

Kingdom of God session 9: Living between two worlds

During this series on the kingdom of God we've looked at what Jesus taught about it, how we enter it, how we live in the light of the kingdom. Before Christmas we looked at the King of the kingdom. In our last two sessions we'll be thinking about the conflict we face as we live in the kingdom of the world while belonging to the kingdom of God.

John 17:14–18

¹⁴ *I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.* ¹⁵ *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.* ¹⁶ *They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.* ¹⁷ *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.* ¹⁸ *As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*

- Jesus warned his disciples that the “world” would hate them, because they were “not of the world”. In the light of our studies on the kingdom, what does he mean by “the world” here? Why are we not of it?
- Do we or should we accept the way the world is or do we resist?

Paul expressed the conflict in another way. Read **Ephesians 6:10–18**

¹⁰ *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* ¹¹ *Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* ¹³ *Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* ¹⁴ *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,* ¹⁵ *and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* ¹⁶ *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* ¹⁷ *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* ¹⁸ *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

- How do these ‘weapons’ help us to stand firm in our faith?
- What do you think are our most important weapons?
- How can these verses encourage us? What is the remedy when we find things difficult?

Jesus also used another image. Read **Matthew 5:13–16**

¹³ *You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

¹⁴ *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵ *Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.* ¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

- What does salt do? How might Christians be salt in the world? Can you think of some practical examples?
- What sort of “good deeds” might show “light” to others? How do these images tie in with the idea of a battle?

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses yet another image, this time of sacrifice. Read **Romans 12:1–2**

¹ *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.* ² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- What do you think Paul means when he talks about “the pattern of this world”? What sort of things do you see in the world which would show this?
- How can our minds be renewed – practically? How will this help us to live as salt and light?

Later in Romans 12 Paul gives practical examples of what it means to follow Jesus. Read **Romans 12:9–21**

⁹ *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.* ¹¹ *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.* ¹² *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* ¹³ *Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality.*

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.* ¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* ¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ [Deut. 32:35] says the Lord.* ²⁰ *On the contrary:*

*‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ [Prov. 25:21,22]*

²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- Is there any one thing here that you see as being particularly opposite to the “pattern of this world”? What is it? Why do you think so?
- Which of these commands do you think are the hardest? What would most shock ‘the world’? What might be the ones that the “powers of this dark world” might be most against?
- Where do you think the hardest battle is when trying to live like this?

Finally, a very practical issue. Read **Romans 13:1–7** (see also **Acts 5:29**)

¹ *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.* ² *Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.* ³ *For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended.* ⁴ *For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to*

bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ *Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*

⁶ *This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.* ⁷ *Give to everyone what you owe them: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.*

Bear in mind that Paul was writing about the authoritarian and often brutal Roman authorities here.

- How should we interact as those living between two 'kingdoms'? Should we always obey our governments? When is it right not to? Can Christians legitimately disagree about politics?
- Do we work to get a "Christian country"? Should we put flags in churches?
- Do we give up on politics?

And to conclude.... There are two temptations that have faced believers in all ages: Retreat from the world or conform to it.

- What are some ways to help us navigate between these two extremes?
- Are our loyalties divided? Where should they lie?

PRAY that God will help us in this new year (new decade) to live in this world as citizens of heaven.