

## *Part Seven*

---

# THE KINGDOM

## 34

### THE KING OF KINGS

This is a study based upon two advance announcements of the coming of the Son of God to earth. One was through the prophet Isaiah more than seven hundred years before the event. The other was the message of the angel of God to Jesus' mother at the time of His conception (Isa. 9:2-7; Luke 1:26-80).

#### *The King in Prophecy*

It was fitting that the hearts and minds of men should be prepared for His coming, made ready to realize His significance and to receive Him. All of God's dealings with men recorded in the Old Testament were preparation for His coming. But it was fitting that specific prophecies concerning Him, His person, character, offices, and work, should be given to arouse expectation and to lay a foundation for faith in Him. The prophecies furnished identification for Him when He came. They were part of the credentials of the Christ (cf. John 5:39, 46; Luke 24:25-27, 44-46).

Of course, the Scriptures chosen for this lesson do not by any means give a complete picture of the person and work of Christ. Other prophecies depict Him as the great prophet (Deut. 18:15-18; Isa. 61:1, 2), as the suffering servant and sacrifice for sins (Psalm 22; Isa. 53), and as the great eternal high priest (Ps. 110:4). These are selected to emphasize His authority to rule—to announce Him as King, Prince, and Lord.

In the past tense of prophecy, which speaks of the future as if it were already come to pass, He is promised as a "great light" and a bringer of joy to the nation. The will of the Lord revealed *is light*. It is according to truth and full of infinite wisdom. "The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:8). The whole world is in darkness and "the shadow of death" until Christ, the Light of the world, shines in the hearts of men (John 8:12; I John 1:5-7; 5:19, 20). The government of God is desirable. His goodness and mercy, His righteousness and majesty, bring the only true and lasting joy. "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart"

(Ps. 19:8). "Joy to the world, the Lord is come: Let earth receive her King!"

To emphasize His rulership it is said: "The government shall be upon his shoulder." He shall be called by terms which describe an exalted and divine ruler. His is an ever increasing government in never ending peace. "Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom." He has a throne, "the throne of David." His kingdom shall be established and upheld with righteousness forever. All this was predicted in this one short passage in Isaiah. Other prophecies of similar import may be read in Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:15-17; Psalm 2:1-9; 45:6, 7; 72; 110:1, 2; Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-10; 42:1-4; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Daniel 7:13, 14, 27; Micah 5:2-4; Zechariah 9:9.

### *The King in the New Testament*

Luke 1 quotes the words of the angel Gabriel concerning Jesus: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32, 33).

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is presented as King. This is especially apparent in Matthew, who records: (1) Jesus' royal lineage as the son of David; (2) the visit of the Wise-men to worship the newborn "King of the Jews"; (3) much teaching by Jesus about "His kingdom" (see especially Matt. 13:41 and 16:28); (4) "in the regeneration, the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory" (Matt. 19:28); (5) the request of James and John for chief places "in the kingdom" (Matt. 20:21); (6) Jesus' deliberate arrangements to fulfill (Zech. 9:9): "Behold thy king cometh" (Matt. 21:1-11); (7) the prediction of His throne of judgment before which "all nations" shall be judged (Matt. 25:31ff.); (8) Jesus' solemn affirmation in answer to Pilate's question: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" (Matt. 27:11); (9) the mockery of the soldiers and the sign on the cross, all of which emphasized that the real charge against Him was that He claimed to be king (Matt. 27:29, 42; Mark 15:18, 32; Luke 23:36, 37; John 19:19-22); (10) Jesus said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).

Certainly, Jesus was a king, is King, and always will be "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (cf. I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). It is true that He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father when all opposing power has been subdued (I Cor. 15:24, 25). He will complete and conclude His reign of intercessory and redemptive work, but He

with the Father shall reign forever.

He is "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:9). He is risen "to rule over the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:12). He is at the right hand of God, "above all rule and authority," etc. (Eph. 1:20-22). His is the name above every name, "that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow," etc. (Phil. 2:10). Those who suffer with Him are to "reign with him" (II Tim. 2:12); for He will save them "unto his eternal kingdom" (II Tim. 4:18), "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:11). He is "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5), "King of the ages" (Rev. 15:3); and "he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15; Heb. 1:8).

Still His kingship was not such as Herod imagined (Matt. 2:3), or such as the Galileans sought to make of Him (John 6:15): "they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king," or such as Pilate may have feared; for His kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36). His kingdom is not of this world, either in origin or nature; but it is in this world as well as in the next. It is to us in this world that all these Scriptures are written announcing Him as King. To us the beneficence of His rule is promised; and to us are the warnings and threats of His just wrath and vengeance upon those who are unwilling that He should rule over them. He came into this world to be a king (John 18:37; Matt. 2:2; Luke 1:32); yet He went out of it again to receive His kingdom (Luke 19:11-27); for His is a spiritual reign in the hearts of men who voluntarily accept it.

### *Exalting Him as King in our Lives*

We have seen above the testimony of the Scriptures to the ruling authority of Jesus Christ. That is what *God* thinks about the matter. "Let all . . . know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36). The trouble is that *men* do not recognize the appointment of God and accept Jesus as King. The one supreme tragedy, and the cause of all others in this world is that men do not exalt Christ as Lord. Although He is the "stone" that God has made "the head of the corner," He has been rejected by too many of the human builders. The fact that they reject Him does not alter the fact that He is their Master and Judge to whom they must answer. He has all authority and providential power over us, but *He does not force us now* to do His will. His rulership and His law are proclaimed unto men, and they are called upon to accept and obey Him, but He does not take away our power to choose or to refuse. He gives us liberty to sow as we will, *but He*

*governs strictly what we will reap.*

God has made a plain and powerful revelation of His Son as Lord and Saviour, and of His will that all men should "honor the Son even as they honor the Father." He has set forth plainly His virgin birth, His eternal being, His divine Sonship, His divine attributes, His authority and power. God has made our attitude towards His Son the great issue of our lives. Any one who is not for Him is against Him (Matt. 12:30; 10:32, 33; Luke 12:49-59; John 3:16-18, 36; 8:24, etc.). Having revealed His Son and His will, God now "commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:30, 31).

Christ should be exalted in the nation—our nation, and every nation. He was presented to the Jewish nation, an offer of righteous power and wisdom to bring them light, peace and joy. But they sought to exalt themselves, and turned Him down.

Any nation can have the great Redeemer for their own King if the people of that nation will enthrone Him in their hearts and do His will. His good will would be the law of our land tomorrow if we the people would just respect His authority and give heed to His commandment in His Word. If we would acknowledge *now* our Lord, before whom we shall some day be judged, we could have our nation freed from its greatest dangers and weaknesses—liquor, crime, greed, industrial strife, broken homes, and every form of sin. We would have the assurance of His power to preserve us and to prosper us; and we would have peace as only the Prince of Peace can establish it. But we can not exalt the divine Lord of our lives by such things as a commercialized and selfish celebration of Christmas, a formal resolution or official proclamation now and then, or by turning His church into a political pressure group that has exchanged the truth of His Word for the lies of modernism. We must exalt Him in the nation by personal and individual allegiance to Him. We must admire Him as "Wonderful," learn of Him as "Counsellor," worship and serve Him as "Mighty God," trust and love Him as "Everlasting Father," and follow Him as "Prince of Peace" with a loyalty greater than patriotism (Isa. 9:6). We must seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

For Further Study:

Geldenhuys, Norval. *The New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1951. Pp. 74-98.

## THE KING OF KINGS

Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of Isaiah*, Vol. I. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968. Pp. 180-196.

Young, E. J. *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. I. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965. Pp. 325-343. Scholarly study of Isaiah 9:2-7 on the Messianic King.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMONG MEN

The New Testament says much about the kingdom, mentioning it 140 times by the term "kingdom," besides the other terms and phrases used. The whole message of the great prophet, John the Baptist, was the importance of the coming kingdom and of personal preparation for it. Jesus taught more about the kingdom than He did about any other subject. He taught men to pray for the kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10). He said it was the greatest treasure in the world, one for which any one should joyfully sell all other possessions that he might gain the kingdom (Matt. 13:44-46). He told us all to "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). He made it more important than the food and clothing which are necessary to physical life. Surely it matters much whether we believe in the kingdom and know it, not only in theory, but in vital experience.

*What is the Kingdom of God?*

It is not easy to give a definite and brief answer which would be satisfactory to all the Scriptural uses of the phrase. Its essential idea is the reign or government of God over the lives of men. Sometimes it comprehends the characteristics and advantages of the complete submission of an individual life to the rule of God. Sometimes it refers to the whole community of men who obey God on earth. Sometimes it has reference to heaven itself as a place where God reigns in perfect peace, wisdom, and glory. But regardless of all other circumstances, it is always essentially the rule of God in the hearts of men.

Other terms and phrases are used for the same idea, and are freely interchanged with "the kingdom of God." Matthew uses the words "kingdom of heaven" about 29 times, although it is not used in any other New Testament book (cf. Matt. 13:11 with Mark 4:11; and Matt. 13:31 with Mark 4:30, 31, etc.) It is also called "his kingdom (the son of Man's)" (Matt. 13:41; 15:28); "my kingdom" (Christ's) (John 18:36; Luke 22:29-30); "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:11); "the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col. 1:13); "the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5) "my (Christ's) church" (Matt. 16:18); the "church of God" (I Tim. 3:5, 15) "the Church" (Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-32); "the

church of the first born (ones)" Heb. 12:23; or as congregations viewed distributively "churches of God" (I Cor. 11:16; I Thess. 2:14), and "churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33), and "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16).

These various expressions are not identical in their limits and points of emphasis, but they do overlap. All of them have reference to the realm of God's rule through Jesus Christ. That reign will someday be completed and unchallenged, and will continue so eternally; but it also exists now and has for many centuries in the midst of those who resist it or deny its present reality.

The kingdom is not represented as coming all at once fully formed and in its ultimate glory, but this term is used for the rule of God in different stages, and for the growing control of Christ over men through the gospel—"first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear" (Mark 4:26-29). Study the other parables of the seed and of the leaven. Chiefly, of course, it looks forward to the glorious consummation, the complete subjection of all things to God, the eternal state of righteousness, peace, and blessedness that will result when God is given full control. Jesus came to establish the kingdom by revealing the righteousness, mercy, and goodness of God's will, and by winning the hearts of men to surrender themselves to Him—by redemption of sinners and reconciliation of their hearts to God, by putting the law of God into their minds and hearts through faith and love and regeneration of the Holy Spirit—(Heb. 8:10-11; John 3:5). The government of God is truly desirable. Pray that it may prevail upon earth as it does in Heaven. (See Psalm 19:7-14.)

As for the stages of the kingdom, there are (1) the kingdom of Israel when God was their true King, (2) the kingdom of grace, and (3) the kingdom of eternal glory: or, in other words, (1) the rule of God under the Mosaic law, (2) the rule of God through Christ and the church, and (3) the consummation of His rule and full assertion of His authority over all. There were "sons of the kingdom" (by fleshly inheritance) who were cast out (Matt. 8:12). Again, there was the kingdom which was come upon Christ's generation (Matt. 12:28) in the person of the king when the kingdom suffered violence from the days of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:12; Luke 16:16).

John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles (before the cross) preached that the kingdom was just at hand, to be expected and prepared for immediately. It was certain to come before that generation died (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1). In a sense it was already come (Matt. 12:28)

## THE KINGDOM

in the person of the King, and it was suffering violence from the days of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:12; Luke 16:16). The rule of God and the principles of His realm were being presented in the preaching of Jesus, and Jesus could say, "Lo, the kingdom of God is in the midst of You" (Luke 17:21). This was said to the unbelieving Pharisees who did not have the kingdom in their hearts, but it was in the midst of them, in that its King was there proclaiming its laws and swaying His authority over them or at least some who were standing among them.

Now there is that stage of the kingdom which Jesus and John preached was "at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17), which Jesus said would come before His hearers died (Mark 9:1), of which He spoke so much during the forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), into which Paul says "we" have been translated (Col. 1:13), the kingdom formed of the redeemed while they are still among the wicked of the world (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Then there will be the triumphant kingdom to come (II Pet. 1:11; II Tim. 4:1) in which not all church members will participate, but only those who are acceptable in faith and character unto the end (I Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:21; Cf. Matt. 13:47-50). These stages are frequently not distinguished: the word is used of life under God's control and care, both now and forever.

### *Characteristics of the Kingdom*

In Jesus' teaching on the kingdom in the Gospel accounts, the following characteristics of the kingdom are to be observed.

1. It springs from seed which is the word of God (Luke 8:11).
2. It comes by a process of continued growth (Mark 4:26-32).
3. Sons of the kingdom are the righteous (Matt. 5:20) growing in the world side by side with the wicked (Matt. 13:38-41).
4. The growing stage of the kingdom takes in some "bad" who are later to be eliminated and destroyed (Matt. 13:47-50).
5. It was "at hand" in the day of John and Jesus, to come before that generation died (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1).
6. Peter was to have the keys (Matt. 16:9).
7. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10).
8. It must be entered by a new birth of water and spirit (John 3:5).
9. It is the greatest treasure a man can find in this world; men will with joy sell all else to obtain it (Matt. 13:44-46).
10. It is not a kingdom of this world (John 18:36).
11. It does not come with a great demonstration of its power—"not with observation" (Luke 17:20).



12. The least in the kingdom is greater than the greatest born of woman (Matt. 11:11).

13. It is equivalent to "eternal life" and being "saved" (Luke 18:18, 25, 26).

Moreover, whenever it came to men, it was to come not with great demonstration of force, "not with observation," but as in inward growth (Mark 4:26-28). It was to spring from seed, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11), and to be brought about by preaching of the Word (Matt. 13:18-23). It was to begin small and grow to be very great (Matt. 13:31-33). During the growing stage it takes some "bad" as well as good, who have to be separated by the angels at the end of the world (Matt. 13:47-50). The sons of the kingdom are the righteous (Matt. 5:20), who grow in the world side by side with the wicked (Matt. 13:38-41). Yet it is not a kingdom of this world (John 18:36). It must be entered by a new birth of the Spirit (through faith in and submission to the word of the Spirit) and of water (baptism into Christ) (John 3:5; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; I Pet. 1:23). And the least in the kingdom is greater than the greatest born of women (Matt. 11:11). Having part in it is equivalent to having "eternal life" and being "saved" (Luke 18:18, 25, 26).

One thing is evident—that Jesus did not mean to set up a worldly, materialistic, or military kingdom. The devil offered Him the kingdoms of the whole world, but He refused them (Matt. 4:8-10). The Jews and even the apostles wanted that kind of kingdom, but Jesus disappointed them. After the feeding of the five thousand, they sought to take Him by force and make Him king, but Jesus refused. The very next day He preached a sermon on the spiritual and eternal purposes of His ministry which was so unacceptable to them that multitudes went away and followed Him no more (John 6). This same idea presents itself at the time of the Triumphal Entry, when the people in all the clamor and excitement of a mob, gathered together as a whole nation at Jerusalem for the Passover, and welcomed Jesus into the city as "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38), and as bringing in the kingdom of His father, David (Mark 11:10). If he had wanted a kingdom of force, or of material wealth, or of political organizations, He could have had it (see Matt. 26:53; John 18:36-37). Because of materialistic ambitions of the people regarding the Messiah, Jesus avoided telling plainly that He was the Christ, and He had to teach of His life's purpose and His kingdom by parables in order to hold their ambition and to try to make plain the unwelcome message of a spiritual kingdom, instead of temporal.

## THE KINGDOM

### *Ways of Speaking of the Kingdom*

One group of passages represents the kingdom under the figure of a place. This is the case in all expressions involving the act of entering into the kingdom (Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3). It is better to enter into the kingdom of heaven with one eye than, having two, to be cast out (Mark 9:27). Men are said to be near or far from it (Mark 12:34). Those who enter are those who are reborn and who do the will of God, who have by relationship with the Saviour and by their characters a certain fitness for it (Luke 9:62; Matt. 7:21; John 3:5). But after entrance has been secured, it is a place of enjoyment, as in Matthew 25:34, and a place where even Jesus Himself eats and drinks as in Matthew 26:29.

In a second class of passages the kingdom is represented as a possession. It is said to belong to the poor in spirit and to those persecuted for righteousness (Matt. 5:3, 10; Luke 18:16). It will be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43). It is the gift of God (Luke 12:32). It is the most valuable of possessions, and it is the height of wisdom to seek and the summit of prosperity to secure it (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31).

A third class of passages represents the kingdom as an organization constituted of a certain class of men. It is a body politic, growing from small beginnings into large proportions and power (Matt. 13:31; Mark 4:26, 27). Its members are the children of the kingdom (Matt. 13:38). Like every human organization, this, too, must have its offices and officers; but to suppose that these are to be appointed without reference to their character and on the same principle as in the political sphere—in order to lord it over their fellow members—is a grievous error. They rule in the very act of serving their brethren (Matt. 20:21-28; Luke 9:48).

A fourth class of passages designates the kingdom as an order of things, or a dispensation. Especially the Old Testament prophets announce the coming of this new order, first in Jerusalem and then to the whole world, under the dominion of the Messiah (Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 27)—a kingdom of the saints (holy ones). It shall be the final and everlasting dispensation, characterized by righteousness, justice and truth, by peace and perfect harmony, by prosperity and security (Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-10; 65:17-25; Micah 4:1-4). It was this that John and Jesus announced the approach of—God's rule in the transformed hearts of men. Jesus taught His disciples to announce the kingdom, to pray for it, and to prepare for it (Matt. 6:10-13; 7:23-27; Luke

12:35-48). The new feature of the dispensation thus announced is its spirituality. Its members are in it by choice and by their perfect willingness to do God's will. Thus its law is written on their hearts and in their minds (Heb. 8:10-12; Rom. 12:1, 2). It is a kingdom whose members share a common faith which dominates the life, and common gratitude for grace received, and common experience of self-renunciation or repentance, bringing all things into subjection to God and His Son, Jesus Christ. It is not brought about by outward coercion or characterized by external regulation. Its reality and power are constituted by inward transformation. One must be born anew to see it properly (John 3:3). "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

The kingdom did come in the generation of the apostles as Jesus said it would (Mark 9:1). It did come with power on the day of Pentecost after His resurrection. Peter was given the keys (Matt. 16:19). Paul went everywhere preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 20:25), although he determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). Philip preached the kingdom of God, and the faith of the Samaritans caused them to be baptized into Christ and become members of the church (Acts 8:12). Paul says God "translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13), and John says "he made us to be a kingdom" (Rev. 1:6). The church is a kingdom. Today, in our dispensation, it is THE kingdom. It is certainly not a democracy as to its nature. Christ is the absolute monarch over all things pertaining to the church (Eph. 1:22).

The Scriptures examined in this study emphasize what participation in Christ's kingdom demands of the individual. Jesus wants us to count the cost of discipleship. He deliberately discourages the careless follower (Luke 9:58). He strictly demands undivided allegiance of those who want to do something else first (9:59-62). We must not permit ourselves to allow anything to become an excuse for resisting the command of Christ. The blessings and benefits of the kingdom depend upon the absolute rule of God; divine wisdom and goodness must have their way and have our fullest co-operation. In the very nature of the case, our participation of God's kingdom demands absolute unconditional surrender of ourselves to Him, and presents to us the cross by which we are crucified unto the world and the world is crucified unto us (9:23). He that would save himself from such surrender will lose everything, even what he saves. He that will give himself up to God's control is assured of God's everlasting care.

## THE KINGDOM

### For Further Study:

- Campbell, Alexander: *The Christian System*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1835. Pp. 107-152. Comprehensive study of scriptures relating to the kingdom.
- Ladd, G. E. *Jesus and the Kingdom*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1964. Scholarly exposition of classical premillennialism. Summarized in Ladd's article, "Kingdom of God," *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. M. C. Tenney. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963. Pp. 466-467.
- Marshall, I. H. "Kingdom of God," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. III. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975. Pp. 801-809.
- Stott, John R. W. *Basic Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964. Pp. 4-22. Summarizes Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.
- Stevens, G. B. *The Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. London: T. and T. Clark, 1906. Pp. 27-40. Helpful insights concerning the Kingdom of God.

THE WISE AND GODLY MAN  
(Outline of the Sermon on the Mount)

Sermon Purpose: To describe true righteousness and true success

I. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IS BLESSED EVEN WHEN IT MAY NOT SEEM SO. Matthew 5:3-12

Who is really well off? Being blessed is a matter of being wise and godly, not of circumstances. Wisdom not of this world.

- A. The poor in spirit (who know their need) have the kingdom. v. 3
- B. The mourning (who see and feel this world's grief) shall be comforted. v. 4
- C. The meek (who are not wilful, but submissive) shall inherit the earth. v. 5
- D. Those hungering for righteousness will be filled. v. 6
- E. The merciful will receive mercy. v. 7
- F. The pure in heart will see God. v. 8
- G. The peacemakers will be called sons of God. v. 9
- H. Those persecuted for righteousness have the kingdom. v. 10
- I. Those suffering for Jesus are richly rewarded, and are most joyful. vs. 11-12

II. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO THE WORLD. Matthew 5:13-16

- A. As salt: worthless without salting effect. v. 13
- B. As light: not to be hid, but to shine to all men, that God may be praised. vs. 14-16

III. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO THE LAW OF THE O.T. Matthew 5:17-48

- A. Jesus does not destroy the law, but fulfills it; for it must be fulfilled. vs. 17, 18
- B. Attitude toward God's law determines place in the kingdom. v. 19
- C. In the kingdom righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees. v. 20
- D. Old time views of the law contrasted with true righteousness. vs. 21-48

## THE KINGDOM

### CONDUCT AND CHARACTER:

1. The law about killing. vs. 21-26
  - a. Killing compared with anger and contempt: MURDER AND MALICE. vs. 21-22
  - b. The duty of seeking reconciliation promptly. vs. 23, 24
  - c. Danger of being brought to judgment with differences unsettled. vs. 25, 26
2. The law about adultery. vs. 27-30
  - a. Adultery and lust: the act compared with desire. vs. 27, 28
  - b. Danger of tolerating temptation and living with lust: remove the cause of sin at all costs. vs. 29, 30
3. The law about divorce. vs. 31, 32
  - a. Obligation to give a divorce certificate. v. 31
  - b. Divorce and adultery: all divorce is wrong in some way. vs. 32
4. The law about oaths. vs. 33-37
  - a. Oaths must be performed. v. 33
  - b. Oaths are ineffective and presumptuous. vs. 34-36
  - c. Oaths are unnecessary and tending to evil. v. 37
5. The law about retaliation or just revenge. vs. 38-42
  - a. Punishment must be equal to the crime. v. 38
  - b. Do not fight back at all. v. 39
  - c. Return good for evil. vs. 40, 41
  - d. Give to them that ask. v. 42
6. The law about loving your neighbor. vs. 43-47
  - a. Love limited so as to encourage hate. v. 43
  - b. Love your enemies and be like God. vs. 44, 45
  - c. Love for friends only is no more than the worst men do. vs. 46, 47
- E. True righteousness is unlimited, perfect, like God. v. 48

### IV. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN'S MOTIVES IN RELIGION. Matthew 6:1-18

- A. Righteousness is done for God, not to be seen of men. v. 1
- B. Give alms not for glory of men, but in secret, and God will repay. vs. 2-4
- C. Pray not to be seen by men, but in secret, and God will answer. vs. 5, 6
- D. Pray not with empty words, but directly and sincerely, after this manner: the model prayer given. vs. 7-15

## THE WISE AND GODLY MAN

- E. Fast not to be seen by men, but in secret and God will honor it. vs. 16-18

### V. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO WEALTH AND WORRY. Matthew 6:19-34

- A. Have your treasure not on earth, but in heaven; for your heart will be with it. vs. 19-21
- B. Divided aims will fail: you cannot serve God and money. vs. 22-24
- C. Be not anxious, for God will provide for you. vs. 25, 26
  - 1. God feeds the birds and will feed you, vs. 25, 26
  - 2. Anxiety accomplishes nothing. v. 27
  - 3. God clothes the flowers and will clothe you. vs. 28-30. He knows your need.
  - 4. Therefore, do not worry like the Gentiles; God knows your needs. vs. 31, 32
  - 5. Seek His kingdom and righteousness, and all will be supplied. v. 33
  - 6. Don't borrow trouble from tomorrow; today has enough of its own. v. 34

### VI. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO JUDGING OTHERS. Matthew 7:1-6

- A. Judge not, for as you judge you will be judged. vs. 1, 2
- B. Why see and correct flaws in others when you have greater faults yourself? vs. 3-5
- C. Don't entrust treasures to those who cannot receive them. v. 6

### VII. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN AT PRAYER. Matthew 7:7-11

- A. Ask, seek, and knock; such efforts will be rewarded. vs. 7, 8
- B. Even a man will give good things to his children when they ask; how much more will God do it! vs. 9-11

### VIII. THE GODLY MAN'S GOLDEN RULE OF CONDUCT TOWARD OTHERS. Matthew 7:12

### IX. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN AND DANGER TO BE AVOIDED. Matthew 7:13-23

- A. The broad and popular way leading to destruction. vs. 13, 14
- B. False prophets coming in disguise but known by their fruits, as any tree is. vs. 15-20

## THE KINGDOM

### C. False professions and false hopes. vs. 21-23

1. Only those who do God's will shall enter the kingdom. v. 21
2. Many will claim mighty works in Christ's name, yet they will be cast out. vs. 22, 23

### X. CONCLUSION: THE WISDOM OF OBEYING CHRIST ILLUSTRATED BY TWO BUILDERS. Matthew 7:24-27

- A. The wise man hears and does what Christ says. vs. 24, 25
- B. The foolish man hears but does not obey. vs. 26, 27

### For Further Study:

Barclay, William. *Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. I. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956. Pp. 78-300. Helpful on word meanings, illustrations and application.

Fowler, Harold. *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. I. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1968. Pp. 203-442. Extensive comment.

Hendriksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973. Pp. 258-383. Helpful comment.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans. Indepth exposition of the Sermon on the Mount.

Thomas, Leslie. *Outlines on the Sermon on the Mount*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1958. Practical studies on the Sermon on the Mount.



## STANDARDS OF THE KINGDOM

Isn't it surprising? We do not have any extensive records of Jesus' teaching. Apparently it was always remarkably brief and simple. Although He taught the people informally day after day instead of just on special occasions, and although they sometimes pressed upon Him and kept Him from having time to eat and sleep normally, still the records of His teaching are very short. The longest single record of a sermon or teaching session in the New Testament is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, and 7).

*Setting for the Sermon*

Jesus' sermon recorded in Luke 6 is usually identified with the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. At least it is very similar to parts of that longer account. The "level place" to which Jesus came down (Luke 6:17) may be a small plateau somewhat below the mountaintop but still on the mountain. There are several places like this on the mountains not far from Capernaum. Jesus had spent the night in prayer on the mountain and first named twelve of His disciples to be His apostles. Only Luke tells us that the naming of the apostles preceded this sermon (Luke 6:12-16). All the Gospel accounts are so very brief that they must omit many things that Jesus did and said.

It was summer, in the first half of Jesus' second year of ministry, right in the middle of the fifteen or sixteen months which He spent in Galilee. Great crowds had been coming to Jesus for miracles and to hear Him. A considerable multitude of them had become His "disciples" (i.e., learners who followed Him more or less regularly). From them (see Luke 6:13-17) He now chose twelve to be missionaries, ones to be sent out with some responsibility.

This magnificent sermon on true righteousness was delivered primarily to the crowd of disciples (Luke 6:20; Matt. 5:1, 2); yet there was also present a vast throng of people from various places up to a hundred miles away (Luke 6:17).

The Sermon on the Mount was spoken to Jews who lived under the law and the old covenant, but who also were disciples of Jesus. He had been teaching multitudes about the kingdom that was at hand, and exhorting people to repent and seek the will of God as preparation, part of the privileges and obligations of the kingdom. In this

## THE KINGDOM

sermon He described the nature of the godly life and the kind of person who receives the favor of God. It was not a sermon on the gospel of God's grace or how God provides salvation for men; but it did first point out that the ones who feel poor and needy, who are sorrowing and seeking, are really well off because of what they may receive from God. He told what inner questions and motives must accompany religious deeds, such as praying, fasting, and giving. He urged men to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness rather than things that mean "security" and "success" in this world. He exhorted them to seek, ask, and expect to receive, to enter in by the narrow door.

He warned of four great dangers in the way of life: (1) taking the broad way with the crowd, (2) listening to false teachers, (3) trusting in phony religion that is not doing the will of God, and (4) hearing the truth and not doing it.

Both Jesus and John the Baptist had been calling the people to repentance: that is, to turn their minds and hearts to do God's will. This sermon gives some of Jesus' explicit instruction about the way of living that is really righteous and pleasing to God. It describes what the mind is like which has been changed in repentance and is functioning by a genuine faith in God, with a good knowledge of the love and goodness of God. Although these words were spoken to Jews while they were still under the law and before the converting power of the gospel was fully established, they do not describe the actions of the flesh under the constraint of the law as much as they do the fruit of the Spirit in men set free from sin and filled with the newness of life in Christ.

### *Significance of the Sermon*

R. C. Foster characterized the sermon:

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest statement ever made on the general subject of religion and morals. It is at once profound and practical. It offers full and final discussion of some of the most elemental and persistent problems concerning our relation to God and to our fellow men. However, in regard to some of these problems it gives only a preliminary statement. The gospel is based upon the divine person of the Son of God and the divine program of redemption through His death and resurrection. Quite obviously, all of this could not be clearly stated as yet. Peter's sermon at Pentecost offers the necessary

complement to the Sermon on the Mount. It is not intimated in any way that Jesus has given a complete statement of His message in this opening sermon. It is not to be isolated from the rest of the teaching of Jesus, but must be joined inseparable with it.<sup>1</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount presents the highest ideals of living the world has ever received in the most beautiful language ever conceived. It opens with a series of sayings which sum up the ideal life of the Christian, and it closes with a passionate appeal to the world to accept and follow these ideals and thus build on the rock instead of the sand. . . . It should enable us to see clearly the absolute perfection of Jesus' teaching, the universality of its application to every life, the universal failure of mankind to attain to these ideals and our dependence upon God's love for forgiveness and help.<sup>2</sup>

Some say the church is not necessary if you just follow the Sermon on the Mount. They often think that a luncheon club using principles of the Sermon on the Mount can do the work of the church and render the church unnecessary. A person can adopt much of Jesus' teaching and still not believe in Jesus. There are many in the church because they agree with much of Jesus' teaching. Yet they are motivated by selfishness. "I love me. I'm the most precious guy. I want to save me so I'll join the church to save myself." Some like Ghandi have preached more of the ideas of the Sermon on the Mount than many preachers. But Ghandi was no Christian.

Some try to apply the teaching of Jesus to society and not to the individual. The Sermon on the Mount is not for society but is for Christians. Any attempt to enforce Christian standards or righteousness on unbelievers and non-Christians will not get the job done! The church should not attempt to enforce on society Jesus' standards. Christians must practice them and do their best to make believers out of non-Christians.

Many consider Jesus not as Lord and Master, but as a reformer and example, the highest man, the supreme teacher. This is "damning with faint praise." Any praise that considers Jesus less than God is not enough. When Nicodemus called Jesus teacher, Jesus gave him a test

---

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Foster, *Studies in the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1938), P. 466.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

to see if his obedience would prove that he really considered Jesus as a Teacher sent from God. (John 3).

*Relation to the Law and Gospel*

The Sermon on the Mount is not the gospel. It is not a philosophy on what one ought to be. The Gospel is stated in I Corinthians 15:1-4. J. S. Stewart emphasizes that the early preachers declared that in the death and resurrection of Christ the kingdom of God had broken into human history with great power. He objects to the vague, non-doctrinal perversion of Christianity:

The Gospel is regarded as a codification of human ideals and aspirations; religious instruction means teaching the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus is the noblest pattern of the good life. This, it is assumed, is basic Christianity: anything which goes beyond it is 'sectarian theology,' mere debatable theory. What this view fails utterly to realize is that the Christian religion is not primarily a discussion of desirable human virtues and qualities—not that at all—but a message about God; not a summary of the ways men ought to act in an ideal society, but an account of the way in which God has acted in history decisively and for ever.<sup>3</sup>

Paul warns against preaching another gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). The Sermon on the Mount preached as a way of life with redemptive qualities apart from the covenant of grace through Christ's death is preaching another gospel. It is not the Sermon on the Mount in you the hope of glory but *Christ* in you the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

The more you study the Sermon on the Mount the more you realize that it is not really good news. The better we understand it the less rejoicing it causes. Studying this sermon can make you feel bad. If you don't feel guilt in your conscience, you are dead or dulled. If it is the gospel, we are still under law. Though its precepts are spiritual ideals—higher than the Old Testament laws—they are still laws; and if such instruction is all we have or need for salvation, then salvation is by works, and Christ died in vain (Gal. 2:21; 3:21).

Its purpose is similar to that of the law of Moses: To bring us to Christ for righteousness by revealing true righteousness in precept for us to admire and desire, and that we might examine ourselves

---

<sup>3</sup> James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946). Pp. 65-66.

## STANDARDS OF THE KINGDOM

and repent. If it stood alone, without a sacrifice for sins, we would also despair. It examines men in the light of God's holiness, and no man passes the examination. It stirs our conscience and makes us glad to accept the gift of righteousness from the author of such standards. It sets forth elements of the 'perfection' to which we 'press on' (Heb. 6:1) and particulars of "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" unto which we are called to attain through the full ministration of the church (Eph. 4:11-13). It lets us know the great goal of man, implies the need of help and introduces the help for attainment.

When men killed Christ they expressed their rebellion to righteousness, hatred against God, falsehood against truth, selfishness against service, hypocrisy against sincerity. Men hated the law of God. They would not endure God living among them. The world does not like the bright light of holiness and the demands and implications of it. Paul said, "All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). You cannot manifest the righteousness of Christ and get all men to think well of you.

In this sermon Jesus teaches His deity by direct claim (Matt. 7:21-24), by tone of authority (Matt. 7:29) and by demonstration of the divine quality of His teaching. Suffering in personal devotion to Him is made the highest blessedness and cause for the greatest rejoicing (Matt. 5:11, 12). Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness is made life's most urgent pursuit (Matt. 6:33).

If this sermon is not the plan of salvation, then why was it given to us? God loves us. He wants us to know the nature of righteousness. He came to this world not only to call us from hell but to call us to heaven; from unrighteousness to righteousness; from darkness to light. He calls us not just out of hell to a hellish life outside of hell. Christianity is not just a fire escape from hell.

The Sermon on the Mount will make us conscious of our unrighteousness. We see God better when we understand these standards of righteousness. This is true no matter how good we feel we are. Beware of these dangerous ruts: "I do enough." "I am good enough." "I give enough." "I pray enough." This attitude is next door to worshipping self.

This sermon shows us our need of the gospel. These high standards of righteousness make us aware of our need of God's righteousness.

### *Standards of Blessedness*

Reading the Beatitudes, we are immediately reminded of Isaiah

55:8, 9: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount contradicts all common thinking. He says the person who is really well off and is in the best circumstances is the one who is poor, mourning, etc. We are not the best off when satisfied with ourselves—that's one sure thing!

The source of happiness is not in one's personality, not in circumstances. We find happiness when we are put in a right relation with God. Christ tells us how to be as beautiful as God wished us to be when first He thought of us. We say we would be happy if we had things or if we were some place. Jesus spoke not of possessions or places, but of ourselves. Notice that the first seven blessings are pronounced upon states of mind or heart, and the only external circumstance mentioned as blessed is persecution—a thing that we are prone to fear and shun at almost any cost (Matt. 5:3-12). He says that those who know need and hunger for righteousness are well off, and that those who are lowly and mourning are happy. This shows that He did not mean a shallow happiness or gaiety. This blessedness is more than just a happy feeling; it is the favor of God upon those described. Most of these sayings are just the opposite of the world's view, and we are too much conformed to the world. We need to study them much and often to "be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

The qualities which Jesus blesses are not those exalted by the Jewish teachers of the law. Alas, how often we fail to appreciate these and exalt other, even opposite traits! There is not self-righteousness here in Jesus' list; no Pharisee fits into the picture, no matter how orthodox in confession or how correct in forms of religion.

These have the favor of God and shall have the kingdom—its mercy, its comfort, its satisfaction, its fellowship divine, its adoption, and its inheritance—because they are prepared in heart to receive it and abide in it. They are conscious of what they do not have, and are unsatisfied with the spirit they have attained (See Rev. 3:17, 18). They are grieved by sin and are moved by love and sympathy (Study II Cor. 7:9-11). They are not arrogant, willful and headstrong, but humble, gentle and docile (See examples of Moses, Num. 12:3; Jesus, Matt. 11:29; Cf. II Cor. 10; I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 2:24, 25; Tit. 3:1, 2; James 1:21; I Pet. 3:15). They intensely desire true righteousness

## STANDARDS OF THE KINGDOM

and will not be satisfied with anything less, yet they are forgiving (See Matt. 18:35). They are not hypocritical, with a divided heart harboring evil purposes, but they are "all of a kind," even to the secret depths consistent with their outward professions (See I Sam. 16:7; Ps. 24:4; Prov. 4:23). They seek and practice reconciliation (See Rom. 12:14-18), yet they will not compromise or forsake righteousness or Jesus Christ even to avoid persecution. All such are blessed. "Theirs is the kingdom." They are not perfect in works of the law, or rich and great in the sight of the world, but they are receptive to the grace of God which gave God's Son, and will "with him freely give us all things." Whom the Lord blesses is blessed indeed!

### *Standards of Active Righteousness*

Too many people appear not to realize that Christianity is much more than abstinence from certain disreputable deeds and odious evils. A stick or stone could be a good Christian if the ideal were absence of guilt. But innocence is part of righteousness, and we too commonly have an inadequate, if not wrong, idea of what is innocent.

Jesus indicates that not all that is legal is innocent. We are guilty when we have not formally violated the letter of the law (Matt. 5:21-42).

R. C. Foster points out:

Jesus emphasized the inner life, making the thought and intent to do evil as sinful as the deed itself. It is not enough to avoid murder, but we must not hate. Adultery is to be shunned, but lust also must be crushed. Evil words and deeds rise out of the heart. We must guard the heart as the very citadel of life.<sup>4</sup>

The golden rule (Matt. 7:12) is not so much cause as it is effect. It is the result of being right with God. It is not how to do it as much as being the result of being in tune with God. Jesus said in John 15 that we can not do anything without Him. Righteousness is not merely negative. That is live and let live. But Christ demands positive service.

Christ offers a higher standard of righteousness and power to attain. Do for God and not for self. "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to

---

<sup>4</sup> R. C. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). The power one gains by serving Christ selflessly is greater than any self-righteousness.

Our righteousness must be in what we do, and not merely in what we don't do. Most of us realize that if we would do some terrible deeds (as a habit, anyway) we would lose all hope of salvation. But we all need to realize that nothing can more effectively cut us off from grace and from hope than the habit of doing nothing; that is, nothing by faith, in the name of Christ, or to the glory of God. Before we "accepted" Christ we sinned sins of omission. Now we must confess and be forgiven of sins that are hard to see and easy to excuse, because they are what we did not do. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

We cannot excuse ourselves by saying that we have done as well as others, or all that the occasion deserved, or all that the law required. Christ's standard is "more than others." He asks that good deeds flow *out of the love in our hearts*, not from the requirements of the occasion or law or custom or force. Go the second mile. "Let him have thy cloak also." (Matt. 5:40-41). "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44). The good Samaritan is an example Jesus gave to teach how it is done (Luke 10:25-37).

The standard of active goodness Christ holds before us is always above us, because it is likeness to God in His perfection. Again, it is from a changed heart within, out of a known kinship with God and out of accepting gladly the privilege of being like Him, having the "love of God shed abroad in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). Such standards direct us in the greatest possible growth in the character befitting children of God, and at the same time save us from complacency. They keep us worshiping Him and seeking His mercy, having no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3).

Foster reminds us, "the person who can study the Sermon on the Mount without suffering distress of conscience had better look to his conscience."<sup>5</sup>

#### For Further Study:

Foster, R. C. *Studies in the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1938. Pp. 462-487. Discusses the principles in the

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 484-485.



## STANDARDS OF THE KINGDOM

Sermon on the Mount and relates the sermon to the social gospel and the deity of Christ.

See books listed on page 186 for comments on Matthew 5.

## PURITY IN HEART AND LIFE

God made us "male and female," and endowed us with wonderful powers and great blessings in our relations with one another and with our children. For our good, and in order that we might not corrupt and pervert ourselves, He commanded strict control and right use of our nature. God who made us gave this command. He knows the good effects of right living and the disastrous results of wrong living. Some men, in their ignorance or willful blindness, may not see the wrong in adultery, but God's Word makes known its sinfulness and God's wrath against it. He plainly, openly, and repeatedly forbids and condemns perversion of the body in fleshly indulgence.

*Adultery Forbidden and Condemned*

The New Testament again and again declares the terrible fate in eternity that awaits the violators of God's law of chastity. *They shall not enter into the kingdom of God* (read I Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 5:3-6). They are shut out of the city of God, away from the tree of life (Rev. 22:14, 15). The wrath of God is upon them (Col. 3:5, 6; Heb. 13:4). Their part shall be in the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8).

Many other warnings and exhortations are given against the lusts of the flesh. They "war against the soul" (I Pet. 2:11). They enslave, corrupt, and defile a person (II Pet. 2:18-22). This kind of sin militates against the body itself (I Cor. 6:18), and brings upon it the worst kind of disease and debility (Rom. 1:26, 27). See also Acts 15:28, 29; Gal. 5:16, 17, 19, 21; Rom. 13:13, 14; I Thess. 4:3-8; I Tim. 1:8-10; Tit. 2:11, 12; Heb. 12:14-17; Rev. 2:14, 20, 22. This terrible sin destroys the beauty and blessedness of the home and breaks the bonds of the marriage union (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). It is not to be tolerated in the life of a church member; if he will not repent he must be expelled from the fellowship (I Cor. 5:1-11).

Wicked men may excuse this sin, may play with its enticements, may cherish it; but God hates it and condemns it. He can save us from it, but not in it. He says so much about it and against it in His Word; surely we must not condone it or appease it, but we must speak boldly against it. It will not be pleasing to the crowd and may bring strong persecution to condemn a sin which is so popular and

which is committed by men in high places. John the Baptist lost his life because he preached boldly and plainly against the adultery of the king. But this generation certainly needs faithful and fearless preachers to point out its sin.

The law is the same for men and women. We are ready to speak with scorn about "fallen women"; what of "fallen men"?

*Avoid the Path of the Wicked*

Proverbs 4:14-23 emphasizes the need of avoiding the influence of evil companions and of the observation of evil ways and doings. "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (I Cor. 15:33). "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints; nor filthiness, nor foolish talking. . . . Be not ye therefore partakers with them; . . . and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them; for the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of" (Eph. 5:3-12). Lust arises from evil thoughts, which are gendered by enticing sights or suggestive words. If we are to keep our hearts pure and our minds on worthy and holy things, we must avoid, resist, and reprove evil.

As Alexander Pope in his "Essay on Man" said:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As to be hated needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

How can one frequent the movies or the dance, or read lewd literature, or give his ear to vile stories without disobeying God and defiling his soul? Just because everyone else in your school or social set is doing it is no reason why you must walk in the same pathway of darkness. Do I mean to say that movies are evil associations that lead to sin? I certainly do. Their advertisements and research indicate that movies specialize in that which is lewd, licentious, and immoral.

A few years ago a foundation employed university professors of sociology and social science (not noted for being prudish) to make a systematic investigation of American movies and their moral influence. They checked fifteen hundred separate pictures and found that the first principle theme in the movies is sex; the second is crime; and the third is a kind of promiscuous and unworthy love-making that is more sex than anything else. It is obvious that since this research the movies have become more openly immoral and

pornographic. The programs and movies on TV show a similar preoccupation with sex and immorality.

George Rawlinson warns:

He that dallies with temptation, he that knowingly goes into the company of the impure, he that in his solitary chamber defiles himself, he that hears without rebuking these obscene words, transgresses against God's law, and, unless he repents, cuts himself off from God.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus plainly teaches that entertaining evil desires in the heart is the same as adultery in guiltiness before God. "Everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

### *Purity of Heart*

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). In the Bible the word "heart" is used to mean all the inner, mental and spiritual nature of man and its functions—such as thinking, believing, feeling, willing, judging, etc. (Matt. 9:4; 13:15; 22:37; Mark 2:8; Rom. 10:10; II Cor. 9:7; I John 3:20, 21). Purity is the state of being unadulterated, unmixed. Think what makes pure soap or pure water. A pure heart is one not corrupted by opposition within itself, at least one that does not entertain or seek low things as well as high—one that has one dominating conviction, one all-subduing purpose. It is very similar to what Jesus meant when He said, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil . . . darkness. . . . No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:23, 24). Note the example of Paul: "One thing I do" (Phil. 3:13, 14). James clearly sets purity of heart in opposition to "double-mindedness," and twice indicates the ill condition of the double-minded (James 1:8; 4:8). Paul specifically warns against "youthful lusts" as corrupting a "pure heart" (II Tim. 2:22).

If the physical heart is vital to our life and welfare, the spiritual heart is even more so. Naturally, out of it "are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). It is the seat of our purposes and the spring of our actions (read Mark 7:21-23). No matter what a man may think on special occasions that he wants to be, he will be whatever he has in his mind and heart hour after hour and day after day; "for as he

<sup>1</sup> George Rawlinson, *The Pulpit Commentary: Exodus*, Vol. I. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961 reprint), p. 138.

thinketh within himself, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). No man can think down and live up. "Sow a thought, and reap an act. Sow an act, and reap a habit. Sow a habit, and reap a character. Sow a character, and reap a destiny." The center of the character is the will, but the center of the will is the attention.

Each of us has only so much mental space. What is filled with frivolity, foolishness, and filth cannot be filled with goodness and godliness. Memorize Phil. 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" and follow it.

### *Sacredness of the Body, a Temple of God*

The body is not in itself or of necessity evil. It can be a good instrument and servant of the spirit for righteous works. It must be kept in subjection (I Cor. 9:27). The evil is in letting it become enslaved to sin. "The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body" (I Cor. 6:13). The Lord redeemed the body, as well as created it. It is "bought with a price" and belongs to Him. We have no right to misuse and corrupt it. On the contrary, we have a very real obligation to develop it and make it a fit and effective instrument for Christ's service.

Alcoholic liquors slowly poison the body. They immediately affect its co-ordination and control. They unnaturally stimulate some of its vital processes and cause perversion of its appetites. In nearly all cases the user of liquor is led to sexual sin, because the body is not only unnaturally aroused by it, but the conscience and sense of moral restraint are deadened. The homes of our land will be not only threatened, but viciously attacked, as long as liquor is commonly used among us. The young people who would be pure, who would know the joys of true love and honorable marriage, who would be parents of admirable children, and who would come to old age in health of body, peace of mind, and hope of soul must settle it in their minds utterly to refuse alcoholic drink. Let us also turn away from all inflaming of fleshly passions by immodest dress, unclean words, or suggestive acts.

If we will have the faith in Christ to take His perfect counsel in these things we will find that self-denial with Christ is far greater glory and joy than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." It will be greatly to our own advantage to keep our bodies clean and useful vehicles of our own personalities all our lifetime, rather than

## THE KINGDOM

making them habit-bound battlegrounds and even diseased wreckage to burden our lives. But most of all, it is our crowning privilege and honor, as well as duty, to surrender our bodies to God and let Christ live in us and work through us His glorious works of righteousness and mercy, producing the fruits of the Spirit, blessing all around us, and preparing us for eternal life in a transformed body of glory like His own.

### For Further Study:

- Lindsell, Harold. *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Washington: Canon Press, 1973. Pp. 95-109; 117-118; 159-180. Deals with the problems of sexual immorality and pornography and finds the power for purity in the life in the Spirit.
- Lutzer, Erwin W. *The Morality Gap: An Evangelical Response to Situation Ethics*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1972. Attempt to develop a consistently Biblical ethic.
- Ridenour, Fritz. *It All Depends*. Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1969. Analyzes situation ethics and the playboy philosophy in the light of Biblical morality.
- Skornia, H. J. *Television and Society*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965. Critical look at the place of television in American society.

## CAPTURING THE IMAGINATION

In recent years juvenile crime has increased by alarming proportions. Many juvenile officials have described these teenage offenders as frustrated, confused, and mixed up mentally. The ungodly lives of adults as well as youth in our society grows out of confused and corrupt thinking.

Paul emphasizes the importance of thoughts and imaginations: "With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity" (Rom. 12:1, 2; J. B. Phillips)

*Thoughts Make the Man*

Bishop Taylor Smith aptly observed: "You're not what you think you are, but what you think, you *are*." Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." But that was not original with him. Marcus Aurelius, wise man of ancient Rome said, "Our life is what our thoughts make of it." But before Aurelius said it, the wise man of the Bible said, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Satan tries to captivate our minds. The secret is to "gird up our minds" (I Pet. 1:13; RSV). Cultivate spiritual thinking by meditation on the things of God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee" (Isa. 26:3; KJV).

The importance of our thoughts must not be denied or diminished. Proverbs 4:20-27 speaks of the vital need to keep true teachings within the heart, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding the "war of the mind." "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:3, 4).

Jesus also said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil

thoughts proceed, fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). The responsibility for sin is in man, not in his environment, or his economic condition, etc., as much as these may furnish occasion for sin. The desires are harbored and the choices are made within the individual. *You cannot live up and think down!* The only real difference between the worst and the best is what a person thinks. Therefore the tastes we cultivate, the attitudes we hold, the principles we believe in, and the desires we cherish have more to do with our character than anything else. W. E. Hocking has truly said, "The changing of human nature is the changing of desires." What we fill our hearts and minds with just might make the difference between heaven and hell. What thoughts come to your mind hour after hour—what do you think about more than anything else—when you just relax and let your mind wander? What is your wishful thinking centered on? Has the dream of "moreishness" captured your wishful thinking? Do you think about the mini-skirted girl when your mind falls into its "day-dream"? Is your mind filled mainly with gloating thoughts of self-accomplishments?

The Bible uses the word "heart" to mean all the inner, mental and spiritual nature of man and its functions, such as thinking, feeling, believing, willing, judging, etc. (Matt. 9:4; 13:15; 22:37; Mk. 2:8; Rom. 10:10; II Cor. 9:7; I John 3:20, 21.) Naturally out of it "are the issues of life." For it is the seat of our purposes and the spring of our actions.

The character of our hearts is made by the way we think and feel about things: both our deliberate, fundamental thoughts and feelings about God and the world and ourselves, and the unguarded flow of thoughts and feelings that fill up every day. Those thoughts and feelings are very often conflicting. We must choose between them. Some of them become dominant. All of them leave their impression upon us! Those to which we give some expression gain the ascendancy over others in determining what we really are like in heart.

Therefore we must be careful of the words we speak (Prov. 4:24); for they not only reveal the inner man, but they help to make him what he is. "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear" (Eph. 4:29). "But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints; nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which



## CAPTURING THE IMAGINATION

are not befitting . . . and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them; for the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of" (Eph. 5:3-12). James says that if we fully control the tongue, we are able to master the whole body (James 3:2).

### *Flee These Things*

Don't be fooled into thinking you cannot control your imagination—thoughts. That's exactly what Satan wants you to think, as he pours into your mind suggestive actions, images of luxurious living, forbidden experiences which you yet *do* experience vicariously. "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Phil. 3:13-15).

What occupies our attention fills our heart, and what takes our time consumes our lives. We are no better than those things to which we give favorable attention. Do not give time and attention to the attractions of fleshly indulgence. "Take time to be holy." Our attention is very largely directed by our eyes. Hence the Bible warns us against letting our eyes wander to sinful things. What we see helps make us what we are through directing our thoughts; but what we are will help to determine what we see. The heart directs the eye, but in turn is fed by it. Job was able to say that he "made a covenant with his eyes concerning the way that they should look upon a maiden" (Job 31:1). David looked, and lusted, and then committed his most grievous sin.

The efforts of many women to expose themselves and adorn themselves so as to make men desire them are to be condemned with utter contempt and abhorrence. The glamor and sex-appeal so glorified by the world of entertainment is not elevating but degrading. Police officials have frequently cited the connection between scantily-clad females and sex offenses.

A few years ago an Association for Mental Health and the Iowa Council on Family Relations co-sponsored a program which discussed sexual promiscuity. The reasons given for the increase in this problem were: freedom of autos; constant bombardment with sex stimuli; the way women dress; steady dating; Junior High School dances. These reasons were offered by secular experts such as psychologists,

doctors, educators, and social workers.

Jesus speaks clearly on the matter of lustful thoughts. Men are to look on women with a clean mind and wholesome thoughts. He says, "Everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:28, 29). Jesus uses this drastic figure of speech to underscore the seriousness of the sin of lustful thinking.

Christian women are instructed to take care and precaution that she dress herself in such a way as not to arouse the lustful thoughts of the male onlookers. "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety, not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (I Tim. 2:9). Peter says to Christian women, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Pet. 3:3, 4).

It is impossible to treat this subject of pure hearts and lives thoroughly or practically without reference to the movies and magazines that specialize in stimulating ungodly lusts, and that hold up for admiration people who are practicing adultery. How can we pray sincerely, "Lead us not into temptation," and then seek for pleasure amidst the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of luxurious and worldly living? How can one frequent the movies, or the dance, or read lewd literature, or give his ear to vile stories without disobeying God and defiling his soul? The prevalence of immodesty, of foul stories, of lewd pictures, is evidence of evil hearts of men who produce, pay for, and enjoy such things. We do not deny that sinful things are done and real people are tragically infected with deep corruption of heart and life; but we do not need to consent that this is worthy of publication for others to think about. Especially we should not make sin, crime, and moral filth the entertainment of multitudes. This type of entertainment—whether movies, novels, pornographic magazines or unclean stories—has a very close connection with the increase of broken homes, divorce decrees, illegitimate children, venereal disease, insanity, and juvenile delinquency. It is the responsibility of parents and adult citizens to promote high

moral standards, modest living, clean thinking; and to oppose all lewdness from that of the radio and newsstands to that of the organized business of vice and prostitution.

*Imagination: Blessing or Curse*

The human eye, you see, can be a blessing or a curse. "If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness," warns Jesus in Matt. 6:23, adding, in Mark 9:47, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

Imagination enables us to look mentally at things beyond the range of our eyes. It gives us the power to analyze things without actually taking them apart. It gives us insight into the workings of things we cannot actually watch with the eyes. It helps us to anticipate experiences and make choices without unguided practice of trial and error.

Imagination is one of the leading faculties of our life, personality, and character. It molds and determines most of our interests and action, determines the zeal with which we perform. As a small boy or man may lead about a large and powerful elephant, so *the power of your will is led about by your imagination*. The center of the character is the will, but the center of the will is attention. Drifting attention produces a derelict type of life.

It is a pretty sure thing that no man ever made a great new invention or a success of any significant kind without working it out in his imagination first. Similarly, no one ever made a big sinful mess of his life without practicing in imagination first.

There are various things which stimulate the imagination. Songs are made to do so. When you hear a song expressing something you like or seek, you turn your imagination on and let it run. What kind of songs do you find stimulating? What kind of songs do you just endure without being aware of what they say or suggest?

Certainly literature is written to arouse the use of imagination. Reading requires imagination to fill out the skeleton of thought given in the words being read. This is one of the very important values of the power of imagination, that we may receive much real experience of knowledge and feelings from the things which are written. But the good power of imagination and memory is perverted and made an evil curse when it is mis-used to fill the mind with thoughts of sin and sinful desires. Of such is Paul writing when he says in Romans 1:32, "(they) not only do things contrary to God's

command, but have pleasure in those who practice them." II Thessalonians 2:12 warns of the wrath of God to come against all those who "had pleasure in unrighteousness." Why should we enjoy as entertainment what we know is sinful? One great danger of watching television (or movies, or books) is that we will use it to enjoy the experience of sin by proxy—as well as that it will stimulate the imagining of acts that we would not ordinarily approve.

James says God does not tempt us, but we are enticed and drawn away by our own lusts (James 1:13-15). God may make trial of our faith to test or prove us. But James means that God does not entice us to sin. Jesus was tempted of Satan, that He might be perfected through sufferings, to be able to help us that are tempted, and to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 2:10, 18; 4:15, 16). But the power of temptation is in our desires. "Lust" is just another word for "strong desires." By the lying promises and attractive appearances that Satan makes for sin, he seeks to stir up our desires, which lead to sin, and the sin brings death. The best protection against it all is to know the will of God and cultivate so strong a desire to please Him that Satan's lies can be readily answered with the word of truth, and sinful desires can be rejected with swift determination.

The desires that tempt or entice to evil will not entirely cease while we are in the flesh and in this world of evil; but they must be denied, ignored and caused to fade away, by our constant and conscious rejection of them. The Christian must not drift along easily, but be vigilant and vigorous in directing his thoughts, his desires and his life. He is not removed from the conflict, but is constantly forced to choose to walk by the Spirit or to exercise the desires of the flesh.

Our imagination may be controlled by the will, led by desire, or ruled by habit. Let's think about this. *Imagination can be controlled by the will*, especially by an undivided, steadfast will; but if the will is vacillating, inconstant, opposed by unconquered desires, imagination will be led by desires.

Imagination will conjure up both gratification and justification for desire. Its attempts to satisfy desire are unrealistic and may cause one to be unsatisfied with the realities of life. Selfish indulgence in imaginary pleasures or attainments may lead to disappointment, when the anticipation exceeds the realization.

### *Changing Desires*

Faith, true faith in Christ and in His judgments, His love and

His promises, changes our desires. The warnings, the promises and the goodness of God lead us to repentance—a change of heart and desire. The privilege of change that God so graciously holds out in calling us to repentance is no light matter. Repentance is a privilege; and once we present our “changed” mind to God, He proceeds to change it even more. Even then evil imaginations may continue to bother and tempt us because they have become a habit. It is in the power of the gospel and faith to change desire, to strengthen the will and to conquer habits. To change a habit, put a good habit in the place of the one to be eliminated. Become active in use of thought and imagination toward the goal of the prize of our high calling in Christ. Apply it to devising methods of doing Christ’s will and extending His kingdom.

God gives us exceeding great and precious promises to motivate us, to help keep us “looking to the recompense of reward” to help us “set our minds on the things above, not on the things upon the earth,” so that by these promises we may “become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is upon the earth through lust (desires)” (II Pet. 1:4).

The Christian faces vital choices in life: *choose! refuse! seek! flee!* What reading do you do? On God’s law do I meditate day and night, (Ps. 1:1, 2). Is this true of your life? What pictures, programs, or stories do you allow to lead and use your imagination? Imagination is closely connected with dreams, and is often called day-dreaming. Some of the dreams we have at night are but the extension of the day-dreams we imagined in the daytime. Are you a passive victim of the devil’s propaganda? You don’t need to act as if you are hypnotized and in a trance unconsciously controlled by others. As a Christian you must not be so weak in purpose and will that the passing impulse of the flesh has control and determines what you do. As you use your mind, set your mind. From Ephesians 4:22-25 the Christian receives the direction of purpose to take: renounce the rule of desires born of deception (misconception), that leads to deceived, wishful thinking, and accept the discipline of truth. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind in Christ” (Rom. 12:1); “Let Jesus come into your heart.” Surrender your mind to Jesus Christ as God, as Savior, as the eternal Wisdom from on high and let His mind dwell in you.

Look into the things God has prepared for you (I Pet. 1:10-12, 13ff; 2:1-2; II Pet. 1:3-5). Let His word have sway in your mind. Treasure the promises that redirect our desires and remake our

## THE KINGDOM

natures. Never forget that the changing of human nature is the changing of desires.

With this in mind let the expulsive power of a new affection—the love of God, of truth, of kindness and generosity and mercy, of good men and good actions, put to death evil intent. Love good and hate evil, Paul says in Rom. 12:9. Let God's love, received in our hearts, give us love for Him, and for all that is true to His nature. The classic THINK passage of Philippians 4:8 tells us what we are to fill our minds with: "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, THINK on these things."

Fill your mind so constantly with the Lord and the good that He wills for us, that you leave no room for evil thoughts to sneak in and take control of your life. **MAKE CHRIST THE MASTER OF YOUR MIND.**

For Further Study:

See books listed on page 200.

## TRUTH AND SINCERITY IN SPEECH

Even if lying were not forbidden by God's Word, it would be wrong. It corrupts the character of the liar; for it is base, cowardly, and contemptible. It introduces chaos in society. It opposes the reality of things as they are. Falsehood attempts to build the thought and feeling and action and character of men upon a fictional foundation in willful opposition to the universe of actual existence. What folly!

There is no middle ground between falsehood and the truth, but one falsehood conflicts with many others. There is no consistency in lies, no standard for harmonizing them. Therefore, the liar ensnares and condemns himself in the contradictions of his own falsehoods; for "No man has a good enough memory to make him a successful liar." On the other hand, all truth is consistent with all other truth; and a man can be assured of consistency of character and steady growth in the mastery of self and circumstances, simply by constantly adhering to the truth.

The absolute truth is not always easy to know. "It requires hard, patient toil to dig down beneath the superficial crust of appearance to the solid rock of fact on which truth rests. . . . Truth is fidelity to fact; it plants itself upon reality; and hence it speaks with authority."<sup>1</sup> It is probably impossible for a mere man to know always the absolute truth, but the virtue of truthfulness is possible to all. Practical truthfulness consists in speaking exactly what is in my mind—not consciously misrepresenting or denying the truth as we know it. God gives us the power of speech and of action to express the thought in our minds. When we lie by word or deed (actions speak louder than words) we frustrate the very power to communicate ourselves to others.

But God in His wisdom and mercy did not leave man to figure out by his reason alone what was right and what was wrong. He revealed Himself and His will for our enlightenment and for our salvation.

*Lying Forbidden and Condemned in the Bible*

God's attitude toward this sin is clearly and strongly expressed in both Old and New Testaments. Lies are identified with Satan, and are said to come from him as "the father of lies" (John 8:44; Acts 5:3). Truth is identified with God (Isa. 65:16; 25:1) and with

---

<sup>1</sup> Hyde's *Practical Ethics*.

Christ (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth (John 16:13); and the Word of God is truth (John 17:17). It is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18). Lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord (Prov. 6:16, 17; 12:22).

In the ninth Commandment of the Decalog (Ex. 20:16) God especially forbids false witnessing against a neighbor, as in a court of justice. Deuteronomy 19:16-21 speaks more particularly of the penalty for perjury. But the teaching goes much farther than that; even to the point of condemning lying in favor of a neighbor, or lying to him in flattery (Prov. 26:28; Ps. 12:2). We are not to receive and carry gossip and scandal (Ex. 23:1; Lev. 19:16; Ps. 15:3; 101:5). Sometimes it is right to expose wickedness in high places; but if we speak anything disparaging another, revealing or denouncing his sin, we must make sure that we speak accurately, giving no false impression, and that we truly need to speak it for the good of society. In the New Testament we are frequently warned against being slanderers (I Tim. 3:11; Titus 2:3), tattlers and "busybodies" (I Tim. 5:13; II Thess. 3:11), meddlers in other men's matters (I Pet. 4:15). Deceivers, whisperers, backbiters, and slanderers are listed among the worst of sinners, on whom the wrath of God abides (Rom. 1:29, 30; II Tim. 3:3).

The righteous are called upon to hate lying (Prov. 13:15; cf. Ps. 119:163), to respect not those who lie, and to reject their company (Ps. 40:4, 101:7). "Putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). "Lie not one to another; seeing ye have put off the old man with his doings" (Col. 3:9).

The punishment that is to come upon liars is of the severest kind, and indicates that lying is one of the most terrible sins. According to Psalms 5:6, God "will destroy them that speak lies"; and Proverbs 19:5 says, "A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he that uttereth lies shall not escape." Liars are positively and absolutely excluded from heaven (Rev. 21:27; 22:15). *"All liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death"* (Rev. 21:8).

The unregenerated human heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:19); lying is practically universal in some form or other (Ps. 116:11). We need to examine ourselves and say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." Liars will be saved only if they repent and love the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. How we need the Lord to renew a right heart within us! "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34).



## TRUTH AND SINCERITY IN SPEECH

In Matthew 5:33-37 Jesus teaches that we need to be so reliable that when we say "yes" or "no" people know we mean it. "Let your speech be, Yea, yea; nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one" (Matt. 5:37). Our word should be as good as a bond.

We are inclined to say talk is "cheap" and unimportant. But "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36, 37). Our power of speech can be very valuable, able to bless and to save men; or it can be very expensive, and cost us our soul's salvation. Words cast abroad are very hard to gather up again. True repentance for sinful speech will require us, as far as possible, to make amends for the harm done; but this may cost much labor and grief, or be impossible. Thank God that we may repent, and be forgiven by Him, and start anew the life of righteousness according to the truth!

### *Reasons for Restraining the Tongue*

1. *Because of the coming judgment of God*, in which we must give account of every word, and be justified or condemned by our words, under the stern laws and warnings cited above.

2. *Because if the tongue is not bridled, we have no religion at all*, says James 1:26.

3. *Because if the tongue is properly governed, the whole body can be brought under control* (James 3:2). What we permit ourselves to speak has much to do with the control of our minds and all the rest of our lives. The motives, determination, the watchfulness that will succeed in governing the tongue will be sufficient to go far in controlling the whole body.

4. *Because "we are members one of another"* (Eph. 4:25). In ordinary human society we are dependent upon one another, and no man lives to himself alone; but in the church we are even more members one of another, as members of the body of Christ. Lies sow discord among brethren, and set men at variance with one another; they tend to make society impossible. A lie breaks the golden rule of doing unto others as we would that they should do unto us. A lie works toward further tearing down of character. The full fellowship of Christians is not possible without mutual trust and love.

### *How to Rid Our Lives of Falsehood*

How shall we overcome all falsehood? Not by strict law alone. For

## THE KINGDOM

we may speak the literal words of truth in such a way as to deceive; or we may lie by saying nothing at all. In fact, using the truth to deceive others makes the worst kind of lie—the most misleading, the hardest to detect. The practice of quoting the Bible to teach false doctrine is devilish indeed. We must have truth in the heart. God desires “truth in the inward parts” (Ps. 51:6). It needs to be ingrained in our being. A good and honest heart will bring forth honest words and deeds. In order to deal honestly with others and avoid the many forms of disguised deception, we must put away hypocrisy and deal honestly with ourselves and with God.

1. Realize the truth of Psalms 139:4: “For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Jehovah, thou knowest it altogether.”

2. Strive to please God rather than men. Truth is often not only hard to discover, but it may be costly to speak. Truth is frequently opposed to sacred traditions, inherited prejudices, popular beliefs, and material interests. To proclaim truth in the face of these opponents has cost many a man his life; and today it often exposes one to much disfavor and even abuse. Hence comes the temptation to conceal our real opinions; to cover up what we know to be true under some phrase which we believe will be popular; to sacrifice our convictions to please men because we falsely believe that to be to our interest.

3. Trust in God for support and protection so that fear of men, in times of crises or danger, will not cause us, like Peter, to hide behind a lie.

4. Especially when we have done wrong the temptation to cover it up with a lie is very great. Here we must remember to put character above reputation, to seek God's approval above all, to correct rather than conceal the fault.

5. Cultivate love for the truth and occupy the mind with seeking it. Many lies are idle talk of idle minds. Excuse no little lies. Uphold always the ideal and purpose to know and to tell the truth.

6. Put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18), and join in the battle for right.

7. Maintain a good conscience.

\*8. Finally, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor” (Rom. 13:10). Love will make us as careful for our neighbor's reputation as for our own. Love will help us to return not evil for evil, but overcome evil with good, so that we will not stoop to answer lies with lies.

TRUTH AND SINCERITY IN SPEECH

For Further Study:

- Lindsell, Harold. *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Washington: Canon Press, 1973. Pp. 75-78. Strong case for honesty.
- Murray, John. *Principles of Conduct*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1957. Pp. 123-148. In a chapter entitled "The Sanctity of Truth" Murray discusses the problems of being truthful.

## PLAIN FACTS ABOUT HONESTY

There is a very close relation between truth and righteousness. Righteousness is action according to the truth—according to the reality of God and the actual relationships of men. God is a God of truth, whose word can be depended upon, who is always consistent with Himself, who can not lie.

Unrighteousness is built on falsehood, whether in sincere ignorance or intentional evasion or denial of the truth. The power of Satan is in deceit, to turn men away from the truth of God.

We should love the truth and seek it as blind men long for sight. How can falsehood be a guide to successful action in any matter? How can we hope to build an enduring life structure upon a foundation of fiction? It is a pity and a tragedy when a man with good intentions acts upon false information or false assumptions because he can not find the truth; but it is worse when he has the truth and covers it with a lie. It is practically impossible to know always the absolute truth. But it is possible to speak and act with truthfulness and honesty, in love for the truth to the best of our ability to know it.

God's Word provides for us the necessary truth concerning our lives, their responsibilities and their salvation. But it bears its fruit in good and honest hearts (Luke 8:15). When we speak and act sincerely according to the truth as we know it, we are ready to receive more truth when it is revealed to us. But if we evade or cover up the truth which we do know, we are preparing to avoid or reject further truth when it is offered to us. Departure from the love of the truth makes us open to many delusions and deceits. See II Thessalonians 2:10-12.

*Honesty is Wise*

Instruction in practical wisdom for successful living, like that of Proverbs, necessarily includes urgent exhortations to be honest and truthful. Children and fools, being ruled by selfish and changing desires, are ready to use false statements or to get things by dishonest means, in order to satisfy present desire. But as men become *wise* (through the revelation of God's wisdom, or through keen observation and experience) they learn that other things are supremely and eternally to be desired, namely, harmony with God, a character of consistency and integrity, and a social order founded on honesty.

## PLAIN FACTS ABOUT HONESTY

It is found to be very far better to subject ourselves to the principles of honesty with all their restraints than to attempt by dishonesty to satisfy momentary desires. Truthfulness has the sure victory and the greater reward. Falsehood leads to frustration.

Nothing is more important in determining the character and outcome of one's life than fundamental honesty. God's Word teaches in many places this basic essential. The Ten Commandments condemn stealing and false witnessing (Ex. 20:15, 16). Jesus warns against hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-3) and condemns the hypocrites (Matthew 23). Ananias and Sapphira were punished by death for lying (Acts 5:1-11). Christians are commanded to lie not to one another (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9). Christian speech should need no bolstering by oaths, but should let simply "yes," mean yes, and "no" mean no (Matt. 5:37). A good conscience is urged (I Tim. 1:5, 19; I Pet. 3:16). Liars are sentenced to eternal torment in hell (Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

Deceit is folly and failure. It is wrong and destructive. It is cruel and unloving. Falsehood, fraud, and all forms of dishonesty are of the nature and works of Satan. "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 12:22). God hates lying and calls upon the righteous to hate it (Prov. 6:16, 17; 13:5; Ps. 119:163; Rom. 12:9).

### *Complete Honesty Is Too Uncommon*

In spite of all God's teaching and all the lessons of human experience, what we call "common honesty" is still all too uncommon. So often we desire to make a good appearance to be approved by men, when the real condition of things would not be approved, and we therefore permit ourselves to misrepresent the facts. The "root of all evil," the love of money, causes many to practice lying or other deception. We look to the immediate results of an act or statement instead of to its fundamental rightness. We practice one deception and then must tell another lie to cover it. It is a growing evil. Those who have been dishonest in one thing are more inclined to be dishonest in others. The only protection against it is to inculcate in our lives a firm faith in God and in the ultimate triumph of the truth, and to fear all the ways of dishonesty.

It is a sad revelation of the sinfulness of American people to see the reports of impartial investigators into dishonest business practices. In some lines of business and repair service more than 60 percent have been found to be dishonest; and there is no reason to believe these are much worse than many others. Politicians whose word can

be strictly relied upon are notoriously scarce. Many people who pride themselves on honesty in paying debts, etc., will strike as hard a bargain as possible in any deal, taking advantage of the ignorance of others. Many who think they would not steal will nevertheless appropriate public property for private use, or take all they can get from any large corporation when they have no just right to it. A man is not strictly honest until he will not accept more than his just due for service rendered or property sold.

Some of the hidden but pernicious forms of dishonesty are dishonest preaching, dishonest praying, dishonest singing, dishonest confession of faith and profession of religion. Much trouble in the church would be greatly relieved if men would always be plain and truthful about their real convictions. The great curse of infidelity, known as "modernism," in the church could soon be dealt with if all the crooked politicians and religious racketeers would truthfully declare themselves for what they really intend to believe. Using the truth to deceive, using the words of faith to indicate unbelief, quoting the Scripture to promote false doctrine, these are devilish indeed. They make the worst kind of lie and the hardest to combat.

Any attempt to deceive or to produce false conclusions is lying, even if all the statements made are true to facts in some sense.

### *The Practice of Honesty*

A form of falsehood that easily overtakes us is not with premeditated intent to deceive, but through weakness and indifference, failing to carry out in action what we have too glibly professed in words. True honesty demands faithful following of the principles we know and claim to hold. We set for ourselves ideals which are higher than it is possible for us to practice at all times. That is not wrong in itself. But becoming accustomed to being short of our professed standard, we excuse ourselves when we honestly know that we have not done what we could and should have done. Sometimes we avoid knowledge which would place upon us responsibility which we wish to evade; but we can not then claim to be excused by ignorance when that ignorance was by deliberate choice, and was not a necessary limitation beyond our control. For example to make this plain, and to suggest an exhortation to preachers, consider the case of preachers who claim to believe the Bible and uphold the Lord's standards of righteousness, who claim to be much concerned about the increasing evil of disregard for God's laws concerning marriage, then to avoid embarrassment, unpopularity or loss of profit, they will unite in

## PLAIN FACTS ABOUT HONESTY

adulterous marriage people who have been un-Scripturally divorced. They commonly excuse themselves of responsibility in the matter because of ignorance, when they made no attempt to make the teaching of Scripture known to the prospective husband and wife or to ask them if their marriage can be contracted in harmony with God's revealed will.

"Happy is the man who is too honest to be fooled by his own alibis." It takes a character most practiced in complete truthfulness to avoid all the subtle ways in which we incline to deceive ourselves. "Honest confession is good for the soul." Sincere apology is often a noble thing and a great help to human relationships. But the practice of making excuses, trying to retain the favor of men when we have not earned it, tends very much to lying. How often both to men and to God we plead inability when the real trouble was not with our abilities, but with our desires. The lame excuses that people offer to themselves for not attending church, and for not giving unto the Lord a fair and reasonable portion of the property and income He has committed to us, have become notorious for the fact that they are just lies to cover up the real fact that we just do not want to.

Manifold forms of dishonesty are all around us so much, and the situations of life frequently become so complicated, that we all are very likely to be ensnared by this sin. It creeps unnoticed into the life of every one of us. We must watch the whole course of our lives to develop habits of strict honesty and not to overlook the "small" things. Slight inaccuracies of speech may seem to be insignificant; but they open the door for more serious forms of deceit by generating a habit of indifference to truth. Besides, even the least untruth is treason against the royal supremacy of truth.

We must be prepared to maintain honesty when we are severely tried and it is very hard to speak the truth or to do the fair thing. Sometimes it may cost a great sum, or the forfeiting of one's life, to be strictly honest: but because of the faithfulness of God, our great judge and Saviour, we can confidently choose the right and trust the outcome to be joyful victory and great reward. In such circumstances only the character that is morally sound and absolutely unwilling to depart from the truth will stand the strain.

For Further Study:

See the books listed on page 213.

## LOYALTY TO THE KINGDOM

(Matthew 6:19—7:29)

"Loyal" and "loyalty" are words not found in most versions of the Bible, yet the idea is taught throughout the Bible better than anywhere else. The idea of loyalty is strong, faithful, unshakeable allegiance. Love, which is so much stressed in the Bible, covers all of that and more.

Jesus does not in so many words ask us to "be loyal" to Him, but He does more: He asks us to love Him, abide in Him and let no family ties or personal interests interfere with or even compare with our devotion to Him (John 15:4-10 and Luke 14:25-33).

*Authority of the King*

In this, as in all His teachings, He assumes and expresses supreme authority and divine majesty. He doesn't offer arguments to be studied or suggestions to be proved by experience. He taught principles to be practiced, but not to be experiments. His principles prove valid in practice, but our duty to practice them is not in order to prove them, and is no greater when they are so proved than when they are first startlingly enjoined. His directives, given out of knowledge of all eternity, can not be tested completely in this life only, and must be accepted because of their source which assures their outcome.

He demands allegiance. It takes faith to follow Him. But He altogether merits our allegiance and devotion, and our trust in Him will never be brought to shame or disappointment.

No wonder the people "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority" (Matt. 7:28-29). He naturally and continually identifies following His word with doing the will of God.

In the warnings and appeals that climax the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges us to undivided allegiance to Him, to God's will, to "his kingdom." He calls for the fruits and works of a genuine faith. To those who are not professing to follow Him it is a call to set their course of life Godward and to follow it with resolute decision, guided by the revelation of God's will in Jesus' words.

To those who are professing to have made the choice of their goal and to be in the way of life and glory, it is a challenge to check



their course.

We will not drift into righteousness and the blessedness of fellowship with God. They must be sought. We must set our course and give strict attention to it.

### *Our First Concern*

"Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness" has been the theme of many sermons because we need so much and so often to be exhorted to put first things first. Jesus' whole ministry in both deeds and words emphasized the importance of spiritual things over temporal things—the significance of our standing with God above any other thing (Matt. 12:50; Mark 10:21; Luke 10:42, etc.).

In actual practice, what is our first concern—the things of self or the things of God? our souls or our bodies? the success of our private finances or the sound progress of the Lord's business? our private household or the household of the faith? the approval of God or the praise of men? What things command our energies, compel our attention and make other things wait? When there is conflict between school and church, which claims our allegiance? Between business and church? Between family reunion and church?

It is said that Jenny Lind, the "Swedish nightingale," was once invited by the king of her country to sing in the royal palace at a festival, but it was to be held on the Lord's Day. She refused to come. The king came in person and pleaded with her and her only response was, "There is a higher King, Your Majesty. I owe my first allegiance to Him." She put Christ first and made Him the real king of her life.

It is so common today for "good Christians" and "church people" to be much concerned for their children to get a secular education and make high honors and a "good living" in the world, but to do nothing and feel no necessity to teach them anything about the Bible, the life of faith and the service of Christ. Yes, they want them to be "members of the church" and law-abiding citizens, but they direct their lives into the service of mammon. Many who think they have resisted the temptations to put desire for treasure first, still are anxious for what they shall eat and wear to the extent that that is their master. Note the common remarks, "Well, a man must live," and "A person has to make a living," as they go to work through all the bad weather and indisposition and inconvenience that would be a perfectly good excuse (to them) for neglecting the kingdom of God.

*"Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* Why shouldn't Christ come

first? He is of first rank, personally. His service is of first quality, intrinsically. He must be put first in our lives or be denied His proper place and His explicit request. Nothing can be loyalty to Him except putting Him first. But in this sermon Jesus does not ask that we give first place to His program merely because of His rank and rights as Lord, but because it is the *primary necessity of our lives*. He does not urge it as a matter of sacrifice to divine prerogatives, but as a matter of practical wisdom for us.

He is our life and our only escape from eternal death and destruction. Don't forget that *fact* just because it isn't beautiful to the popular eye. Seeking His kingdom is of primary importance inasmuch as life itself is of basic importance and greater significance than any particular circumstances of life. "What shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. 16:26).

But listen! "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). It is not only necessary to serve God; it is also safe, prudent and profitable. To them that are faithful in allegiance to Him, He promises to be faithful in Fatherly providence: "All things shall be added unto you"; "your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Cf. Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:19.) The favor of God is a real and lasting treasure worth striving for with the best efforts of our lives; whereas, the riches of this earth are deceitful, unreliable and fleeting. To serve God is not a sure way to a high salary on earth, but it is the only sure way to a real security and ultimately a *tremendous success*! To guarantee the provision for our *real needs*, here or there, serve God. To have a sure and permanent defense against all the storms that assail, hear and do what Jesus says. To be a child and servant of God is the greatest opportunity that life offers; in fact, it is the only one that is not vanity of vanities and bitterness of soul in the end. O that men would really read Ecclesiastes, and that they would also really believe our loving Savior!

### *How Shall We Attain Unto The Kingdom Of God and His Righteousness?*

The general answer of Matthew 7 is: By doing the will of the Father—doing the things that we hear Jesus say.

Jesus did not yet preach the whole story of the kingdom God was preparing and the "righteousness of God by faith" to be accounted unto those who believed and obeyed the full gospel (Rom. 1:17; 3:21; 4:22-25; Phil. 3:9). It remained for the Holy Spirit to guide the

## LOYALTY TO THE KINGDOM

apostles into all the truth about the full particulars of the riches of grace. But Jesus pointed out the road that, faithfully followed, would lead to all those things; viz., just follow Him. Jesus' purpose in the Sermon on the Mount was to prepare the hearers for the kingdom which would be fully revealed soon enough. They must be made ready to receive it. We must not attempt to separate this sermon from the rest of the New Testament, either to make legalism of this sermon, or to make that grace a theology based on sand: empty hearing and vain faith (Matt. 7:26, 27; James 1:22; 2:14-26). The loyal heart of obedient faith is expounded here.

J. W. McGarvey states:

Doing the will of God must be understood, not in the sense of sinless obedience, but as including a compliance with the conditions on which sins are forgiven. Whether under the old covenant or the new, sinless obedience is an impossibility; but obedience to the extent of our ability amid the weaknesses of the flesh, accompanied by daily compliance with the conditions of pardon for our daily sins, has secured the favor of God.<sup>1</sup>

Then what standards and tests does Jesus set for loyalty that befits the kingdom?

1. (Matthew 7:1-5.) We must not be censoriously and uncharitably judging others while hypocritically blind to our own sins, but we must give place to God and show mercy as we expect to receive mercy. This general principle must be understood in the light of specific teaching, as in Matthew 18:16, 17; Titus 3:10; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14; II John 10; Matthew 7:15, 16; Romans 16:17; I John 4:1; I Corinthians 5:11 and I Peter 4:17, 18.

2. (Matthew 7:7-11.) Pray persistently, with faith in the goodness of God.

3. (Matthew 7:12.) By the Golden Rule practice the goodness which we seek to share, to do God's will and to represent correctly our Teacher.

4. (Matthew 7:13, 14.) We must not follow the crowd. We must enter the narrow gate. We must be willing to separate from the world and live the limited and restricted life, confined to seeking and doing God's will.

5. (Matthew 7:15-20.) We must not believe every religious teacher,

---

<sup>1</sup> J. W. McGarvey, *Matthew and Mark* (Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1875). P. 73.

## THE KINGDOM

but weigh their words and their works in the balance of the word of God. We must study the Bible and know the difference between true and false religion (I John 2:18-29; 4:1; II John 9-11).

6. (Matthew 7:21-27.) We must do more than pray, and more than hear the word, and more than spectacular deeds of religion; we must be obedient in heart and obedient to the word of God's revealed will. Prayer and outward profession without practice are useless and will collapse in utter ruin.

May God give us grace to apply these divine canons to our hearts and not to think no more highly of ourselves than we ought to.

### For Further Study:

See books listed on page 186 for comments on Matthew 6:19—7:29.

## WHAT THE KINGDOM IS LIKE

(Matthew 13)

The chief emphasis in the preaching of John the Baptist was that the kingdom of God was close at hand and men should prepare to meet the King (Matthew 3:2-12). Then Jesus and His disciples went throughout the land teaching as if the chief aim in anyone's life was to enter into the kingdom (See John 3:3, 5; Matt. 4:17, 23; 5:3, 10, 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21; Luke 4:43; 7:28; 8:1).

Jesus had preached in Judea about eight months (until He was leading more to baptism than John, was—John 4:1-3). After that, He had preached in Galilee at least eight months or more. About half of His entire ministry was past. Many miracles had been wrought. Great throngs of people were following Him, so that He had not time to eat and sleep. Some of the Pharisees were trying desperately to combat His popular influence. His family sought to take Him home for a rest. That was the time when Jesus taught the sermon all in parables about the kingdom (just before He left on a boat trip during which He was so tired that He slept right through a terrible storm).

The people were excited about the kingdom message, but they did not understand it. The Jews expected a kingdom of military power and material wealth. They were not listening well to Jesus' teaching about true religion and obedience to God. When Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God, they did not understand or even realize that He was talking about it. They thought of the kingdom as a form of national power, a relationship between their own nation and other nations. But Jesus thought of it as a relationship between each individual and God. They thought of it as the possession of material security and power to rule over others; but He spoke of it as the possession of God's word and as submission to God's rule over one's own life.

To help them overcome their habitual, mistaken ideas of the promised kingdom and to show how near it was to each of them, Jesus told these simple illustrations, which were called in Greek, "parables." Jesus is famous for His parables on various subjects. Some notable ones had been told before the time recorded in Matthew 13. But on this occasion He spoke nothing but parables! An immense crowd was gathered on the shore of Galilee, so that Jesus got into a boat in order to speak to them all. He taught "many

## THE KINGDOM

things in parables," perhaps more than are recorded in the combined accounts of Matthew 13:1-53; Mark 4:1-34; and Luke 8:4-18. But all that are recorded are comparisons to describe and identify the kingdom. Instead of defining or explaining the kingdom in abstract terms, Jesus pictured it in concrete comparisons. They were pictures to show the characteristics of the kingdom which the Jews had not seen or had never expected it to have.

Jesus was asked by His disciples why He spoke only in parables to this crowd. He said it was because the crowd did not know the secrets which He had been revealing about the kingdom, as the apostles knew them. The "mysteries" of the kingdom meant simply the things about it that were revealed and which would not be known unless they were learned by revelation. Jesus had been revealing them in His teaching, but the people did not give as much attention or have as much faith as the apostles did, and their old mistaken notions were very much in the way. Even in this sermon, if He spoke in plain terms about the kingdom without parables, they would not perceive what He meant.

No doubt the picture stories which He used left many of the people wondering and unconvinced; but they also left them with some clear and easily remembered pictures to refer to frequently until their minds were able to accept the truths of the kingdom to which they pointed.

We are helped in understanding the parables by the explanations which Jesus gave of two of the most complex ones to His disciples that very day. His interpretations of the soils and the tares give us a guide to the meaning of all the parables. The interpretation is also helped by the fact that two or more parables point to the same feature of the kingdom. Two or three illustrations of the same thing make one more sure of the point of each illustration.

### *Like The Product Of Seed Growing In Soil*

The first parable shows that the kingdom is like the results obtained when seed is sown on various kinds of soil. In explaining this one, Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11).

Some hearers of the word are like the soil of the beaten path, not receptive to the word, and Satan takes it away from their consciousness, as birds eat the seed off the roadway.

A second class of hearers is like the thin soil over a slab of rock. The word gets from them an immediate response. They make a good start in letting the word of God live in them. But when trials and

## WHAT THE KINGDOM IS LIKE

hardships come because of the word, their citizenship in the kingdom immediately withers away. They are not the stable kind of people who endure steadfast in what they know is right, but are like plants without roots deep enough to endure when the sun is hot.

A third kind of hearer includes those who have too much else occupying their minds and affections. They are like good soil with the seeds or roots of thorns in it. The word is received, but the cares of this world and the enticements of riches soon outgrow the desire to do God's will. The Lord's control is choked out by other controlling interests as wheat is choked out by Johnson grass.

The fourth class of hearers is like the good soil that bears much fruit. They hear the word of the Lord, understand it, and hold it fast in a good and honest heart (See Luke 8:15); hence they bring forth the fruit of living faithfully according to the will of God.

Another short parable, which is recorded only in Mark 4:26-29, says that the kingdom is like the growing of seed in the ground. The sower, having sown the seed does no more work on it, and does not know how it grows. But the earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear (or head of wheat), then the full grain in the ear. So the kingdom does not come like a finished product delivered from the factory, or like ruling power is seized in a revolution, but it grows by the effect of God's word in each person's mind and heart.

### *Like Wheat in a Field With Weeds*

Again (in Matthew 13:24-30) the kingdom is pictured as good seed growing in a field, but an enemy has sown tares (weeds that look like wheat) in the same field. Some servants suggest pulling out the weeds. But the owner said that wheat might be pulled up with them; therefore both would be allowed to grow together until the harvest, when they would be separated and the weeds would be burned.

Jesus explained this parable, being asked by His disciples, so we do not have to guess at its meaning. The field is the world. The good seed, or the plants that grow from it, represent the people of His kingdom, planted in the world by Christ. The devil is the enemy that sowed the tares, which are the people who serve the devil. Jesus did not say who the servants were that suggested pulling the weeds; perhaps they might be men who propose to serve God by killing off wicked men. But in the harvest, which comes at the end of this age, the reapers will be the angels, who will gather all the wicked to be burned. Notice that He said they will be gathered "out of His

kingdom!" He had said before that "the field is the world" and the plants from the good seed are the sons of the kingdom. Either this views the whole world as the realm of His rule, potentially His kingdom, or the angels are to gather some wicked ones from among those who were the kingdom.

Then the righteous shall shine as the sun *in the kingdom* of their Father, when the kingdom apparently will be free from all offenses and evils.

### *Like a Net Full of Fish. Good and Bad*

Another parable pairs with the one about the tares to picture the fact that some unacceptable persons are to be sorted out of the kingdom at the end of the age. In this one the kingdom is compared to a dragnet gathering all kinds of fish. It is brought to shore, and the bad ones are thrown out, which represents the work of the angels at the end of this age, separating the wicked from the just and casting them into the fire (Matt. 13:49, 50).

The parables reviewed thus far show that the kingdom is not national and material, but spiritual and individual; also that it is not all glory and success, but some people start in it and fail, some are cast out at last, and others are unaffected by it though in contact with it. These comparisons indicate that the kingdom is not a time when the Lord forces His rule upon all, but those who accept His word yield to His rule and are the kingdom while they live on this earth in the midst of the ungodly.

### *Like the Best Kind of Growers*

Jesus said the kingdom is like a seed of mustard and like leaven. Both of these picture its growth. The mustard seed, though very small, produces a large plant, sometimes fifteen feet high, in one year. The leaven may not look much alive and may be only a little bit hidden in a large batch of meal, but quietly and unnoticed it multiplies itself. Thus Jesus' kingdom, beginning with twelve humble men (or even 120, or 500), looked insignificant, but by a spiritual vitality put into it by the Lord it had power to grow and encompass the earth.

The parables were not intended to be prophecies, but illustrations. The parable of the leaven represents the growth of the kingdom without noise or show, by transfer of transforming faith from one person to another; it probably does not predict the complete transformation of the world by the growth of the church or (as some say who



consider leaven always a symbol of evil) the complete corruption of the church by evil growing in it. There are predictive elements in Matthew 13:41-43 and 49, 50, but these are subordinate parts of comparisons which describe the nature of the kingdom in pictures rather than telling the high points of its history in predictions.

*Like The Most Precious Thing Known*

Two other parables picture the kingdom as having greater value than everything else combined that any man can have.

It is like a treasure lying hidden in a field. Whoever finds it will joyfully sell all he has to buy that field.

It is like one priceless pearl so precious that the owner of a great collection of prize gems will give all that he has to buy it.

Whether to the poor laborer, working in another man's field, or to the rich merchant admiring his collection of jewels, to everyone the kingdom of God is the opportunity of a lifetime. Perhaps by this we should test the reality of our faith in Christ's words:—Are we eager to sell all else to have Him rule in our lives? And how great is our joy at the opportunity to make the transaction?

For Further Study:

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. II. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957. Pp. 60-101. Good comment on the Matthew 13 parables.

Lightfoot, Neil R. *The Parables of Jesus*, Part I. Austin: R. B. Sweet, 1963. Well outlined studies with competent comment.

Taylor, William. *The Parables of Our Savior*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1887. Pp. 17-103. Helpful exposition with good application.

## TREASURES OF THE KINGDOM

(Matthew 13:44-46)

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

Of all the precious things that the thoughtless crowd casts aside or ignores as valueless, none is so greatly and so generally underestimated as the kingdom of Christ. Not only the majority of Americans, who take no active part in any church, prefer a mess of pottage to their birthright in Christ; but a large percentage of church members cannot tell what Christ means to them. Indeed their lives testify that He means less to them than many mundane things. How does it go in your personal market? Are you selling everything else to buy Him? And—(don't answer out loud)—how great is your joy at the opportunity to make the transaction?

Jesus told two parables to emphasize the fact that whether to the poor laborer, working another man's field, or to a rich merchant, admiring his great collection of prize gems, to everyone the kingdom of heaven is the opportunity of a lifetime—literally! No man has so many worthy attainments and personal powers, such great wealth, such varied and important interests that he should regret losing every one of them to be a humble disciple of Jesus. It is easier for the poor and oppressed to realize that in coming to Christ they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The rich and self-righteous, the proud and powerful are very hard to bring to that realization. Even when they see value in Christ their hearts are often "joined to their idols." "How hard it is for them that trust in riches!" (Mark 10:24). "How can you believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not" (John 5:44). Those who are wise in their own conceits have these things "hid from them" (Matt. 11:25). Compare I Corinthians 1:26-31. Still it is true that *any man giving up all to have Christ has nothing to lose and everything to gain!*

In Philippians 3:4-14 Paul tells of his own experience as a "merchant seeking goodly pearls." Compared with others he had made a good showing of things gained outside of Christ, but he counted them all loss to gain Christ. He actually suffered the loss of all things but counted them mere rubbish compared with the excellency of Christ.

*Let's Take an Inventory*

What are the treasures that the Savior sets above the sum of all that the best-favored life can assemble? What is the preciousness that so satisfies the great apostle and makes all his former attainments as rubbish? It is evident that many of us do not value the kingdom as Jesus and Paul did. Surely we have not known what riches abound there. Jesus spoke as if any man in his right mind would joyously part with everything he had to get that supreme treasure as soon as he saw it. Paul and many others did just that. But today people are putting off accepting Christ, and are afraid to part with anything to gain Him.

What makes Christianity precious? One thing—it costs an infinite price: time and sacrifices, life and blood, heartaches and struggles of men and of God. Nothing else in history compares with it. Another thing—it is rare, the only thing of its kind and nothing else approaches it or can substitute for it. But Jesus was thinking of its value to us for what we may find in it and receive from it.

It is possible to expect the wrong thing and, being disappointed, to turn away and lose all. The crowd that Jesus fed miraculously tried to turn His beneficent powers to political and material purposes. They would take Him by force and make Him their king to satisfy their own ambitions and desire, but Jesus would not consent (John 6:15). Then Jesus, the following day, rebuked them for seeking the bread that perishes and tried to give them the Bread of Everlasting Life, but they had expected the wrong thing and when they found it not they forsook Him (John 6:26-66). Paul writes of those, "corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth, supposing that godliness is a way of gain" (I Tim. 6:5). So do not follow those false prophets abroad today who promise all the material things you want if you buy their religio-psychology course. But Paul did go on to say: "But godliness with contentment is great gain: for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:6-8). In the same letter he said: "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is and of that which is to come" (I Tim. 4:8).

## THE KINGDOM

### *For The Life That Now Is:*

(Note: Do read the scriptures cited. Look into the catalogue of the products of God's love with at least as much interest as you look at Montgomery Ward's catalogue of products of American industry. This is merely an index held to a minimum of space.) We should expect and find:

1. Justification, the burden of sin removed, conscience relieved (Rom. 8:1, 33, 34; I Cor. 6:11; Heb. 10:19-23).
2. The burdens we bear (e.g., responsibility) lightened by love and by the strengthening the Lord gives (Phil. 4:13; II Tim. 4:17; II Cor. 12:9).
3. A sure and steadfast hope (Heb. 6:17-20).
4. Peace (Rom. 5:1; John 14:27; Phil. 4:9) freedom from anxiety, fear and despair (Phil. 4:6; Matt. 6:33).
5. Self-mastery, Christ dwelling in us (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 3:14-19; James 1:2-4; Gal. 2:20).
6. True liberty (Gal. 5:13; John 8:32, 36).
7. The unshaken life (Matt. 7:25; Rom. 8:37-39; Heb. 12:28; I Cor. 15:58; Phil. 4:12).
8. The best of human fellowship, refinement of every social relationship (Col. 3:8—4:6).
9. Comfort (II Cor. 1:3-5; I Thess. 4:18).
10. Increasing joy and satisfaction out of life (Phil. 4:4; Gal. 5:22).
11. Partaking of the divine nature, its beauty and poise, its radiant righteousness (II Pet. 1:3, 4); chastisement (Heb. 12:5-11); correction; instruction (II Tim. 3:16, 17) improvement—the discipline of a loving Father, building us up to a wonderful and beautiful ideal (Eph. 4:13).

### *For The Life That Is To Come:*

1. Eternal life (I John 5:11, 12).
2. Transformation (Phil. 3:20, 21; I Cor. 15:50-54).
3. Being with the Lord (John 14:3; II Cor. 5:8). Divine fellowship unhindered.
4. Being like the Lord (I John 3:1, 2).
5. Joint-heirs with Christ, Heir of all things (Rom. 8:17).
6. Divine power's sure victory (Gal. 6:9; II Tim. 2:12).
7. Rest (Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:9-11).
8. New heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness

## TREASURES OF THE KINGDOM

(II Pet. 3:14).

9. The glory of God and of the children of God (Rom. 5:2; 8:18-20; II Tim. 2:10; II Cor. 4:17; I Pet. 5:10; Rev. 21:11).
10. A kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28).

### *Reflections*

*These treasures are chiefly personal.* "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). They are not in things, but in the realm of spirit and persons. Therefore they are not seen and appreciated by the profane eye of Esau. Even the practical providence is the Lord's personal care. He is able to provide for all out of little or nothing. The feeding of the multitudes, miraculously, demonstrates Jesus' teaching that God knows our needs and cares about them. He will add all these things if we seek first the kingdom (Matt. 6:33; Phil. 4:19). To have the Lord is to have everything! "The Lord is my shepherd; that's all I want," said the little girl who had the words mixed, but the idea exactly right. We may have Him who makes "all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28) and who is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). His best gifts to us are what He creates in us personally, not material stores.

*Cleansing! Righteousness! Priceless goal of the awakened soul!* We who know not the curse and shame and defilement of sin do not appreciate the cleansing from sin. We who believe not the written sentence of doom and damnation upon sinners care not for deliverance. We are so prone to have such low standards, such trashy ideals, as to be satisfied with a little self-righteous respectability of works of the flesh, even in pride; but Paul sought not a righteousness of his own, of law and flesh, but sold everything to gain the righteousness of God, given by faith in Christ through His blood.

*He is so precious to me!* In a burning building a fire escape is the most precious thing—no matter if the crown jewels of Russia and England combined be there. Dear Brother, are you ashamed of this phase of our precious faith?

*It is desirable to be healthy, wealthy and wise.* These proverbial prizes are the object of most of men's daily efforts. In Christ we have: *wisdom* exceeding the greatest education; *security* exceeding the greatest wealth, the *unspeakable riches* administered for us now by a loving Father and reserved for us unto the day of inheritance; *health* of mind and soul, rightly affecting the body, renewing within though the outward man decay, lasting beyond the putting

off of the flesh.

*The greatest treasures are yet to come.* We "who have the first-fruits of the Spirit . . . groan . . . waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For in hope were we saved" (Rom. 8:18-25). "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life we are of all men most pitiable" (I Cor. 15:19). "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). The whole New Testament emphasizes that we are to invest this life in securing that one which is final and eternal. The blessings of God we receive here are to prepare us for and to lead us to that limitless blessedness there. "A tent or a cottage, why should I care? They're building a palace for me over there."

### *What Does Christ Mean To Us?*

Are we living up to the privileges of the Kingdom? A man paid for first class passage on a steamship and took along a lot of cheese and crackers to eat for the whole trip. One day another passenger, too sick to eat, found him off by himself eating his cheese and crackers. "If you can eat, why don't you go eat that fine fare they are serving in the ship's dining room?" He answered, "The ticket for this trip cost so much I couldn't afford to eat that kind of meals." "Man, you paid for it in your ticket. You are not getting all that's coming to you."

Are we continually living such rejoicing, thankful, and victorious lives that other people may see how valuable Christ is to us and desire what they see that we have?

For Further Study:

See books listed on page 227 for comments on the parables of the Hidden Treasure and The Pearl of Great Price.