

God's Two Realms

TWO REALMS IN LUTHER'S THOUGHT

- ❖ Luther's Commentary on Psalm 82 (Luther's Works, Volume 13):
 - “[The Gospel] makes a plain distinction between the temporal and the spiritual estate and teaches, besides, that the temporal estate is an ordinance of God which everyone ought to obey and honor” (Luther's commentary on Psalm 82).
- ❖ Dr. Joel Biermann's *Wholly Citizens*:
 - This is the essential point from which all else springs: The material world of creation that surrounds us is God's work and still matters to God.
 - Since it matters to God, he provides for its protection and care by establishing what Luther calls the temporal estate: the rulers and governments who are accountable for the well-being and right functioning of that material, temporal world in which we all live, and in which the spiritual estate carries out its work.
 - The temporal estate is not opposed to God or to the spiritual estate. It is not even a necessary evil as a consequence of the brokenness of sin infecting the creation. There is nothing negative or regrettable about the temporal estate. It is simply God's provision for the smooth functioning of the creation.
 - The realms—both the spiritual and the temporal—belong to God and are directed by him for specific and distinct, but equally God-pleasing work.
- ❖ Augsburg Confession XVI – Concerning Civic Affairs
 - “Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God...”
 - “Christians are obliged to be subject to political authority and to obey its commands and laws in all that may be done without sin. But if a command of the political authority cannot be followed without sin, one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5:29).”

TWO REALMS IN GENESIS 1

- ❖ Genesis 1:1 sets the stage for the biblical thinking on “two realms”
- ❖ The writer of Genesis has no interest in teaching you science. He wants to teach you theology.

- ❖ If you want to understand the message of Genesis 1, you need to hear it as an Ancient Israelite would have heard it.
 - “In the beginning, God made what’s up there and what’s down here.”
 - What’s down here? Humanity’s space.
 - What’s up there? God’s space.
 - Deuteronomy 26:15
 - 2 Chronicles 6:21
 - Psalm 113:5-6
 - Matthew 5:34
 - Matthew 5:45
 - Matthew 6:9
 - On days 1-3, God performs 3 acts of “separating” and creates a 3-tiered cosmos:
 - The waters above (sky/heaven = Heb. *shamayim*)
 - The land (Heb. *erets*)
 - The waters below (the underworld = Heb. *sheol*)
 - God places “rulers” in the two realms of the living
 - Heaven -> “Lights” (lit. “Lamps” – but more than just lamps...Genesis 2:1)
 - Earth -> “Humanity” (God’s image bearers)
- ❖ What is God’s command to humanity in Genesis 1:28?
 - Rule the earth.
 - Bring order to the earth by participating in God’s creative act.
 - Make the whole earth like Eden.

EDEN AS THE INTERSECTION OF THE TWO REALMS (GENESIS 2)

- ❖ Eden is a Garden, which means:
 - Abundant food – Genesis 2:9
 - Abundant water – Genesis 2:10

- ❖ Eden is a High Place (mountain)
 - Four rivers flowing out – Genesis 2:10-14
 - Note v. 13: “The name of the second is the Gihon...”
 - Ezekiel called Eden a mountain – Ezekiel 28:13-14
- ❖ Eden is Heaven on Earth – God’s dwelling place.
- ❖ Humans are put in Eden “to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

MOUNT ZION & THE TEMPLE AS THE NEW EDEN

- ❖ Solomon’s Temple was made to resemble Eden
 - Fruit imagery was everywhere – 1 Kings 7:18-22
 - Water was plentiful
 - Note that Jerusalem was situated next to a natural spring, called “Gihon”
 - See 2 Chronicles 32:30
- ❖ Jerusalem is a High Place (Mount Zion) – 1 Kings 8:1
- ❖ Mount Zion is Heaven on Earth – God’s dwelling place – Psalm 132:13
- ❖ The Levites were to “work and keep” the temple – Numbers 18

JESUS & THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

- ❖ Jesus presents himself as the intersection of Heaven and Earth
 - He is “God with us” – Matthew 1:23
 - He “made his dwelling” (lit. “Tabernacled”) with us – John 1:14
 - Jesus is the place where heaven and earth overlap
- ❖ Jesus came creating little pockets of heaven where people can be in God’s presence.
 - “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17)
- ❖ Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:9-10)
- ❖ Jesus referred to himself as God’s temple – John 2:19-22.
- ❖ Jesus sends out his followers to announce that God’s kingdom has arrived in him (Matthew 28:18-20)

REVELATION & THE REUNITING OF THE TWO REALMS (REVELATION 21-22)

- ❖ At the end of time, John sees a new heaven and a new earth – Revelation 21:1
- ❖ John sees heaven and earth being reunited – Revelation 21:2-3
- ❖ There is no temple in the new creation – Revelation 21:22
- ❖ The abundant water and the Tree of Life from Eden are there – Revelation 22:1-2

OPEN ENDED CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Humans function as “mini-Jesuses” in the world.
 - Because God lives in us, we live at the intersection of heaven and earth
 - We are “temples of the Holy Spirit” – 1 Corinthians 6:19
- ❖ As Christians, our calling is not to “escape” from the world, but to bring the healing message of Jesus to a broken world.
- ❖ Our engagement with politics is always going to be messy, but that’s not an excuse to quit.
- ❖ As Christians, we get to partner with Jesus to bring his heavenly kingdom to earth—Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount provides a template for doing this.