The Kingdom of God, Its Laws and Its Citizens

Let us think for a moment about the idea of the *Kingdom of God*. To those who know the Bible and the life of faith the term may sound ordinary, but to the uninitiated the phrase *the Kingdom of God* can sound strange. The word *"kingdom"* feels archaic, as if it belonged to another age.

Throughout the history of Romania, different kinds of rulers governed the people: voivodes, princes and, more rarely, kings. Michael the Brave and Vlad the Impaler, for instance, were princes, and so was Stephen the Great. It is interesting to ask why princes, rather than kings, ruled for most of the past.

If we look at Austria, there was an empire there. In France, Napoleon was emperor. In ancient Rome, men like Nero and Trajan were emperors. An emperor is one who reigns over several kings, while kings are sovereigns over smaller territories. So an *"empire"*, the kind of realm the Romanian word used here for "kingdom" really describes, is the domain in which an emperor holds authority over several rulers.

When we speak of the *Kingdom of God*, we mean a realm with a single sovereign. The term may sound archaic, but the idea is not hard to grasp. Today we have countries, nations, continents, the European Union, which brings together several states, and the United States of America, with its presidential system.

The Kingdom of God is a reality that was established before the world and the earth were created. For a kingdom to be a kingdom, there must be a king. A kingdom also has subjects, and that is where we come in. And for a kingdom to be a kingdom, it needs a body of laws, which traditionally are laid down by the king.

In modern societies, where monarchies are less common, laws are made by democratic institutions such as parliaments, where many people take part in the legislative process. This is done to keep power from being concentrated in the hands of one person, who could become a tyrant or dictator, wielding absolute and often oppressive control over the people.

Unlike earthly rulers, who may make laws to serve their own interests, the Kingdom of God is governed by righteous laws. God, as the supreme King, has established laws that are described as perfect and just. According to the teaching of the Bible, this divine kingdom reaches down to earth as well, as we say in the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew: *"Thy kingdom come… here on earth"* and *"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."* This tells us that the laws of heaven are meant to be lived out in our world too.

To understand better the nature of this kingdom and of its King, let us turn to Deuteronomy chapter 32, where we find descriptions of God's character. Verses 3 and 4 say: *"Because I will

publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."* These verses give us a glimpse of God's justice and perfection, which are essential for understanding the Kingdom of God.

It matters that we know these things about God's kingdom, because they shape how we understand salvation, our spiritual rescue. When we understand how earthly kingdoms and their laws work, we can appreciate all the more the kingdom we are called to belong to and hope to enter. One of the defining qualities of the King with whom we will live for eternity is His righteousness. He is not unjust; there is no unrighteousness in Him. He is a God without iniquity and without injustice.

Let us stop and define the word *righteous*, so we can better understand this quality. Here on earth there are people who judge according to the laws of the land, and those laws are considered just. Let us assume they are just, because they rest on a divine standard. People try to be as just as they can, but human interference can twist God's justice and so injustices arise. To be *"righteous"* means being objective with those around you: fair, impartial, even-handed and incorruptible.

There are corrupt people, and there are incorruptible people. Let us describe this King as He is: honest, deceiving no one, without a trace of cunning, a person of complete integrity. Those who have read Holy Scripture will remember that of the Lord Jesus it is said: *"neither was guile found in his mouth."* Let us think carefully about our own lives, from birth up to now. Have we ever lived in cunning and guile?

There are popular fables that illustrate cunning. Which animal is usually linked with it? In those fables, the sly, crafty fox tricks the crow. How does she do it? By praising him first, by flattering him. That is how our own cunning begins: by praising the other person, dressing them up and lifting them high, so that afterwards we can get what we want. We come along with flowers, with a gift, with something, in our cunning, to reach our goal. Say there is an official just doing his job. In your cunning you sweeten his day, bring him a box of chocolates, bring him something, and so you get what you want.

But what is God like? Righteous. All His ways are right, in everything He does. In His Kingdom all the ways are right, and His subjects are righteous too. A kingdom without subjects, with only a king, raises questions: whom would the king rule? Who would be governed? To whom would the king give laws? With whom would the king be just or unjust? It is vital that we picture this kingdom, because without understanding it we do not know where we are heading.

Let us think about the subjects of the Kingdom of God. Let us try to define who they are. Perhaps the word citizens of the Kingdom fits better. Let us reflect on the citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Let us turn together to Psalm 50 to look at the way people imagine the Kingdom of God. Many people long to reach God's Kingdom, His Paradise, without knowing God's Way, what God is like, or what the citizens of this kingdom are like. That is our starting point. In verse 16, God says to

the wicked: *"What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."* Amen.

We often imagine that God is like us. We head for the Kingdom of God, for Paradise, where He lets us in free of charge. We do not care how entry is gained, nor are we interested in what it is like there, how people live in the Kingdom of God.

How does this King live? As human beings we often imagine that the king lives in his palace, where no one can get in, and where the rules he lives by are laid down. There is one religion that claims that only a limited number of people will be in heaven with God and rule the world, while everyone else stays on earth and follows other laws and ordinances.

So the question is: who are the citizens of this heavenly kingdom? With whom did God populate this place in the past, and with whom is He populating it now? Are they the same beings, or different ones? Have you ever thought about who lives in heaven? According to the Bible, there are the *heavenly hosts*, who are in fact God's angels. These angels are a people of holy, obedient beings, and what is remarkable is that the laws the King lays on His subjects He keeps Himself. That is very important.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy to read and reflect on how we ought to live if we expect to go there. In Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 15 and 16, it says: *"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it."*

This is a comparison between the Old Testament and the New, a foreshadowing of things to come. It speaks of a land the people will possess, which back then was the earthly Canaan, and for us is the heavenly Canaan. But there are conditions: we must walk in God's ways and keep His commandments, statutes and judgments.

These ways are the ones God Himself walks in; there are not separate laws for Him and for us. The laws God lives by are the very laws we, His people, must follow. *"I have set before thee life and good, and death and evil. Hold fast to them. I command thee to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his commandments, his statutes, his judgments."* This is how the Lord our God will bless us in the land we are going to possess. So we prepare here to enter a land where the will of God is done.

When we look at a map, whether Google Maps or a GPS, we see the paths and roads of a country. Why do we see them? Because we need to know them and use them. If you want to get to Cluj, a city in north-western Romania, you have to follow the roads that are already there, not wander off through mountains and rivers, but travel on roads built before you. For example, the road through the Olt Valley, which links the towns of Pitesti, Ramnicu Valcea and Sibiu across the Carpathians, was built by the Romans about two thousand years ago. Today we travel the same roads our forebears used, whether they went by cart or on horseback.

God has laid down His ways just as roads have been laid down in the physical world. They are not made up on the spot; they are already mapped out for us. What does He command us? *"Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you"* (Deuteronomy 5:33). These ways are eternal. Let us read Deuteronomy 26, verses 16 to 19: *"This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, **and to walk in his ways**, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments."* Amen.

The King has a people, does He not? What conditions are placed on this people? What can we learn from this? What does it take to belong to His people? God commands you to do certain things, and you must declare: *"Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, **and to walk in his ways**."* Must we make this declaration today, or will we make it when we get to heaven? Do you notice how these things are put? What is God urging us to do? When is He calling us? Today, or after we leave this earth? The answer is: today.

To become part of His people, you must declare today that you will walk in His ways, keep His statutes, commandments and judgments, and listen to His voice.

Let us return to the nature of His ways. All His ways are right. What did we read? *"All his ways are judgment."* Let us also open Deuteronomy 18. We read and draw step by step closer to the Kingdom of God, to understand what we are called to and what decisions we must make, and not merely so that we may be saved from the wrath to come through His mercy and sacrifice.

God's Word tells us that we must know what His ways are like. From Psalm 18, let us read verse 30: *As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried.* Amen. Once again we reflect on the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom is perfect, because everything in His Kingdom is perfect. His ways are perfect. That is the Kingdom of God.

We have been called to be part of this Kingdom of God. We will read and see that we have been transferred into a Kingdom where the ways are perfect. Thinking about how we travel here on earth, take the example of a journey to Cluj. In physical terms, a perfect road would be perfectly straight, without the slightest detour, not even a hundred metres, letting you cover the distance in the shortest possible time. From Bucharest to Cluj the ideal road would be the most direct one. Yet people do not always build such perfect roads, because of natural obstacles like

mountains, or the need to go around large cities, so roads stray from the direct line.

When we speak of *the way of God*, we mean a straight way, as Scripture describes it. Psalm 19, verse 7, says: *"The law of the LORD is perfect."* This tells us that in the Kingdom of God the laws are perfect and right. Kingdoms without laws are in anarchy and cannot be called true kingdoms. A kingdom is marked by rule over various peoples and lands, with well-defined structures.

The laws of God, which govern the Kingdom of God, are right and perfect. This kingdom existed before the world was made, and the world runs according to the laws God set for mankind, laws that were established before the world existed. In Psalm 25, from verse 4, we find a psalm of David, who was king over the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from Jacob.

It urges us to think about the requirements the citizens of the kingdom must meet, and to consider whether we too must conform to them. Verse 4 says: *"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths."* In Deuteronomy we are reminded how important it is to walk in the Lord's ways, as it is written: *"Thou hast avouched this day… to walk in his ways."* David too prays: *"Shew me thy ways, O LORD."* When we use a GPS, the purpose is clear: to guide us to a destination. Sometimes the GPS is slow to start, and we need patience. Without patience we may rush ahead and take the wrong direction, and risk getting lost.

Show me Your paths. Teach me Your paths. Teach me where You walk.

These are called the Ways of God, or the Way of God, because God walks in them. Before verse 9, to complete the context, let us also read verse 8: *"Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way."* Just as a GPS is designed to be accurate and reliable, God is good and upright and always shows us the right way.

God guides us in the right way, but there is a condition: humility. *"The meek will he guide in judgment."* We must be willing to wait and not rush ahead without His guidance. *"And the meek will he teach his way."* There are many ways that may seem good, but as God's Word warns us, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* So it is essential to seek and follow the way God shows us. The way we follow is essential if we are to reach life; let us remember that. There is only one way, as the Lord Jesus said: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* There is no other way.

As He teaches, *"the meek will he teach his way."* As it is written in Psalm 25:12, *"What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose."* So we must be humble and fear God for Him to show us the way; it is not for just anyone.

"His way is perfect." We often talk about perfection, and the reason we must be perfect is that His ways are perfect. No imperfect person can walk in His ways, because they are perfect. That is why His land, His homeland, is perfect. He calls us to perfection because that is what His land is like. There is no imperfect land for those who do not make it; there is no second-best or temporary homeland. There is only one, the original and perfect one.

In the book of Psalms, chapter 27, verse 11, David prays, and we can pray this too: *"Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path."*

If we turn to Colossians chapter 1, verses 13, 14 and 15, we read: *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."*

The word *"creature"* here may feel rather old-fashioned. We might also say *"creation"* or *"the universe"*. *"The firstborn among all who follow Him, who will be His brothers."* The verse shows us that He is the first of those who will belong to God's family. What matters for us is that He has set us free from the power of darkness, that is, from Satan's grip, and has translated us, that is, moved us to a new spiritual place, into the kingdom of the Son.

The kingdom of the Son is the same as the Kingdom of God; they are not two separate kingdoms but one. We have been given redemption through the Son's blood, which means He paid a price to set us free. It is like a car you sold and now want back: you have to pay to buy it back. In the same way, mankind, created by God and fallen into Satan's hands, was bought back by God, who paid a price to bring us back into His Kingdom.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 17, we are shown that anyone who is in Christ becomes a new creature. That person has been moved from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light, that is, into the Kingdom of God. So for the one who is a new creature, all things have become new, as we read in verse 18: *"And all things are of God"*, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.

Further on, in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1, 2 and 3 describe mankind's former condition: *"You… who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."* These verses highlight the deep transformation that takes place when someone is redeemed and brought back into the Kingdom of God.

Among them we all once lived, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has made us alive together with Christ. He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Amen.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." What this tells us is that He has translated us, has raised us, and set us together in the heavenly places where God's will is done.

But to whom does He show the way? Whom does He teach His way? Whom does He guide in all that is right? The humble, and the one who fears Him. That is why, though people are dead in their trespasses, He brings us to life as new creatures, moved from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light, so that we may walk in His ways, which are perfect, according to His laws, which are perfect.

Let us open the Scriptures and see how the citizens of the Kingdom live, those who lived before mankind existed, and what we too are called to. Let us go to 2 Peter, so that the way of life of the citizens becomes clear: the new creatures, the new creation, those who have been moved from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light.

Chapter 2: I will read from verse 9, skipping a little, so we catch just the idea we need. *"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord."* Amen.

The angels in heaven, who are with God and are greater in power and might than we humans, bring no railing accusation before the Lord against the rulers of this earth. The angels, who are subject to the laws of the Kingdom of God, do not act at random; they keep these laws strictly. As human beings we often allow ourselves to mock those in authority, but what does it actually mean to speak evil of dignities? To speak badly of them, to make jokes at their expense? Over the years, people have made countless jokes about the police, the army and other authorities.

The angels in the Kingdom of God, who walk in His way, do not pass railing judgments. The Epistle of Jude mentions an angel who keeps God's Law. This is not about the fallen angels, but about those who remain in God's will. In Jude, from verse 8, it says: *"Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."* We do not know in detail Michael the Archangel's exact role and rank in the Kingdom of God, but we do know it is a high one. In his dispute with the devil over the body of Moses, Michael spoke no judgment or insult; he said simply: *"The Lord rebuke thee."*

The citizens of the Kingdom of God live in a way that shows respect for the laws of this Kingdom. Unlike people, who are often not afraid to mock and despise, the angels, though greater in power and might, do not dare to do so. This is because of their fear of God, which teaches them to follow what is right and to honour His law. The law of the Kingdom is in the King's hands.

In the biblical example of King Solomon, who was both king and judge, we see how a hard case was handled with wisdom. Two women asked him to decide about a living child, and Solomon gave a just verdict. This shows how authority and law must be respected and applied with justice. In David's day, if you remember, it was his son Absalom who, when people came to the king for judgment, stood at the city gate and won them over, offering to give them justice himself. He would say: *"Oh that I were made judge in the land… I would do him justice!"* His aim was to draw them to his side, and he managed to win the people's support and overthrow the king, even though it was the king who was called to judge.

In the Epistle of Jude we see that in the Kingdom of God things are different: we are not given the right to this kind of judgment. If we are not given the right, how should we act? Let us turn

to James and ask God's help to apply the word as those in His Kingdom do. We have been moved there to do God's will, turning aside neither to the right nor to the left. Chapter 4, verse 11, says: *"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."*

There is one lawgiver and judge, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? Amen. Who are you, Peter? Are you the King? Are you the Judge? Did you give the Law, so that you can judge people by it? Here we are shown that there is only one lawgiver and judge. In our country, some make the laws and others judge by them. But in the Kingdom of God there is one King, the Giver of the Law.

And I would like to close by making clear what we are called to. Why must we do these things in the first place? God's Law is perfect. If we keep it, we too become perfect. If we meddle with God's Law and push ourselves into His work, we are no longer acting in a perfect way.

Let us read a few things about the Lord Jesus and see what we are called to, and may God help us meditate on them. We turn to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 8, where verses 32 and 33 describe what one figure in the Bible went through: *"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away."* Amen.

These verses refer to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who, though He was in the Kingdom of God, never left that kingdom as we did. He knew no sin and was never dead in sin; He was alive from eternity, in the Kingdom of God, and yet His judgment was taken away.

It is important to remember that the Lord Jesus spoke of this judgment that was taken from Him when He said: *"I came… not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."* This teaching is given to us as well. We will look further at this judgment and at humility in chapter 6, bearing in mind that the Scripture we read is like a two-edged sword. Some people, reading these verses, decide to stop judging anything at all, not even sin, and to live without direction, because they think their judgment has been taken away and they no longer have the right to judge, and so they ignore other teachings of the Lord Jesus. We must be careful and avoid such extremes.

In verse 37 we are told: *"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."* When the Lord Jesus was asked to settle a dispute between two brothers over their inheritance, He answered: *"Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"* He had come to earth for another purpose. In the same way, we must think seriously about how we live in the Kingdom of God, because that is where we belong, and nowhere else. It is not enough to say a few words and be carried off to a paradise where we will live in luxury or comfort, or whatever else we imagine life with God to be.

God's will is perfect, His Law is perfect, He is perfect, and His works are perfect. And what must our deeds be like? Scripture teaches us that we must have *"perfect speech, perfect faith, perfect

deeds, perfect love."* May the Lord help us, both you and me. Amen.

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