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“FELLOW-WORKERS UNTO THE  
KINGDOM OF GOD”

COLOSSIANS 4 : 11.

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SERMON BY THE

REV. CHARLES ANDREWS DICKEY, D. D.,

RETIRING MODERATOR

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IN this letter to the Colossians Paul identifies the redeemed Church with the promised kingdom of God.

“The saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse,” are to be delivered from the power of darkness, and to be translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. These heirs of the kingdom are described as those who have redemption and the forgiveness of sin, through the blood of the first-born Son, and image of the invisible God, creator of all things, including all thrones, and all dominions, and all principalities, and all powers. And the crowning glory, the chief expression of the preëminence of Christ, is declared to be that he is “the head of the body,” and that the body is the redeemed Church.

Making mention of other churches to which he

had ministered, and of other ministers who had shared his labors, Paul, with the redeemed Church and the kingdom of God closely associated in his thought and service, says, These are "fellow-workers unto [or toward] the kingdom of God."

It has seemed to me fitting to address you, the representatives of the Church, as "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God." Let us make the kingdom of God our meditation and confer together about the service which we may render to realize the King's wish that the kingdom may come.

The kingdom of God occupies a prominent place in the Holy Scriptures. The spirit of all history, and more especially of sacred history, is the testimony of the kingdom of God. The Bible is the handbook of the kingdom of God. Men are only mentioned, and events are only recorded, because of their connection with the kingdom of God. The songs that make the Bible a poem and an anthem of triumph, the prayers that express the longings of souls and the reverence of faith, the dreams and visions that spread their supernatural light from Abraham's tent door to the retirement of Arabia, and from Jacob's pillow of stone to the solitude of Patmos, the mountain of fire that lighted the wilderness, the dazzling ritual that prefigured the Cross, the anthem of angels that announced the Advent, the tragedy of Calvary that consummated the Atonement, and the Easter dawn that confirmed the revelation and redemption of the kingdom of

God, these together make the Holy Scripture the constitution, the revelation, and the history of a kingdom which has its beginning in the eternal purposes of a sovereign God, and we have the assurance of God that when the kingdom has been finally established, it shall never end.

The record of Christ's ministry, the most of his discourses and pictures, and every event of his life, from his humble birth and the adoration of kings, to the departure from Olivet, under the escort of angels, and back to abandoned glory to complete the gift of the kingdom to the Father, all this is the testimony of the kingdom of God.

When the amazed apostles turned their faces from the cloud that carried away their King, and in obedience to his command began the subjugation of the world to his scepter, they proclaimed the promise of the King's return to be crowned by the universe of God, as "Lord of all."

Bible students have given great prominence to the study of this kingdom, which occupies so conspicuous a place in the Word of God, and recent study has been devoted with great diligence to this subject. I shall not attempt to contribute anything unfamiliar, but this kingdom of God seemed an appropriate theme for this significant time. We are looking backward to discover possible progress, and we are looking forward to gain inspiration for better service, and therefore, charged with a divine commission, entrusted with the Word that contains

our orders and reveals the "great mystery concerning Christ and the Church," I thought it fitting to present for your consideration this theme of revelation, and to address you as "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God."

The kingdom of God may be considered in four general aspects. First, as the REVELATION of an eternal plan and purpose of God, by whose power and for whose glory all things exist.

Second, as RETARDED by the unwillingness of those who should be the subjects of this supreme and rightful Ruler.

Third, as REDEEMED from sin by a plan of love and grace, devised and executed by the offended Sovereign; and, finally, the kingdom RESTORED, triumphantly established over all resistance, the blessedness of its subjects, and the glory of its King.

This kingdom, the primary purpose of which is the glory and praise of God, has its existence, absolutely, in the will of God and by the decree and power of God. David's prayer on the occasion of giving up his throne to Solomon, fully expresses this sovereign sway of God.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

"Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and

might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

The Psalms abound in such confession and praise.

"The kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations."

"The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."

For any creature to dispute the authority of God is treason, and to refuse obedience and willing service is rebellion. Therefore, to comprehend the nature of the divine kingdom and the relation of all other beings to the Supreme Being, we must observe that the kingdom of God is rooted and grounded in creation. God's right to rule is founded on his relation to all things as their Creator. Everything must be subservient to the will of its maker. Everything that the omnipotence of God makes possible, and everything that the will of God regards desirable, must be included in the kingdom of God. The absolute dominion of God has its foundation in the absolute ownership of God. To the crown of creation, the perfect man, God delegated dominion over the creatures beneath him. But man lost his dominion by losing his perfection and by putting himself in opposition to the will and dominion of God.

The order of creation suggests the purpose of God to glorify himself in a kingdom in which man, made in his own image, after his own likeness,



whose life was the Spirit of God, should be the conspicuous subject. Having "called light from the darkness that covered the face of the deep," having spread the firmament and gathered the waters, having given the continents their form, having filled the earth with sustenance, having lighted man's abode by night and by day and made it fully ready for his dominion and blessedness, God established his kingdom and bade his subject to occupy it for his own gain and blessedness, and for the glory of his Creator. The only condition of occupancy was obedience. The will of the sovereign and holy Creator must be the law of the subject, for though a son of God, bearing the image of his Father, the creature could have no right, no liberty, not in harmony with the will of the Sovereign for whose glory the kingdom was established.

But just as true, the sovereign must receive an obedience springing from the full and loving consent of his subjects. God could not be satisfied with slaves for subjects. Loyalty must spring from love, the subjects must be free and willing, and find their consent and obedience in perfect confidence. The Sovereign set life and death before his subjects and left them free to choose. Adam might have been the representative of a race of kings, but he listened to the enemy of God, disobeyed God, and opened his eyes on a flaming sword that closed the gate of life; and realized that "sin had entered into

the world and death by sin," and that he represented a race of slaves.

God's plan of love was frustrated. His guilty subject was in rebellion. Darkness, deeper than the chaos out of which light had been called, enveloped creation, and the murder and corruption, and evil of every sort, that hurried humanity to destruction and grieved a righteous God, thwarted the purpose of God and his kingdom on earth, for mankind seemed a failure. The carnal mind became enmity against God, and the wild, downward rush of fallen nature brought mankind to such a state that God, in righteous wrath, was compelled to wash the polluted earth with a flood, reserving a single family for the preservation of his kingdom.

In the family of Noah, God kept his kingdom of grace, shortly to be more plainly revealed. When God banished his rebellious subjects and closed the gate of his kingdom, he gave them a strange promise to keep alive their hope. "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." It was a dim ray of light in the darkness, but later revelations enlarged and confirmed the promise. Silent centuries elapsed, when suddenly the silence is broken by the voice of an offended, loving, patient, God. The crash of the fall could not prevent the plans and purposes of the grace of God. In eternity, before creation or fall, God devised a scheme of grace by which the kingdom should rise out of the ruin of sin, and the subjects of grace es-

cape the shadows of death. God waited until his new representative was ready to receive his revelation of grace and transmit it to the heirs of redemption. Against the background of many centuries of darkness stands the most majestic figure, save the Son of God, that appears in the race that God's grace would redeem. The son of Terah is the shadow of the Son of God. What experiences and visions and dreams may have filled the seventy-five years of life spent in his own land, and among his own kindred, we are not told, but we know that when God called Abraham "To go out into a place, which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went." "For he looked for a city," a kingdom "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

The first step of "the friend of God" manifested the obedience that might have saved the kingdom in creation, and the faith that was to be the condition of the kingdom of grace. The reverence of the race has confirmed the election of God, and the three religions which represent the living God, and confess his sovereignty, honor alike the memory and the headship of Abraham. By the choice of this one man, by covenant and promise, by a trial of faith that strangely suggests the Holy Temple and the Holy Cross by the nearness of Isaac's altar to them both, by a trial of faith that strangely suggests the Atonement, God brings this kingdom of

grace, out of the chaos of sin and death, to be foreshadowed for centuries, but in the fullness of time to be established on the earth by the King in person, and to be extended through a redeemed Church until it represented universal empire and the undisputed reign of God.

The descendants of Abraham, keeping the covenants and promises, and living in communion with the living God, who had entrusted his kingdom to their keeping, are driven by want into the bondage of Egypt, and by the heel of oppression, the family, growing to a nation, is hardened into a courage that should conquer freedom and plant the kingdom of God among the kingdoms of men.

While the people grew by suffering, God was training a leader and a lawgiver in Midian. Banished from Egypt, Moses found courage to return and boldly proclaim the message of God at Pharaoh's throne. "Let my people go that they may serve me." Resistance was overcome by judgments, the people of God, who had become a nation, crossed the sea that buried their oppressors and met their King at Sinai, ready to proclaim the laws of the kingdom of God.

The Mosaic period of the kingdom of God is full of significance and suggestion. It marks the constitution of the kingdom. The Supreme Ruler proclaims the laws of his kingdom. The conditions that make for righteousness are declared with great exactness. The relations of subjects to their Sover-

eign, and of subjects one with another, are definitely fixed and guarded by laws. A code of morals is given which would insure perfection by its complete observance. The proclamation of Sinai is a plain declaration that the kingdom of God is to be a kingdom of righteousness.

But how is righteousness to be attained? How are poor, wayward, wicked men to please God with perfect righteousness? Does God mean to mock the hopes of struggling humanity by making impossible conditions of entrance into his everlasting kingdom?

The institution of the passover before the exodus, and the prominence given to the ceremonial law, answer the question for the love and grace of God. The book of the law consists mainly of directions to the Cross, of foreshadowings of the atoning death, which is to be accomplished as the kingdom of God progresses. Feasts and offerings and sacrifices, a tribe of priests to insure the letter of the law, these, set forth with marvelous minuteness, significantly proclaimed at the constitution of the kingdom that it is a kingdom of grace and not a kingdom of merit, a kingdom of faith and not a kingdom of works. These offerings and sacrifices, in themselves of no avail, the blood of which could not wash away sin, only suggested the blood of sprinkling that would speak the better things, promised and hoped for in the kingdom of God. Moses interpreted the ceremonial law when he de-

clared "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."

Thus equipped, Abraham's family left the wilderness and, as a chosen nation, took possession of the promised land. The nation and the Church were one. The same laws regulated citizenship in the nation and membership in the Church. Israel, among surrounding nations, was intended to be the leaven of the kingdom in the midst of a lost humanity. To use a striking figure of an eminent writer, "Israel was God's river flowing on to make the whole earth glad, and the wicked, worldly empires, through which it flowed, were but stagnant morasses and pools." Defections and defeats, with occasional reforms and victories under loyal leaders, bring the chosen nation, the representative of the kingdom of God, to face the question of a visible king. A visible kingdom, as it appeared to Israel, not yet able to realize the spiritual character of the kingdom of God, required a visible king. In wrath God abdicated his throne and allowed Israel to choose a king. The tragedy of Saul was the calamity of Israel. Then God condescended to name a man after his own heart, and the throne of David was the glory of Israel and the reign of David was the glory of God. David's reign was a prophecy. David was eminently a type of Christ. He recognized himself as reigning in the stead of his greater Son. The kingdom of God as related

to the person of Jesus Christ, finds continual suggestion in the reign of David. The Psalmist of Israel deserves the title, Psalmist of the kingdom of God. In the name of Christ he challenges all enemies to oppose his kingdom.

“Why rage the heathen, and vain things  
Why do the people mind?  
Kings of the earth do set themselves,  
And princes are combined  
To plot against the Lord and his  
Anointed, saying thus,  
Let us asunder break their bands,  
And cast their cords from us.  
He that in heaven sits shall laugh,  
The Lord shall scorn them all.”

This deep vein of devotion, and loyalty, and confidence regarding the triumph of the kingdom of God, runs through the Book of Psalms, and particularly characterizes those psalms which prophesy and praise the Messiah.

But the glory of David departed. A divided kingdom, scattered tribes, and bitter defeats at the hands of enemies, sadly retarded the kingdom of God. The failure of royalty, the impossibility of putting the kingdom of God in the keeping of human kings, brought conditions which the plans of God met, with other seers of the kingdom and other seekers after God. The dynasty of prophets insured two significant developments. Not only did the prophets restrain and rebuke kings, who disregarded the sovereignty of God, and the right-

eousness and blessedness of their subjects, but they were given sight to see the glory of the coming kingdom, wisdom to discern its spiritual character, and, above all, an acquaintance with the holy, heavenly Person who was to come and establish the kingdom, and in and through whom the kingdom was to be revealed and finally triumphantly restored.

When Israel wept by the rivers of Babylon, and mourned the captivity that seemed the end of hope, they gave better heed to the teachings of their prophets. Away from the holy temple which they revered and from the holy city which kept everything sacred pertaining to the worship and kingdom of God; separated from their rituals that seemed so essential to acceptance with God, their spiritual sense was quickened by their bitter distress, and they were brought to realize the spiritual character of the kingdom of God. In touch with sad, lost men, who were not Israelites, they began to understand that the kingdom of God was not confined to Judæa, but that Judæa was a center, from which it was God's purpose to influence and mold surrounding nations and bring them, by his grace, into his eternal kingdom.

A distinguished writer, referring to the spiritual and universal character of the kingdom of God, as set forth in the teachings of the prophets, says: "The formation of a spiritual community in the days of the prophets, was a new thing in the his-



tory of religion. Till then no one had dreamed of a fellowship of faith, disassociated from national form, maintained without the exercise of ritual services, bound together by faith in the Divine Word alone. It was the birth of the conception of the Church, the first step in the emancipation of spiritual religion from the form of political life."

Daniel describes, with peculiar clearness, the relation of the kingdom of God to the kingdoms of men. Summoned by a restless king, both to recall and to interpret a dream that had disturbed him, Daniel, informed by God, foretold the destruction of successive earthly kingdoms and declared that the stone "cut out without hands," which became a great mountain was the symbol of the kingdom which the God of heaven would set up, which should never be destroyed, but stand forever.

With what sublime imagery, and how frequently, does Isaiah describe the triumph of Christ and the Church, and the final glorious restoration of the kingdom of God. But I would emphasize more particularly the prophetic association of a suffering King with the triumphs of the kingdom of God. The person of Christ, unique, alone, transcendent, stands out in prophetic vision the essence and center and determining influence in the establishment of the kingdom of God. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The consciousness of the redemption of the kingdom by the life of the King, is more or less apparent in every prophetic utter-

ance concerning the kingdom and the King. The strange dual nature, that comes nearer, but remains a mystery, in the gospels, is the continued theme of prophecy. In this dual nature, the King and the subject mysteriously meet. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," viz. : establish a kingdom of righteousness, God reveals his purpose of doing by "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh : that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled." The "Wonderful, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace," is "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Immanuel is the wounded One, the bruised, the despised, the rejected, the Lamb brought to the slaughter. This is the mystery of godliness, the kingdom that sin made the kingdom of death, redeemed back, and made a kingdom of life by the grace of the Sovereign, expressed in a willing sacrifice of himself, in the actual death of the Cross.

The Atonement is a vivid illustration of the cost of the kingdom and of life, in the experience of every one who passes from death unto life. Christ declares "The kingdom is in you." Redemption is individual. The struggle, and temptation, and resistance, and sacrifice, the war in the soul between flesh and spirit, illustrate in every redeemed life the conflict by which the kingdom of God, and of righteousness, and of the Spirit, triumphs over the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of the flesh.

The center of the kingdom of God is the Cross of Jesus Christ. Around the Cross eternities revolve. Calvary marks the spot, the battlefield, whose victory restored the kingdom of God. The fruits of the victory are being gathered as the centuries roll, and "when the end comes the conqueror will deliver the whole kingdom that he purchased with his blood, to the Father," and the coronation song is already written, "Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. . . . Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

The proclamations of the herald of Christ, the teachings of Christ himself, and the faith in which the apostles went everywhere preaching the gospel of the kingdom, confirm the prophetic visions of the kingdom of God.

Between Malachi and the ministry of Christ there is the silence of four centuries. Christ and his herald found dull ears for the reception of their message. "A few feared the Lord and spake one to another." A remnant of seekers after God, and fellow-workers toward the kingdom, were ready for the message and for service. The voice in the wilderness renewed the call of priests and prophets

to repentance. Christ entered his ministry with full consciousness of his authority, and with full knowledge of the death which he must suffer to establish the kingdom of God. The boy knew his Father's business and devoted himself to the work of the King. The model prayer of Christ makes the kingdom the first desire. The person of Christ confirmed the description of the prophets. Jesus Christ not only assured the kingdom, he was the kingdom. His life was the model of the kingdom. To be in the kingdom was to be in Christ. To be of the kingdom was to be like Christ. We have the fatherhood of God, only through the brotherhood of Christ. Moral and spiritual sonship was lost in the wreck of sin. Our new sonship is our regeneration by the spirit and the grace of God. Believers, redeemed by grace, are admitted into a kingdom that was never destroyed. God and his well-beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit and angels who never fell, kept the kingdom for redeemed men. Christ extends the blessing of the kingdom to as many as will believe, to as many as the Father will give him in return for the price he paid for their redemption. Admission into this kingdom is not determined by the righteousness of those who seek it, not by the edict of the King, not by any law, not by any form, nor by association with any institution; admission is determined by relationship with Christ, whose is "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." The commission of the apostles is very

plain, "I appoint unto you a kingdom (as the Father hath appointed unto me a kingdom) to sit on thrones and to eat and drink with me in my kingdom." The fullness of the kingdom is the likeness of the king. The blessing of the kingdom is not a new patch on an old garment, not new wine in an old bottle, but to be a new creature in Christ Jesus, to have a new life by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

Nineteen hundred years of faith and patience, and conflict, and martyrdom, and prayer, and fellowship in work, have passed, and the kingdom keeps coming. It has already come. It is a reality to a "number numberless," who have already had "ministered unto them an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom."

The miraculous ministry of the Messiah, beginning with the mystery of the Incarnation and closing with the mystery of the Resurrection, fulfilling the prophetic visions and executing the purposes of God to establish a spiritual kingdom among men, gives place to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who, through the Church, should continue the work which should finally restore the kingdom of God as a kingdom of grace, and exalt to undisputed supremacy this Messiah "whom God hath set at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to

be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

A handful of faithful followers, with confidence in their ascended Lord, and relying upon the promise of the Spirit, waited in a little upper room, neither disheartened nor discouraged by the unbelieving mob that crowded the streets of Jerusalem. Very soon their faith was rewarded with flaming tongues, and the conquest of the world began.

The kingdom of God is not identified with any state or nation. It is a federation of redeemed men, a federation of believers, a federation of loyal followers of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the spiritual body, and heir to the throne of the kingdom of God, among all people, and kindred, and tongues, and tribes, regardless of their earthly allegiance.

This belief is the inspiration and spirit of missions. The people of God, the citizens of the kingdom of God, whatever may be their nationality, are moved by holy zeal, and by loyalty to their king, to extend the kingdom that they love and to proclaim its true blessedness to every creature.

The scepter of earthly power departed from Judah, the throne of David is occupied by his greater Son, and henceforth the history of the Church is the history of the kingdom of God. This new spiritual kingdom was set up in the midst of the proudest and most powerful empire that had ever reached for universal dominion. The kingdom

of Christ must succeed through much suffering, and it has suffered with a courage that only confident faith could inspire. By turns persecuted, courted, and corrupted by Rome, hampered by the complications of civil and ecclesiastical powers, subduing cities which soon yielded to the fascinations of fleshly lusts, almost lost in the dark ages, yet ever nurtured by a remnant that kept the oracles and kept its faith, the Church, the retarded kingdom of God, is born again, and the dawn of the Reformation reveals the hidden destiny, and assures the triumph of the kingdom of God.

As a part of the Church of Christ, bearing our part of responsibility for the final triumph of the kingdom of God, we may claim no small share of the labors and of the fruits of the Reformation. This free republic that honors us with citizenship, and that protects our religious liberties, was founded by our Reformation ancestors and upon Reformation principles. Together with other Christian nations, who have received their civilization from the Reformation, we control the destinies of the world. The providences of God that mark the advent of this new century, make American citizenship a grave responsibility. These providences have opened doors for Christian missions that give assurance to our strongest faith, and call for the best service of fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God.

It will not be necessary for me to detain you

with any application of the subject to which I have asked your attention. We have a history of which we are not ashamed. We have an equipment full of efficiency; and we have opportunities which should suggest a deep sense of responsibility.

But I am reminded that an order of the Assembly will devote a whole day to the consideration of Presbyterian progress and of Presbyterian prospect. Representatives, well qualified for this special service, have been chosen, and we wait with confidence for their reports and prophecies.

A special appointment of the Assembly has given me an opportunity to visit many centers of influence, and to see the work that our beloved Church is doing to advance the kingdom of God. And in closing I desire to bear testimony to a few things that should give us great encouragement at the opening of the new century.

I have greatly enjoyed the close fellowship of my brethren. I have found a deep reverence for the Word of God and a courageous defense of its revealed truths. I have found loyal support of the ancient Confession that stands for the sovereignty of God, and proclaims the laws of the kingdom of his love and grace. I have found only faithful service and fraternal spirit. The Church is peace. The Church is one in heart and hope, and purpose. There are no roots of bitterness springing up to trouble us. With united purpose the Church is set for the defense of the gospel of the kingdom of God.



We have a noble ministry, nearly eight thousand strong, and the depleted ranks are being filled by colleges and seminaries, whose faithful work praises them.

The ministry is strengthened and supported by a noble eldership, nearly thirty thousand strong, whose service in both Church and State, is for the glory of God. Ministers and elders lead a noble membership, more than a million strong, a body of devoted believers whose lives and generous gifts testify to their fidelity. And not our least joy and hope is our reserve, a million and a half strong, that is being trained in ten thousand Sabbath-schools, by devoted teachers, for work unto the kingdom of God.

The highway that unites the cities of the Pacific Coast, winds through mountains and valleys of surpassing beauty. The picture that lingers in my memory is Mount Shasta, rising fourteen thousand feet above the sea, standing alone in the plain, wrapped in its own solitude and in its mantle of snow. I gazed upon its silent glory for hours, and at sunset, when the mountain was taking on richer colors, and revealing greater charms, we were very close to it, when suddenly it disappeared. Before I could recover from my surprise, the shadow was gone, and the mountain stood out boldly in its full beauty. We had passed near the base of a bleak foot-hill, and this low foot-hill had hidden the great

mountain. Thus, we lose sight of the kingdom of God. The foot-hills of our unbelief and needless strife, and worldliness, hide from our vision "the mountain of the house of the Lord that is to be established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills," "unto which people shall flow, and to which many nations shall come and say, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord."