

ASPECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND CHURCH LIFE SEEN IN THE NEW JERUSALEM

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

The City and the Bride

Scripture Reading: Rev. 21:2; 1:4, 6; 19:7-8; 22:16a

I. “I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem”—Rev. 21:2a:

- A. The New Jerusalem is a city representing the kingdom of God—v. 10:
 - 1. According to the scriptural meaning, a city is a center for the exercise of authority; therefore, the city symbolizes the kingdom—Psa. 46:4; 48:1-2.
 - 2. As the house, the church is God’s home, the place of His dwelling; as the city, the church is God’s kingdom, the place of His ruling—Eph. 2:19, 21-22.
 - 3. The house is mainly with Christ as life, and the city is mainly with Christ as the Head—Col. 3:4; 1:18; 2:19.
 - 4. When we realize that Christ is not only our life but also our Head, the church will be not only the house but also the city—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15.
- B. The Bible first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church; the presence of the kingdom produces the church—Matt. 4:23; 16:18-19:
 - 1. The life of God is the kingdom of God; the divine life is the kingdom, and this life produces the church—John 3:3, 5; Matt. 7:14, 21; 19:17, 29; 25:46.
 - 2. The gospel of the kingdom brings forth the church because the kingdom is the life itself, and the church is the issue of life—4:23; Acts 8:12.
- C. The kingdom is the reality of the church; therefore, apart from the kingdom life, we cannot live the church life—Matt. 5:3; 16:18-19; Rev. 1:4-6, 9:
 - 1. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7) is the content of the church life; without the reality of the kingdom, the church life is empty.
 - 2. The kingdom life issues in the church life; as we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life—Rom. 14:17.
 - 3. Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up—Matt. 16:18-19:
 - a. The keys of the kingdom are given to make the building of the church possible—v. 19; 18:18; cf. John 20:23.
 - b. When the kingdom of the heavens is able to assert its authority over a company of believers, those believers can be built up into the church—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16.
- D. The genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age; today the believers live the kingdom life in the church—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; 13:44-46; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:19; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4, 6:
 - 1. The term *fellow citizens* in Ephesians 2:19 indicates the kingdom of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His authority.
 - 2. The word *kingdom* in Revelation 1:6 reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is; the church represents the kingdom.

3. Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live, walk, and have our being in the spirit, not in our natural man—Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25.
4. We need to live a kingdom life in the church, growing and developing in the divine life until we reach maturity—2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Pet. 1:5-11.
5. The church today must be a miniature of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, a center where God may exercise His authority—Rev. 1:11; 21:2, 10; 22:16a.

II. **“I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem...prepared as a bride”—21:2:**

- A. The Lord's recovery is for the preparation of the bride of Christ—19:7-9.
- B. The bride must be mature in the divine life—vv. 7-9; Eph. 4:13-15:
 1. The readiness of the corporate bride depends on the maturity in life of the overcomers—Rev. 19:7; Heb. 6:1; Phil. 3:12-15; Eph. 4:13.
 2. We need to continue to grow until we are matured in the divine life to become a full-grown man, arriving at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—v. 13.
 3. A mature believer knows and cares for the Body of Christ, being Body-conscious and Body-centered—1 Cor. 12:16, 18-19, 21, 24.
- C. The bride is a corporate person; for this, building is necessary—Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:15-16; 5:23, 27:
 1. The central and divine thought of the Scriptures is that God is seeking a building as the mingling of Himself with humanity—Gen. 2:22-23; Rev. 21:2, 9-11.
 2. The goal of the Lord's recovery is to recover Christ as life and everything to us so that we may be built up—Eph. 3:8; 4:16.
 3. To be built up with fellow believers is the Lord's supreme and highest requirement of His faithful seekers—vv. 15-16.
 4. Being built up with the fellow partakers of the divine life is the highest virtue of one who pursues Christ in God's eternal economy—1 Tim. 1:4.
- D. Revelation 19:7-8 unveils the righteousness of the bride—Matt. 5:20; 22:11-13:
 1. As our objective righteousness, Christ is the One in whom we are justified by God—Rom. 3:24, 28; 5:1, 9; 4:25; 5:16, 18.
 2. As our subjective righteousness, Christ is the One dwelling in us to live for us a life that can be justified by God and that is always acceptable to God—Matt. 5:6, 20.
 3. The righteousness in Philippians 3:9 signifies a daily living that is right with God and man; this righteousness is of God and actually is God Himself.
 4. The living that is right with both God and man must be God as our expression in our daily living—2 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10.
 5. Christ lived out of the saints as their subjective righteousness becomes their wedding garment—Rev. 19:8; Phil. 3:9; Matt. 5:20; 22:11-13.
- E. As the bride, the church needs beauty; the beauty in Ephesians 5:27 is for the presentation of the bride—cf. S. S. 4:7; 6:4a, 10a; 7:6:
 1. Ephesians 5:27 reveals the beauty of the bride, saying that Christ will “present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.”

2. The beauty of the bride comes from the Christ who is wrought into the church and who is then expressed through the church; our only beauty is the shining out of Christ from within us—3:17a; S. S. 4:7.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Ephesians 2:19 says, “You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God.” The term “fellow citizens” indicates the kingdom of God. All the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are citizens of God’s kingdom, which is a sphere wherein God exercises His authority. As long as anyone is a believer, he is a citizen of the kingdom of God. This citizenship involves rights and responsibilities, two things that always go together. We enjoy the rights of the kingdom, and we bear the responsibilities of the kingdom.

In 2:19 Paul covers two aspects of the church: the kingdom, indicated by the term “fellow citizens,” and the family of God, indicated by the phrase “the household of God.” God’s house is a matter of life and enjoyment; all believers were born of God into His household to enjoy His riches. God’s kingdom is a matter of rights and responsibilities; all believers who were born into the house of God have the civil rights of and their responsibility in the kingdom of God. Therefore, in 2:19 two profound matters are covered: the kingdom of God with its rights and responsibilities and the house of God with its enjoyment of the Father’s life and riches.

Ephesians 2:19 affords us the basis for saying that the church today is God’s kingdom. The citizens mentioned here are related to a kingdom, a nation, not to a family. A family is composed of members, not of citizens. On the one hand, we are members of God’s household; on the other hand, we are citizens of God’s nation, of God’s kingdom.

Although the church today is God’s kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live and walk in spirit. Whenever we behave according to the old man or live in the flesh or the self, we, in a practical way, are out of God’s kingdom. This means that when we are in the flesh, we are in the old realm of the fallen human nature, which has been fully usurped by Satan to form his kingdom. Therefore, a genuine Christian, if he lives in the flesh instead of in the spirit, may live in a practical way not in the kingdom of God but in the kingdom of Satan. Only when we live, walk, behave, and have our being altogether in our spirit, not in our natural man, are we in the kingdom of God and, in reality, are the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God, like the house of God, is a corporate person. The church as the house of God is a corporate person because this house is the family of God, the household of God. The kingdom is likewise a corporate person because it is also a corporate entity. Whether we are living in the church as the house of God or as the kingdom of God depends on whether we are living as members or as citizens. To live as members of the house of God is a matter of enjoyment, but to live in the kingdom of God is a matter of bearing responsibility and of being regulated. We are members of our Father’s household, and we are citizens of our God’s kingdom.

Being the Reality of the Church

The kingdom of God is the reality of the church. According to the New Testament, the church is intimately related to the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus declared, "On this rock I will build My church," and in verse 19 He went on to speak of the kingdom of the heavens. The words "the kingdom of the heavens" in verse 19 are interchangeably used for the word "church" in verse 18. This is a strong proof that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age.

Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up. For the building up of the church, we need the kingdom as the reality of the church. Although the kingdom is the reality of the church, we cannot say that the church is the reality of the kingdom. We can say only that the kingdom is the reality of the church.

Being the Living of the Church

The kingdom of God is the living of the church. A verse that strongly proves this is Romans 14:17. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." According to some Bible teachers, the kingdom has not yet come. They claim that now is the dispensation of the church, and the next dispensation will be that of the kingdom. But in 14:17 Paul does not say that the kingdom of God *shall be*; he uses the present tense and says that the kingdom of God *is*. According to the context of Romans 14, which speaks of receiving the believers, the kingdom is today's church life. The reality of the church life is the kingdom. Romans 12 speaks of the Body life, and Romans 14, of the kingdom life. This indicates that, in Romans, the kingdom life is the reality of the Body life.

In a sense, it is correct to say that the present age is the church age and that the coming age will be the kingdom age. However, in another sense, the kingdom of God is here today, for the kingdom is the reality of the church and the living of the church. Hence, the church is the kingdom. Since the church is the kingdom today, it is not correct to say that the kingdom has been suspended altogether until the coming age. Romans 14:17 proves definitely that the kingdom is the living of the church today.

Furthermore, in Acts, which is concerned with the church, there is frequent mention of the kingdom (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In Acts the believers preached the kingdom of God as the gospel (8:12). The gospel is even called the gospel of the kingdom. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the kingdom is altogether separate from today's church life.

According to the revelation in the New Testament, the proper church life is the kingdom life. If we live under the rule of the living God within us, that is, under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, we shall have the kind of life recorded in chapters five, six, and seven of Matthew. We shall also have a life of the kingdom practiced in the church life. Hence, we should not separate the kingdom of God from the church.

In Romans 14:17 we see that the kingdom of God as the living of the church is

righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. When the authority of God's kingdom operates in us, righteousness, peace, and joy will characterize our daily life.

Righteousness, peace, and joy are actually the expression of Christ. When Christ is expressed, He is our righteousness toward ourselves, our peace toward others, and our joy with God.

As the believers live the kingdom life in the church, they will live righteously toward themselves. This means that we must be strict with ourselves and make no excuses for ourselves.

To live the kingdom life in the church also means that we live peacefully toward others. Our relationships with others must be characterized by peace. Toward others we must endeavor to pursue peace, continually seeking to be at peace with them. This peace is Christ Himself lived out from our being.

Living the kingdom life in the church also requires that we live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of joy. If we are not joyful, this indicates that we are not in the Holy Spirit. If we are truly living the kingdom life, we shall be joyful with God, praising Him. Whenever we live righteously toward ourselves and peacefully toward others, we shall live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. Such a living is the kingdom of God as the living of the church.

**Those Developing and Growing in the Life of God in the Church Life
Shall Be Richly and Bountifully Supplied with the Entrance
into the Kingdom of God**

In 2 Peter 1:3-11 we see that those believers who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life shall be richly and bountifully supplied with the entrance into the kingdom of God. After we have entered into the kingdom of God through regeneration, we need to go on to have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On the one hand, we have entered the kingdom; on the other hand, we still need a rich entrance. The initial entry into the kingdom is regeneration, but the rich entrance is through the full growth and development of the divine life revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-11.

Verse 11 says, "For so shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The bountiful supply we enjoy in the development of the divine life and nature (vv. 3-7) will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord, which will be a reward to His faithful believers, who pursue the growth in His life unto maturity and the development of the virtues of His nature, so that they participate, in the millennium, in His kingship in God's glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6).

In 2 Peter 1:5-7 we have the development of the divine life with the divine nature from stage to stage. Verse 5 says, "Adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge." The word "supply" in verse 5 actually means develop. Hence, to supply virtue in faith is to develop virtue in the exercise of faith, in the exercise of the like precious faith allotted to us by God (v. 1) as the common portion of the New Testament blessing for the initiation of the Christian life.

The virtue in verse 5 refers to that mentioned in verse 3, where Peter speaks of the One who has “called us to His own glory and virtue.” Furthermore, this virtue is related to the divine nature (v. 4), which denotes the riches of what God is. The virtue in verses 3 and 5 is, therefore, the issue of the experience of the divine nature in verse 4. When we partake of the divine nature, the different aspects of the riches of what God is, these riches become our virtues.

In verse 5 Peter also tells us to supply “in virtue knowledge.” Virtue, the vigorous action, needs the bountiful supply of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (vv. 2, 3, 8) regarding the all things related to the divine life and godliness and the partaking of the divine nature for our enjoyment in the development described in verses 5 through 7. This knowledge is actually the knowledge of all things related to life and godliness. We must have this knowledge developed in our virtue.

In verse 6 Peter continues, “And in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness.” Self-control is the exercise of control and restraint over the self in its passions, desires, and habits. Whereas self-control is related to the self, endurance is related to others and to our circumstances. As to ourselves, we must have self-control, and as to our circumstances, no matter what they may be, we need endurance. Then in our endurance we need to develop godliness, a living that is like God and expresses God. As we exercise control over the self and bear with others and with circumstances, godliness needs to be developed in our spiritual life so that we can be like God and express Him.

In verse 7 Peter concludes, “And in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love love.” The Greek word translated “brotherly love” is *philadelphia*, composed of *phileo*, to have affection for, and *adelphos*, a brother; hence, brotherly affection, a love of delight and pleasure. The Greek word for love in verse 7 is *agape*, the word used in the New Testament for the divine love, which God is in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). It is nobler than *phileo*, and it adorns all the qualities of the Christian life (1 Cor. 13; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14). It is stronger in ability and greater in capacity than human love (Matt. 5:44, 46), yet a believer who lives by the divine life and partakes of the divine nature can be saturated with it and express it in full. Such a love needs to be developed in brotherly love, to govern it and flow in it for the expression of God, who is this love.

Faith may be considered the seed of life, and love, the fruit in its full development. This development includes virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, and godliness. Eventually, we have the full development and maturity from the seed of faith, through the roots of virtue and knowledge, the trunk of self-control, and the branches of endurance and godliness, to the blossom and fruit of brotherly love and love. Second Peter 1:11 indicates that, as a result of the growth and development of the divine life unto maturity, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to us.

According to Peter’s word in 1:5-11, to grow to maturity is to develop what we have already received. We have been allotted the like precious faith, which is an all-inclusive seed. All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them into virtue. Then we need to develop in our virtue, knowledge; in

knowledge, self-control; in self-control, endurance; in endurance, godliness; in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. Through such a growth and development we eventually shall reach maturity and shall have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The fact that those who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life will have a rich entrance into the coming kingdom implies that certain believers will not have a share in the coming kingdom, because they have not been living in the proper church life and have not had the adequate growth in the divine life. For this reason, at the time of the manifestation of the kingdom, they will have no participation in the kingdom. But those who grow and develop in the divine life to the full extent will be supplied with a rich and bountiful entry into the coming kingdom.

We have seen three aspects of the status of the church: first, the church as an assembly separated from the world; second, the church as the house of God composed of those who have been born of God; and third, the church as the kingdom of God, which is the reality and living of the church today. We all need to grow in the divine life in the church life so that in the coming age we may have a rich entrance into the kingdom of God. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 2235-2243)

THE COUNTERPART OF CHRIST

A Great Mystery with Regard to Christ and the Church

In Colossians 2:2 Paul speaks of the mystery of God, which is Christ, and in Ephesians 3:4, of the mystery of Christ, which is the church. In Ephesians 5:32 Paul says, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church." The fact that Christ and the church are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), as typified by the husband and wife being one flesh, is the great mystery. It surely is a great mystery that the church as Christ's counterpart comes out of Christ, has the same life and nature as Christ, and is one with Christ.

The Church as the Bride, the Wife, of Christ as the Bridegroom, the Husband

The church is the bride, the wife, of Christ, who is the Bridegroom, the Husband. The word of John the Baptist in John 3:29 indicates that Christ is the Bridegroom. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." The bridegroom is a most pleasant person, who comes for the bride. The church should be a corporate bride prepared for Christ. To us He should be the attraction, the pleasure, and the satisfaction. As those who constitute the counterpart of Christ, we should enjoy Him as such a pleasant Bridegroom.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul speaks concerning Christ as the Husband. "I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one Husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." Here we see that Christ is the believers' Husband, the unique Husband for us to love. We should belong only to Him, and we should appreciate Him and love Him. As our Husband, Christ has attracted us, and we have been presented as a pure virgin to Him. Now we should care only for Him,

allowing nothing to replace Him in our hearts. Our love for Him should be pure, and our whole being should be focused on Him.

To Be Married at Christ's Coming Back

In Revelation 19:7 and 8 we see that Christ and His counterpart, His bride, will be married at His coming back. Verse 7 says, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." The marriage of the Lamb is the issue of the completion of God's New Testament economy. God's economy in the New Testament is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His redemption and divine life. By the continual working of the Holy Spirit through all the centuries, this goal will be attained at the end of this age. Then the bride will be ready.

The words "His wife" in Revelation 19:7 refer to the church (Eph. 5:24-25, 31-32), the bride of Christ. However, according to Revelation 19:8 and 9, the wife, the bride of Christ, here consists only of the overcoming believers during the millennium, whereas the bride, the wife, in Revelation 21:2 is composed of all the saved saints after the millennium for eternity.

As the Lamb, Christ needs a wedding. The Gospel of John reveals that Christ is the Lamb who came to take away sin (1:29) and also the Bridegroom who came that He might have the bride. Christ's goal is not to remove sin; His goal is to have the bride. In the book of Revelation we see that Christ is the Lamb and the coming Bridegroom. As the Bridegroom, He must have a wedding.

We need to emphasize the marriage of Christ and His bride so that we may know that our position is that of the bride and the position of the coming Christ is that of the Bridegroom. We are on earth preparing to become the bride to meet Him, and He is on the throne in the third heaven prepared to come as the Bridegroom to meet us. Therefore, He is coming as the Bridegroom, and we are going as the bride. When we meet Him at His coming back, we shall have a wedding.

Revelation 19:7b says, "His wife has made herself ready." The readiness of the bride depends on the maturity in life of the overcomers. Furthermore, the overcomers are not separate individuals but a corporate bride. For this, building is needed. The overcomers are not only mature in life but are also built together as one bride.

Revelation 19:8 says, "It was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." "Pure" refers to the nature, whereas "bright" refers to the expression. The Greek word translated "righteousnesses" may also be rendered "righteous acts." These righteousnesses do not refer to the righteousness (which is Christ) we received for our salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). The righteousness we received for our salvation is objective so that we may meet the requirement of the righteous God. The righteousnesses of the overcoming believers who compose the bride in Revelation 19:8 are subjective so that they may meet the requirements of the overcoming Christ. Hence, the fine linen indicates our overcoming life, our overcoming living. It is actually the Christ whom we live out of our being.

The fine linen with which the bride in Revelation 19 is clothed is equal to the

marriage garment in Matthew 22:11 and 12. According to the revelation of the Scriptures, the believers need two garments—one for our salvation and another for us to be prepared as the bride. For our salvation we need a robe to cover us. This is the robe that was put on the prodigal son in Luke 15:22. Such a robe signifies Christ as our righteousness, and it is for us to be justified by God in His presence. All believers in Christ have this robe, the first robe, Christ as our righteousness, our justification, which enables us to stand before the righteous God. However, we also need the second garment, which is the wedding garment in Matthew 22:11 and 12 and the fine linen in Revelation 19:8. Whereas the first garment qualifies us to meet God for His salvation, the second garment qualifies us to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb as His bride. The second garment is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. It is the very Christ whom we live and who is expressed through us in our daily living. This is the righteousnesses of the saints in Revelation 19:8. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 2276-2279)