

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE
HOW GOD DEALS
WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS—
DISCIPLINE IN THE KINGDOM

(2)

RECEIVING LIFE
IN THE KINGDOM IN THE COMING AGE

When we preach the gospel, we tell others that we receive eternal life through believing in Jesus Christ. If a person believes in Him, he will have eternal life. Everyone who understands the Word of God knows that in the church age, as soon as a man believes, he has eternal life. This is our message. But the question now is this: When is this eternal life manifested, revealed, and enjoyed? Today our minds and spirits are constantly being harassed by death. Satan is still very strong. So when will the eternal life be fully manifested? Will it be in the new heaven and new earth? Or will it be in the kingdom? Let us read John 5:24-29. "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth: those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have practiced evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Verse 24 says that as soon as a person believes, he has eternal life and will not come into judgment. He who hears the word of the Lord and believes the Father who sent the Lord has eternal life. But verse 29 says that those who have done good will come forth to the resurrection of life, while those that have practiced evil will come forth to the resurrection of judgment. The word life (Gk. *zoe*) in verse 29 is the same word as in verse 24. Those that have done good will come forth to the resurrection of *zoe*, and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. Verse 24 says clearly that we have eternal life already. But verse 29 says that some will not have eternal life until after the resurrection. Can you see the difference here?

Verse 25 is on the church age. It says that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. We all are these dead people. We have heard the voice of the Son of God, and as a result, we live. Verses 28-29 say, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth." Verse 25 says that an hour is coming and it is now. Verse 28, however, omits the phrase "and it is now," saying only that an hour is coming. Hence, it refers to the future, not to the present. Also, the Lord Jesus says that in the future all the ones from the tombs will come forth from the tombs. In verse 25, He refers to "the dead." In verse 28 He refers to the dead who are in the tombs. Verse 25 talks about the dead, referring to those dead in trespasses and sins. When the Lord speaks of those dead in the tombs, He is not referring to the death of the soul in sin; rather, He is referring to those dead in the body. All those who are dead in their body, that is, those who are in the tombs, will hear the voice of the Son of God for the second time. Those who have done good will go into the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil will go into the resurrection of judgment. This second time is the time when all those in the tombs will rise up.

Let us read Mark 10:30. "But that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life." Here the Lord Jesus mentions eternal life again. We have to note what kind of eternal life this is. The eternal life in Mark 10:30 is not the eternal life of the church age spoken of in the Gospel of John or the eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. Please note that this eternal life is in the coming age. The phrase the coming age in the original language means the next age or the subsequent age. Today we are in the age of grace. The next age is the age of the kingdom, that is, the age of the millennium. Here, the Lord says that one can receive eternal life in the coming age. This does not refer to the eternal life we receive when we believe in the Lord.

Before the Lord spoke this word, a man came to Jesus asking what he should do to inherit eternal life. This was a question concerning works. Hence, the Lord Jesus told him of an eternal life that is gained by works. He told the young man that he must keep the law and sell all he had before he could inherit this eternal life. In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus shows us clearly that eternal life comes by grace and not by works. So why does He say here that we have to keep the law and sell all that we have, before we can inherit eternal life? It is because the eternal life described here in Mark 10 is different from the eternal life described in John. The eternal life in Mark 10 is received through works. The eternal life in John is received through faith.

After the young man left, the Lord Jesus looked around Him and said to the disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (v. 23). In saying this, the Lord put eternal life and the kingdom together. After the Lord Jesus said this, the disciples wondered what His word meant. The Lord said, "Children, how difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 24-25). The disciples were astounded and asked who then could be saved. The Lord said that "with men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Peter then asked what he would get for having left all to follow Him, and the Lord told them of the things that are to come. "Jesus said, Truly I say to you, There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life" (vv. 29-30). They will receive eternal life in the kingdom.

Hence, the eternal life spoken of here is the eternal life in the kingdom. The eternal life in the kingdom is obtained through works. It is acquired through consecration, through suffering and bearing reproach for the Lord. For the Christian, the question of eternal life in this age is solved. The question of eternal life in eternity is also solved. But whether or not he will have eternal life in the kingdom depends on whether he loves the Lord, forsakes everything for the sake of the gospel, denies himself in everything, and rejects the world. It depends on whether or not he is living for money, for material gain, for his family, or for the worldly people. If he loves the Lord and forsakes all things for the sake of the gospel, the Lord promised that he will not lose these things even in this

age, but on the contrary, he will gain a hundred times as much. If one gives up a little for the Lord today, he will reap a hundredfold return in the heavenly bank. Who can get such a high interest rate? A deposit of one dollar will yield a hundred dollars. You cannot find such a bank in the world. In addition, there is eternal life in the coming age.

In many places in Matthew, the phrase "eternal life" is used interchangeably with the word "kingdom." In these places the living ones are the ones who enter into the kingdom. For example, Matthew 7:14 says that the gate is narrow and the way is constricted that leads to life, and there are few that find it. Today many preach the gospel using this passage, and exhort people to enter the narrow gate and take the constricted way. But if one were saved through entering the narrow gate and taking the constricted way, salvation would not be of grace, but of works. Salvation would then become a reward for entering the narrow gate and taking the constricted way. The eternal life revealed in the book of Matthew does not refer to the eternal life of today; rather, it refers to the life in the millennial kingdom. In order to reign with Christ in the kingdom, a person must enter the narrow gate and take the constricted way. If one does not obey God's commandments and God's will, he will lose his eternal life. However, this does not mean that he will perish. But he will lose the eternal life in the kingdom.

If this problem is solved, then the problem of the ages in the Bible will be clearly resolved. In the age of the church, everything is by grace. At the end of the church age, God will establish His kingdom through His Son. In the kingdom only the faithful servants will reign with Christ by being resurrected from among the dead. The Bible shows us this very clearly.

PUNISHMENT IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

The Bible says that many children of God will have specific punishment. Many Christians have improper walks. They do not live in a godly way. They love the world and walk according to their will. They worship God according to man's way. They have not obeyed God's Word in taking care of God's work, but have instead done what they themselves like to do. They try to please men. They seek man's glory rather than God's glory and are not willing to stand in the same place of shame that the Lord stood in. They commit many mistakes and many sins. They have not been disciplined by God in this age. After they die and are resurrected on that day, can they reign with the Lord? The Bible says that we have to suffer and bear reproach with Him first before we can reign and be glorified with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Not only have many believers never suffered, they have many sins. They love the world and walk according to the flesh. When they leave the world, they will still have much unrighteousness and many sins that were not dealt with. The Bible shows us that such believers will have specific and definite chastisement.

Matthew 18:23-35 speaks of a slave being forgiven of his debts by the master. Another slave owed this first one a debt. But the slave who was forgiven of his debt would not forgive his fellow slave. The first slave definitely represents a saved person, because he pleaded for the master's forgiveness, and the master, who was moved with compassion, released him and forgave his debt. We are all helpless persons coming to the Lord to seek grace. The Lord has forgiven our debt and has let us go. If this one represents a Christian, then whatever this one

faces represents what we will face. The way the master deals with this slave will be the way the Lord deals with us.

Verses 28-30 say, "But that slave went out." He went out because he was now a free man. "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and he took hold of him and began to choke him, saying, Repay me what you owe. Then his fellow slave fell down and begged him, saying, Be patient with me and I will repay you. But he would not; instead, he went away and threw him into prison until he would repay what was owed." This passage is about one Christian not forgiving the sin of another. You are a forgiven person. But you are not willing to be forgiving. The Lord has forgiven you of ten thousand talents. Now your brother owes you a mere one hundred denarii, but you say in your heart that he must repay. He must repay you even the last cent. What will the result be then? Verses 31-33 continue, "Then his fellow slaves, seeing what had taken place, were greatly grieved and came and explained fully to their master all that had taken place. Then his master called him to him and said to him, Evil slave, all that debt I forgave you, because you begged me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave even as I had mercy on you?" That this person represents a saved one is again proved by the fact that the Lord had mercy on him. The Lord said, Should you not have mercy on your fellow slave as I have had mercy on you? Should you not forgive your fellow slave as I have forgiven you? This proves that this one represents one who has received God's mercy and forgiveness. He must be one that has life already. But he will not forgive other Christians. "And his master became angry and delivered him to the torturers until he would repay all that was owed" (v. 34). This one, who had been shown mercy and who had been forgiven, was put back into the hand of the torturers until he repaid all that was owed to the Lord. Whether he could repay all that he owed is another matter. The fact is, he would have to suffer. This shows us that if a Christian will not forgive another, on that day the Lord will deal with him in the same way that he has dealt with others. If you would not forgive your brother, the Lord will deal with you according to your unforgiving attitude.

MERCY AND JUDGMENT

We know that our God is a righteous God. In the future, at the judgment seat, He will judge us according to righteousness. However, though there is righteousness at the judgment seat, there is mercy also. If you show mercy to others, the Lord will be merciful to you. If you are unforgiving toward others, and if you are so righteous and unyielding toward others' failures and weaknesses, the Lord will deal with you in righteousness in that day. If you are merciful to others, the Lord will show mercy to you. Luke 6:37 says that if you do not pass sentence on others, sentence will not be passed on you; if you will not judge others, you will not be judged, and if you forgive others, you will be forgiven. Some Christians are too mean today. When they criticize others they scrutinize every mistake others make. When they do their best to criticize and judge others, they have to be careful. In the future God will deal with them in the same way they deal with others. With what measure you measure to others, it will be measured to you. If you give to others good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, the Lord will give to you in the same way. He who forgives will be forgiven, and to him who shows mercy, mercy will be shown.

Hence, the Bible says that mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). There is one thing which even judgment cannot triumph over—a person showing mercy to others throughout his entire life. We cannot be without mistakes. But if we show mercy to others today, God will be unable to deal with us. Many Christians are not able to lose in their dealings with others. They argue all the time with others. They give little ground to others and grant themselves all the ground. But we should rather show mercy to others today. When the time of judgment comes, there will be some whom even the Lord of judgment will not be able to hold anything against. This does not mean that man can purposely change God's commandment. It simply means that if you are merciful to others while you are living on earth, God will be merciful to you. Your mercy today will triumph over your judgment tomorrow. The way you judge others will be the way that you will be judged. This grace is righteous. The way you treat others will be the way that the Lord will treat you. The way you treat others will fashion for you a vessel, with which God will measure out judgment to you. James 2:13 says, "For the judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." Those who show no mercy to others will be judged without mercy. But those who show mercy to others will triumph over judgment. Your mercy will surpass the judgment. This is an amazing fact.

Matthew 18 shows us clearly that God's children can still fall into the hand of the torturers. If they do, they will have to remain there until they pay off all their debts. Of course, there is no way to pay off all the debts. But at least one day they will learn to be merciful and to forgive others in the same way that the Lord showed mercy to them and forgave them. By then they will still have to show mercy to others. Hence, in verse 35 the Lord says, "So also will My heavenly Father do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your hearts." This portion of the Word is not spoken to unbelievers, but to Christians. It shows the relationship between the heavenly Father and His children and the relationship between the brothers.

Prior to this portion of the Word, Peter asked the Lord, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). The Lord told him that he should forgive up to seventy times seven. Then the Lord spoke the word about the two slaves. Peter will face chastisement if he does not forgive his brother. The word of the Lord shows Peter that there is the possibility that he could be thrown to the torturers. There is the possibility that he could be put into prison. If there is the possibility for Peter to be thrown to the torturers and cast into prison, there is the possibility for us to be treated the same way also. That is why the Lord used the plural "you" in verse 35. His word is not for Peter only; it is for everyone. If we do not forgive each one of our brothers from our heart, the heavenly Father will do the same to us. Please remember that our eternal salvation in the new heaven and new earth is unshakable. Thank the Lord that this is by grace. But if our problems today are not dealt with specifically, we will still suffer specific punishment in the future kingdom.