into Heaven, and they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (Luke 24:50-53). Only grace takes Jerusalem in, sovereignty sets authority aside as to having its base in Jerusalem, and brings all sovereignty into the Person of the Lord Jesus; and He in a mountain in Galilee away from Jerusalem. It is the authority of the Person of Christ, the authority is not in Jerusalem but in HIM and HE is universal, not merely local.

Luke begins at Jerusalem, and grace continued in Jerusalem until they slew Stephen, when they committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the Lord moved out from Jerusalem to the Gentiles, i.e. the nations: but first He gained a company out of Jerusalem at Pentecost in relation to all nations. Wonderful grace to those who crucified Him. He could have cast them off, but no! He got His representative nucleus out from Jerusalem; here is sovereign grace at work!

Again He did the same thing in a member of Christ, thereby showing who touches a member of the Body of Christ, directly touches Christ HIMSELF: "Saul, Saul, why persecuted thou Me?" Saul was persecuting Him in the person of Stephen and sinning against the Holy Ghost; and the Lord moved out from heaven. Grace strove with Saul until he became Paul.

The Lord does not recognise authority as having its seat in Jerusalem, but in dealing with authority to all nations He moves into Galilee. Matthew brings in authority as invested in the Person of our Lord Jesus, then brings in the Church as the administrative instrument of that authority, and lifts it out as of the earth, bringing it into the heavenlies and the universal. A Remnant, an Elect Company, an Overcomer Vessel, a Called out People, or whatever you like to name them, has to be brought into the position of spiritual altitude and ascendancy, and so have administrative government in the nations; but it is the *sovereignty in Grace*; in this age it is a *Throne of Grace*. And the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus is being proclaimed to the nations and calling out from them a people for His name.

2. Heavens

Seventy-five times the "Heavens" are mentioned in Matthew's Gospel, which is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven—the rule or the sovereignty of the heavens.

The heavens are seen ruling at the birth of the Lord of Glory, the star seen in the East was the one star which ruled the heavens at that time, and was governing things on the earth; bringing Wisdom from the East to worship at the feet of the Lord Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. The heavens are sovereignly ruling in relation to the coming of the Son, for the "Greater than Solomon" is here; and a new day has dawned for the world with the coming of Jesus Christ. The "East" signifies the dawning of a new day. Herod tried to break in, but the heavens ruled. That one star was ruling in the heavens and governing things on earth, at that time it was THE STAR in the heavens.

3. Angels

Take another heavenly aspect of this Gospel: seventeen times "angels" come into this book. Angels are related to the administrative government of God in relation to "heirs of salvation." (Heb. 1:13-14). "An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it" (Matt. 28:1). One angel in resurrection sovereignty. One angel was quite sufficient for world governments and all hell's force and counsels; Oh! the comfort and assurance this brings; yes, here is seen the rule of the heavens nullifying both hell's might and earth's greatest government, for Rome at that time was the chief world government, so representative of all the governments of the world. It is blessed to know that all sovereignty and authority are in the hands of the Lord Jesus, and angels are an administrative government of God in relation to the "Heirs of Salvation." And in Matthew we have *one* angel in relation to the government of the Lord Jesus in the nations; what strength and power this implies.

In Mark—"And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting... arrayed in a white robe"; here we have purity, service in relation to the whole creation on the basis of holiness: an angel in administrative government in the matter of moral character; holiness as to a whole creation.

Luke—"Behold two men stood by them in dazzling apparel... why seek ye the Living among the dead?" Two angels, two *men*. Two in the scriptures is the number of witness: testimony in adequate measure to the whole race of men. A full witness and testimony to be borne to the race of mankind concerning the sovereignty and government of the Lord Jesus.

John—"Two angels *sitting* one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." John's gospel has peculiarly the emphasis on Love. "God so loved the world." In love He gave His Son to be the sin-bearer and to carry away the sin of the world. What is there above the LOVE of GOD? These angels are in an attitude of repose in that love of God, for the love of God has triumphed. When you have got a true appreciation of that love of God, then you can sit and are able to rest. It is a testimony of His love to the world, a reposing in the love of God - and that love as manifested in the sending of His Son and in the raising of Him from the dead. A heavenly intervention in relation to the sovereignty of His love in the nations. The angels are busy in administrative government in relation to the love of God.

All these heavenly elements are related to the Lord Jesus and His church in His sovereignty among the nations: sovereignty into which we have been brought by a living relationship and experience. God's order is never isolated units. He called and sent His disciples forth two by two; two being the testimony to the Church, as a representative number. We have got to recognise "Body" principles

and spiritually understand and faithfully observe God's own order; for if you act in independence you take yourself out from under the covering of the Sovereign Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus—"God gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church which is His body" (Eph. 1:22). Throne prayer is a matter of the Church, and it is absolutely necessary as you go out into the nations with the Testimony of the Gospel of the Sovereignty to have the covering of that Throne-prayer in the Body of Christ, if there is to be realised the end of God, the impact of the Sovereignty upon the kingdom of Satan; it has got to be a going forth not as isolated, saved individuals, but in a right spiritual relationship to the Head and members— ONE BODY.

In Ezra 7, we have the bringing in of the "House of the Lord" and immediately the link with the heavens: "Whatsoever is commanded by *the God of Heaven* let it be done exactly for the House of the God of Heaven" (23). It is a marvellous decree of Artaxerxes—"And whosoever will not do the law of thy God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death or to banishment or to confiscation of his goods or to imprisonment." (26). This is to come upon the man who dares to oppose the building of the House of the Lord. Artaxerxes seems to go to the utmost to hasten and ensure the building of this house for God. Three times it is said, "The God of the Heavens"; sovereignty that cannot be overruled is in operation and related to the building of the House of the Lord, the rule of the heavens is seen here.

In Luke's Gospel you have the same fact of the rule of the Heavens being linked with the House of the Lord—His Church: thus emphasising the Church as the administrative instrument of that sovereignty of the heavens. "The *seventy* returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name." "And He said unto them... behold I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall in any wise hurt you..." "In the same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, *Lord of Heaven* and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." (Luke 10:17). (Seventy is the number of representation).

And so it is seen to be the "gates of heaven" over against the "gates of hades" and the "counsels of heaven" over against the "counsels of hades": and the House of the Sovereignty over which all the counsels of hell cannot prevail: for the counsels of the Godhead were back in Eternity past unto the securing of that company desiring and determining His will.

The Kingdom of Heaven, or the rule or reign of Heaven, is a sphere in which the sovereignty of God operates but in which everything not suitable is going to be eliminated, and only that which is according to God will remain: see the parables of the "Dragnet" and the "Tares" (Matt. 13). The true will be separated from the false and the Lord secures His "called out ones" from the nations of the world; His redeemed ones, His church, the City of God as seen in the book of Revelation.

"After these things I saw and behold a great multitude, which no man can number, *out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... saying, salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9,10).

"And he carried me away in the Spirit, to a mountain great and high and showed me the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, her light was like unto a stone most precious... clear as crystal. The bride the wife of the Lamb." (Rev. 21:9-11).