

Kingdom of God

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The Spirit of the Kingdom

Kingdom of God Series, Part 1 of 6

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September 4, 1988 AM

Intro: Here are some statements about JOY ... (Here are definitions from 'The Amplified New Testament:

- "Blessed"=happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous [that is, with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions;)
- ("Blessed"="and enviably happy [with a happiness produced by experience of God's favor and especially conditioned by the revelation of His matchless grace;")
- ("Blessed"=happy, blithesome, joyous and spiritually prosperous, etc.)
- ("Blessed and fortunate and happy and spiritually prosperous [that is, in that state in which the born- again child of God enjoys His favor and salvation]") ...that on the surface seem to contrast with the "facts."

We come to understand (1) that we are dealing with paradox; and (2) Jesus would have us to trust Him as to what is and is not lasting reality. The pathway to Life Eternal may be PLAIN, so that no one need be lost— but it is also SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED.

It is a Way of trust! FAITH means that we must follow our Shepherd, and trust His wisdom. Everyone seems to be a self-appointed "expert" in this matter of spiritual truth.

R.C. Sproul tells of a theologian and an astronomer in dialogue; the astronomer says to the theologian: "We don't need all this study, these big words— faith and salvation are simply "Do unto others ..."

And the theologian came back: "I think I see what you mean about technical terms and study: I don't understand 'expanding universe' and 'novae' and 'black holes' and the like. Such words are unnecessary; astronomy is simply, "Twinkle, twinkle, Little star ..."

Salvation is truth both SIMPLE and PROFOUND! And (3) JESUS DECLARES THAT OUR "HAPPY" ... OUR "NORMAL" ATTITUDE IS TO BE ONE OF TOTAL DEPENDENCY ON GOD.

I. THE PERCEPTION OF FALLEN MANKIND IS: I AM THE CENTER

- A. We are BORN into the CENTER of our own little universe. Little children, as wonderful as they are, have a very small world that slowly expands— but always has "EGO" at the center!
- B. To be BORN AGAIN is to enter into the REAL WORLD, where God is at the CENTER. We come to believe spiritual reality by the ministry of the Holy Spirit— but we still see things, humanly, from our own eyes, from within our own personalities.

And so, unless we deliberately accept God's WORD, and stay close to Him, we are tempted to slip back into self-centered ways of living; (1) making selfish goals of prosperity OUR goals; (2) making self-centered judgments of who is or is not important on the basis of OUR benefits.
- C. This is what had happened to the Church at Laodocia: they had failed to remember the Beatitudes, and so they had failed to find real "blessedness." (Revelation 3:17-19 Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white

garments that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous, therefore, and repent.)

II. THE REALITY IS: WE ARE COMPLETE ONLY IN VICE-REGENCY TO GOD

- A. Man does enjoy unique privilege. (Psalm 8!) "When I consider the heavens ... the work of Thy fingers; the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, WHAT IS MAN? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels!" Man carries THE VERY IMAGE OF GOD!
- B. The temptation is: You shall be as gods! And yet somehow being God's highest free moral creation does not seem to satisfy man ... he is tempted to be his own god!
- C. Real JOY ("Blessed ...") COMES FROM LIVING IN GRACE JOY IS BEING WHAT WE ARE INTENDED BY GOD TO BE, AND DOING WHAT WE ARE CREATED TO BE DOING!

III. FAITH IS DELIBERATELY ACCEPTING/OBEYING TRUTH FROM ONE WHO KNOWS

- A. Salvation is NOT simply what we do or do not know... or even what we do or do not do. Those things are important. But all too often they keep the spotlight on "SELF."
- B. Salvation is deciding 'WHO shall be God!' and 'Whom shall I believe?!' Who is going to be "at the center of my Universe?"
- C. This may/will require going against "how we feel" at times. How many times pilots or mariners are required to believe what the instruments say instead of how they feel! I have been completely turned around in a white-out fog and ended up at the wrong side of the harbor. Pilots have realized they were literally upside down. Why? Because facts sometimes contradict senses. This is a weak illustration of spiritual reality and faith, perhaps. But it is a valid truth all the same.

CONCLUSION:

Are YOU "blessed?" How happy are you? Perhaps we all need to look at our spirits! We need to ask: Am I 'poor in spirit?'

The Spirit of the Kingdom

"Poor in spirit..." does not refer, primarily, to how you happen to "feel" today. But it does have everything to do with your dependency on God's grace:

1. "Forget" about salvation as a matter of correct doctrine, or believing the "right/-correct/Nazarene way!"
2. And (please don't deliberately misunderstand me!) "Forget" about salvation as a matter of doing this and not doing that;
3. The real question is: AM I A TOTALLY GOD-DEPENDANT PERSON? Is my life totally wrapped up in His life, His will, His grace— until I am everything I am because of HIM, and nothing I am or have is worth anything apart from Him?

If you want JOY, real JOY, wonderful JOY ... then be dependant!

Prayer: Lord, We do believe You! We refuse to believe this world with its "wisdom!" We are NOT the center of the Universe! YOU are! AMEN!

#367 Jesus Is All the World to Me

Heroes of the Kingdom

Kingdom of God Series, Part 2 of 6

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2. **Heroes of the Kingdom**
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September 11, 1988

INTRODUCTION

This may well be the most difficult period in all human history to live a genuinely Christian commitment. Now as never before the world needs to see the Church of Jesus Christ in purity and in power!

When Paul Rees was here in this church ten years ago he said, among other things, "We need the vigor of a Christian community with all the earmarks of a counter-culture."

Would you think with me a few minutes about that statement of need?

I. THE NEED FOR A VIGOROUS COMMUNITY OF FAITH, WITH ALL THE EARMARKS OF A COUNTER-CULTURE

Why is this so important? And why is it so difficult to achieve?

- A. Why a community of faith, anyway? Why not simply each one do his or her own thing?

The plan of Jesus is to change the world through His Church. The entire New Testament is written to the Church- for the Church- the Church is Christ's creation, his love! The Church is Christ's ONLY plan to evangelize and reach the world with His redeeming love.

[Ours is an age of individualism. The church exists to serve US! We choose a church by how well it helps OUR needs. But Jesus sees the Church as His BODY— as an extension of Himself— to do HIS work of redemption.]

- B. WHY IS THIS DIFFICULT NOW? We aren't being persecuted for righteousness sake— not really!

A community of vital faith would seem to be more difficult to achieve under open, obvious persecution. But do you think that is really how it would be? [Frederick Faber wrote: "Our fathers, chained in prisons dark, were still in heart and conscience free. How sweet would be their children's fate if they, like them, could die for Thee!" What could he possibly mean?] Under obvious tyranny issues SEEM more simple. Harder, yet simpler.

It is more difficult now to be 'all-out' for Jesus because the issues, the values, are often "fuzzy" ... harder to see clearly!

- C. WE LIKE TO FOCUS ON A FEW ISSUES THAT WE SELECT — and that WE see as "clear-cut" and we focus on THEM: (1) Abortion (2) Hunger (3) Disarmament (4) Or, for some "King James Version" or "Our Brand"

But then WE are still the focus— OUR activity— OUR control! We like to hear the sins WE hate preached against— but we don't like to have our comfortable way of life disturbed!

- D. JESUS CALLS US TO ALL-OUT LIVING, not simply on a few difficult or easy issues, which WE select, BUT IN THE SPIRIT OF THE BEATITUDES, AND IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS CHURCH and cutting ACROSS culture— not simply "for" it or "against" it. AND THAT IS DIFFICULT!

II. AND SO HEROES ARE NEEDED!

[IF WE ARE TO SEE CHRIST'S CHURCH BECOME THE VIGOROUS COMMUNITY OF FAITH, WITH ALL THE EARMARKS OF A COUNTER-CULTURE!!]

Transition: "BUT HOLD ON— If it is such a difficult business to really be a Christian, how come the church is full this morning?" AREN'T WE ALL CHRISTIAN HERE?

A. IT TAKES COURAGE TO LIVE THE BEATITUDES!

Jesus knew that if people began to live the way He was preaching that they would run into trouble. That is why He said: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

And then went on to add: "Blessed are YOU when men SHALL revile YOU!" Not just in centuries gone by! Every person who sets out to follow Jesus is going to be swimming ACROSS the current!

B. HEROES OF THE FAITH ARE PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU AND ME THAT SIMPLY SAY: "I AM GOING TO OBEY JESUS, NO MATTER WHAT!" Heroes are:

1. Pete and Jim
2. Tom (Nees) and Tom (Wilson)
3. [THIS WEEK!] Brenda simply and as a matter of course turning down a high-paying job because it is an abortion clinic.
4. Esther
5. Cecil, patient and Christ-like before a class of immature teenagers; influencing them to believe that Christ can really change a life.
6. YOU! Living for Christ in school— at work— faithful— Jesus says: You are BLESSED!"

III. HOW CAN I RESPOND TO THE NEED FOR HEROES?

A. To begin with: DEFINE "FAITH" AS O B E D I E N C E! Get away from the idea that faith and salvation are a matter of KNOWING CORRECT FACTS ... OR EVEN DOING 'GOOD THINGS!'

B. CHRIST'S HEROES KNOW WHAT JESUS SAID; THEY SEEK TO LIVE BY HIS SPIRIT

In order to be a hero in the kingdom of heaven one must deliberately reject the wisdom of this world. And the wisdom of this world, of this age is particularly pervasive. We are persuaded that we are the wisest, smartest

generation of all human history; NO ONE, including JESUS CHRIST, can tell US how to live!

But following Jesus— being "heroes for HIM" requires the humility to take orders from the meek and lowly Nazarene— and requires the humility to be a part of His glorious-and-imperfect CHURCH!

C. AND BEING A HERO FOR JESUS CHRIST MEANS ACCEPTING HIS VALUES! [

Can you believe Jesus said: "It is BLESSED to be reviled for Christ's sake!" ??]

What are the commonly accepted values of this world, this age?

(From Fortune magazine: I quote- " ... they tell themselves that this is an increasingly crowded, competitive world. ...they feel a deep urgency about getting what they feel are their shares of power and its rewards. They tell themselves that in their urgency they cannot afford relationships that "drag" on their progress. Marriage is possible if it does not hamper career. Children, for most of them, must wait until both members have claimed lucrative posts. For many of them the decision to remain childless feels final." (MORE QUOTES AT END...)

In contrast, Jesus says: PUT ME, PUT MY CHURCH, MY KINGDOM FIRST!
(6:33!)

CONCLUSION:

[Transitional sentence:] "I said at the beginning: This may just be the most difficult time in all of human history to be a Christian." Can you see how this might be true?

A. IT WASN'T AS SIMPLE AS WE MIGHT THINK WHEN THE ISSUES WERE BOLD and clear-cut under despotic, totalitarian rule:

Swiss doctor-writer Paul Tournier wrote, in his book "To Resist or Surrender?"

"Shortly after (WWII) I was asking him (Bishop Wurm) about that tragic era ... he told me how hard it had been, at the beginning of Hitler's reign, to know what attitude the church should take.

"... Should the church step in line, in spite of the movement's obvious flaws, in the hope of influencing the new regime and of directing it toward a true national renewal? Or must the church fight the regime, thus losing all contact with the masses? ..." And then come some very significant words: "There comes into every conflict a terrible, vicious circle: He who does not stand up in time is carried forward into ceaseless compromise right on into final capitulation."

What Dr. Tournier is telling us is that unless we take a stand against evil as soon as we recognize it we soon find EXCUSES to do as we please, even if it means cooperating with the NAZIs!

B. B. BUT WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TODAY? But what about OUR times? What are the prevailing value systems of our times? Who tells us what is really important? Show biz videos? The craving of greed for more prosperity? The blind worship of sports? The fat god of comfort? Self-development at any cost?

Certainly NOT: "Poor in spirit!" Certainly NOT: "Mourning for our sins!"

Certainly NOT: "Meek, gentle!"

Who has the courage to cast his or her lot with the lowly Nazarene? "We need the vigor of a Christian community with all the ear-marks of a counter-culture."

Are there Christians who will follow Jesus in a radical manner— not in a cult-like, blind, unbalanced way— but in total obedience??

I AM ASKING YOU TO BE A HERO! Will you tell Jesus in your heart of hearts today that if He will give you grace, you will follow Him— in His SPIRIT— and live for Him no matter what the cost?

There is an apocryphal story of how Alexander the Great called a truce and gave the chief of a warrior tribe an opportunity to surrender, to become slaves and vassals without a battle.

"Why should we surrender?" the proud chieftain asked. "We have hundreds more brave warriors than you!"

Alexander simply pointed at one of the soldiers in the ranks nearby. "Thrust your sword into your heart for Alexander!" he ordered.

Without hesitation the soldier drew his sword, opened his breastplate, and plunged the sword into his heart, and fell down at his commander's feet. The warrior chief surrendered.

This seems like a remote story— from a far-off culture. The Lord Jesus would never call on us to die merely for display, I'm sure. But what happens when the boss asks you to LIE? Do you put your job on the line? What happens when everyone in the class CHEATS? Do you die to false honors and follow Jesus?

What kind of a Christian Community— what sort of powerful church— could Jesus Christ build— right here in Wollaston— if He had that kind of total loyalty? What could Jesus Christ do with a people who determine to be His followers, even in this pluralistic, humanistic, anything-goes, comfort-seeking society? WOULDN'T IT BE EXCITING TO FIND OUT?

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Addendum 1

Pete Fleming: Master's degree; walked with God from the age 13; in high school earned letters in basketball and golf, and as valedictorian (Seattle, Ore.) he said in his speech: "Where shall we look? Where shall we go? I believe that we have a right to go back to the Bible for our anchorage. University of Washington, president of University Christian Fellowship; in 1951 he received his master's degree, the master's thesis in philosophy: Melville's *The Confidence Man*. He announced to his friends that God was calling him to Ecuador: "I think a 'call' to the mission field is no different from any other means of guidance; a call is nothing more or less than obedience to the will of God, as God presses it home to the soul by whatever means He chooses." In 1951 as he prepared to sail from the States: "Remember the last few verses of I Corinthians 3: 'For all things are yours ... and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.' Throughout all our personality we are God's, and since God has made our whole selves, there is great joy in realizing who is our Creator. This realization is to

permeate every area and level of life. In appreciation of beauty, mountains, music, poetry, knowledge, people, science- even the tang of an apple— God is there, to reflect the joy of His presence in the believer who will recognize His purpose in all things."

Addendum 2

Jim Elliot: graduate of Wheaton, school-champion wrestler, consistent honor student, president of the Student Foreign Missions Fellowship, amateur poet, class representative on the student council. Diary jottings: (As a senior in college:) "'He makes his ministers a flame of fire.' Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of 'other things.' Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be a flame. But flame is transient, often short-lived. Canst thou bear this, my soul, short life? In me there dwells the Spirit of the Great Short-Lived, whose zeal for God's house consumed Him. 'Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.'"

Jim and Pete went in 1951 to work among the QUICHUAS— where they labored almost 5 years. Jim and Pete went on to join Ed McCully and Roger Youdarian and Nate Saint in one of the most dramatic and widely publicized Christian ventures in history: they were martyred in January, 1956, reaching the dreaded Auca Indians in interior Ecuador.

Addendum 3

James Fowler, in his important book, *Stages of Faith*, tells us that the present generation of ambitious young people believe that NO ONE can tell them HOW TO SUCCEED! They KNOW! These ambitious young people "... tell themselves that most of the men and women presently at the top are probably less imaginative and less competent than they are (or will be.) They do not believe, therefore, that they have too much to learn on the way up. The major obstacles to their rising that they see are the inertia and self-protecting power of the incumbents. ...they must be in striking distance of a chief executive's post by the time they are thirty-five."

Addendum 4

In 1980 Fortune magazine interviewed 80 25-year-old "yuppies" about their hopes and plans (as quoted in Fowler's Stages of Faith:) "The values that seemed central had to do with the achievement of success. Success meant for them the eventual achievement of financial independence and, on the way to that, achieving top-rank leadership in one or more of the major institutions of our corporate society. .. Far more than government, they believe, today's and tomorrow's corporate giants are the entities that will determine our global future. " ... they tell themselves that this is an increasingly crowded, competitive world. ...they feel a deep urgency about getting what they feel are their shares of power and its rewards. They tell themselves that in their urgency they cannot afford relationships that "drag" on their progress. Marriage is possible if it does not hamper career. Children, for most of them, must wait until both members have claimed lucrative posts. For many of them the decision to remain childless feels final. " ... At the risk of sounding judgmental (their testimony) might be capsulized as "the human vocation is to take care of number one; those number one's who have the most talent, drive and luck will— and should— inherit the earth." [And then Fowler goes on to tell how talented and mostly decent young talents were sucked into the Nazi dream and realized that selfish ambition is finally self-destructive.]

Laws of a Righteous Kingdom

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September 18, 1988

Matthew 5:17-20;43-48

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say unto you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

(43) You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same?

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Introduction:

The Sermon on the Mount is a keynote speech for the kingdom of God. It sets forth the principles on which Jesus Christ has founded His church.

1. The spirit of Christ's kingdom is set forth in the Beatitudes: poor in spirit, godly sorrow for sins, purity of heart, gentle— in short the spirit of Christlikeness.
2. The heroes of Christ's kingdom are those willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake. Following in Christ's example, with His spirit, will bring conflict with the values of this world.
3. But Christ's kingdom is more than a spirit, and more than heroic followers. Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of clear and definite LAW. There is no authentic kingdom without some kind of law. Without law there is anarchy.

(transition) And in the opening paragraphs of this great Sermon Jesus shows how His kingdom relates to Law. He shows how His kingdom (I.) is the old testament law fulfilled; and how in His kingdom (II.) the spirit of the law surpasses even the keeping of the letter of the law; and how, in His kingdom (III.) the heart of the LAW is revealed as perfect love.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW FULFILLED

(Verse 17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.")

- A. Jesus did not come to bring anarchy, which is what freedom from the Ten Commandments would mean. Jesus came to set us free to be able to KEEP this Law-code, which is good and holy. (see Romans 7:12)

The Ten Commandments have never been erased. Do you know them? Do you keep them?

- I. No other gods before Jehovah God
- II. No idols/ no worshiping of man-made things
- III. Reverence for the Name of God (and His Person)
- IV. A day of special significance before God

- V. Honor father and mother
- VI. Respect LIFE/ do no murder
- VII. Respect intimacy/ no sexual infidelity
- VIII. Respect property/ do not steal
- IX. Respect truth/ do not bear false witness
- X. Respect integrity/ do not break the commandments in the privacy of your heart!

B. Jesus did reveal His authority over the Old Testament Law by boldly stating: "This is what you have come to understand ... But I declare to you ..." And then Jesus proceeded to show that the law could be "kept" in a legalistic way that did not satisfy the demands of His kingdom. Jesus wanted the love of the LAW implanted within His people's hearts!

And later, Jesus summarized the O.T. Law, the Ten Commandments, by saying:[in Matthew 22 and Luke 10] "Thou shalt love the Lord with all your being..and your neighbor as yourself." THIS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.

C. But Jesus lifted this "law of love" to an even higher plane when He gave His life for us, and He calls us to that same self-giving love with His "New Commandment" [John 13:34 A new commandment I give you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another!"] The "Golden Rule" is an Old Testament rule; Jesus said: "Love as I have loved you!"

[Transition: Not only was the Law fulfilled— the letter of the law was to be surpassed in this kingdom Christ was founding:]

II. THE LETTER OF THE LAW SURPASSED BY THE SPIRIT

(Verse 20 For I say unto you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.)

A. WE DARE NOT TAKE THE LAW LIGHTLY! Jesus said: "Whoever annuls (ignores, breaks) one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

What Jesus was saying is: WE LIGHTLY INTERPRET THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM TO OUR OWN GRAVE PERIL! An attitude of glib interpretation is a dangerous position. "Oh, this is what that commandment means! Surely the Sabbath is strictly an Old Testament concept! "Why should I worry about the covetousness of my heart? "I really don't bow down and worship my color T.V.— I just spend 20 hours a week respectfully bowing down before it!"

- B. JESUS COMMENDED THE SERIOUS STUDY AND OBSERVANCE OF THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM. Jesus also said: "Whoever keeps these commandments and teaches them will be BIG in the kingdom of heaven. I see this as an attitude of serious attention to the written Word of God. A willingness to live by the revealed will of God.
- C. THESE LAWS ARE MORE THAN JUST RULES AND REGULATIONS.[It may be well and good to look for loop-holes and every legitimate deduction when filling out your income tax. That is what the government expects. But this is NOT the spirit with which we approach the holy LAWS of the kingdom of God. We are to DELIGHT in them! We are to LOVE TO KEEP THEM! They represent God's love and concern for us!] Jesus said: Keeping the law has to be more and better than just the scrupulous outward observance! You have to surpass the scribes and the Pharisees!

What sort of law-keepers were they?

They were very good at keeping the letter! But THEY WERE (1) SELF-CENTERED; they kept the law in order to save their hides, not because they loved the Lawgiver. And THEY WERE (2) SELF- RIGHTEOUS. Blind to the fact that they were breaking the first commandment and the last, they revelled in the fact that they knew the ins and outs of Jewish law and could get around the letter of the law with impunity. Being (3) SELF-SATISFIED, THEY COULD NEVER KNOW THE SATISFACTION OF REALLY PLEASING GOD. There was very little warm love in their religious faith. [... and so ...]

III. THE HEART OF THE LAW REVEALED AS PERFECT LOVE

(Verses 44 and 48 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you ... THEREFORE YOU ARE TO BE PERFECT, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

IS PERFECT.)

- A. Jesus spent a good part of the Sermon on the Mount showing where the "letter" of the law, in and of itself, would not suffice in His holy kingdom. "You have heard ... but I say!"
- B. He made it clear that the heart of the good and holy law was to make us like God. Jesus wanted us to see that God LOVES us. He wants to make us like Himself so He can have fellowship with us "(v 45)in order that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good..."
- C. So He closes the first part of His Sermon with the startling statement, actually a command: BE PERFECT! WHAT CAN THIS MEAN?

Certainly not 'perfect' in the sense of never being wrong, never making mistakes, never needing forgiveness. But 'perfect' here means complete, or mature, or having come to the adult stage of development. Conclusion:

Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament. He is Lord and Master of the revealed Word of God.

If we will plunge into the written word of God... beginning now, where we are, spiritually; and if we will take the Law and the Prophets seriously, realizing they are intended to show us how to seek and to find in them the spirit of Jesus Himself, the Bible will be like a good schoolmaster, bringing us to the knowledge of the deeper truths of the spirit of Christ's kingdom, and into the personal knowledge of the King Himself!

#311 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord

Kingdom Exploits

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September 25, 1988 - Matthew 6:1-15

Introduction:

We have called the Sermon on the Mount the constitution of the Church of Jesus Christ, the 'foundation statement' for the kingdom of God.

1. The Beatitudes state the revolutionary, loving spirit of the kingdom.
2. The heroes of the kingdom are the men and women who dare to live in that spirit, across cultural pressures. ["blessed are ye when men shall revile you for My sake!"].
3. And the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of holy law. ["I have come to fulfil, not destroy, the law"]

Spirit, heroes, a constitutional law; all these are vital parts of the beachhead of the kingdom of heaven which Jesus has established on planet Earth.

But there is more. For Jesus makes it plain that those who are part of His kingdom have deeds to do, tasks to perform, exploits to accomplish.

In the opening paragraphs of this sixth chapter Jesus makes some clear assumptions:

I. THE EXPECTATIONS OF OUR MASTER

A. A. Every follower of Jesus has expectations to meet:

1. Jesus expects that His kingdom will be a giving kingdom; so he expresses that assumption to His disciples (verse 3): "When you GIVE..." The kingdom of God is an out-flowing of love. [A GIVING KINGDOM [outward]]
2. Jesus came to establish a living kingdom; He came to bring the LIFE of God Himself, and bring it in abundance to and all that is symbolized in the vertical relationship, the give and take of spiritual breath, is comprehended in the expectation (verse 6): "When you PRAY..." The kingdom of God rises no higher than its Source in prayer. [A KINGDOM OF ABUNDANT LIFE [vertical heaven- connection]]
3. And Jesus desires that His kingdom shall be a resourceful kingdom. There are 'means of grace' available for us. God desires to meet every inward longing of the human heart, and He has designed 'means of grace' that correspond to our deepest needs. [A KINGDOM OF FULFILLMENT [seeking of personal power— inward!]]
4. But Jesus intends that the means of grace remain just that: means, and not ends in and of themselves. This is at least a part of what Jesus was saying as he made the assumption (verse 17): "When you FAST..." For the kingdom of God has means of inward renewal and growth and strength.

B. [summary] So there you have it: There are some things we simply are going to do because we are part of Christ's kingdom:

1. we GIVE— the outward thrust of life
2. we PRAY— the vertical dimension, the breath of LIFE
3. we FAST— (seeking personal power, growth) the inward focus of spiritual growth ...
4. and perhaps we could add a fourth assumption to this chapter that includes the other three. In verse 20 Jesus says: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!" And He adds: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!"

- C. All three of these basic movements of the soul are involved in the tasks of the Church of Jesus Christ, to which we all are called as Christians.

The (1) giving out, and the (2) dependency on God in fervent prayer, and the (3) receiving of energy and inspiration all are involved in the 1. WORSHIP, and in the 2. EDUCATION, and in the 3. EVANGELISM; in the 4. FELLOWSHIP and in the 5. SERVICE MINISTRY of the church at every level of its existence.

We GIVE, and we PRAY, and we LEARN TO DEPEND ON THE SPIRIT MORE AND MORE in whatever facet of the church's work we are gifted and called upon to labor.

II. THE PERFECT COMPREHENSION OF GOD THE FATHER

"Your heavenly Father, who seeth in secret ..." repeated three times (4,6,18); and (verse 8): "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." and (verse 32): "... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

- A. God KNOWS
- B. God CARES
- C. God RESPONDS (more on this truth in IV.)

III. CHRIST'S PATIENT EDUCATION

- A. Learning how to implement His expectations. Jesus knew that even spiritual things must be taught and learned. So this was a lesson which (no doubt) He repeated over and over again— and taught by His example:

"When you GIVE— do it like this. When you FAST— make it effective!" And His BIG lesson, at least here, is about PRAYER: "When you PRAY- here is how!:"

- B. The "Pattern for Prayer"

Worship - Surrender - Trust - Specifics - Praise !

- C. Perseverance in this great School!

IV. THE SATISFACTION

A. Labor in the kingdom of God does not go unseen nor unrewarded! It pays to serve Jesus!

Labor for Jesus is NOT 'slave-labor!' God responds to the sincere cry of the heart!

Hebrews 11:6 "God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

B. But HOW does it pay?

1. It pays in FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS. (Go! ... and Lo, I AM with YOU always!)

2. It pays in ACCOMPLISHMENT and ADEQUACY (Galatians 6:7:"Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not!")

[But these are NOT the heart of the emphasis here. Jesus says: "The Father will reward you OPENLY!!"]

3. It pays to serve Jesus in a way that will be rewarded OPENLY! It will be MANIFEST!

Conclusion

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we are asking Jesus to return in His glory and set up His kingdom when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But there is this sobering thought about the coming again of Jesus. It is then that we shall come face to face with His expectations for us! It is then that we shall give an account of our stewardship. Our GIVING and why we gave! Our praying and even our 'spiritual reaching'— our holy things— our 'fasting' and our seeking to find the holy way.

#48 (EH) Go Forth and Tell! O Church of God, Awake!

Kingdom Priorities

Kingdom of God Series, Part 5 of 6

1. The Spirit of the Kingdom
2. Heroes of the Kingdom
3. Laws of a Righteous Kingdom
4. Kingdom Exploits
5. **Kingdom Priorities**
6. Worship the King of the Righteous Kingdom

October 2, 1988 (also April 5, 1992)

Matthew 6:33 "Seek ye first the kingdom of God ... "

(Service of Holy Communion)

Intro:

One of the difficult things for Protestants is grasping the great importance of the sacraments of the church. Of all the means of grace, the sacraments of baptism and communion are possibly understood the least. [Our fierce American/Protestant independence makes us want to reject anything that looks like "formalism" or sanctimonious hocus-pocus. But in a blanket rejection of the "mysterious side" of our faith we throw away literally hundreds of years to which we are heirs as much as any Christians anywhere!]

Our text this morning as we prepare to share together in the sacrament of Holy Communion is of the most powerful promises in Jesus' teachings. It is the text from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:33 "Seek ye first the kingdom of God..." There is a strong correlation with this text and coming with God's people to share the sacraments Jesus has commanded for the church.

Look at the text:

I. SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

- A. A challenge to take God's word against all other voices, including the word of our pagan world.

The text comes to grips with the basic conflict that we see as: Christian faith and "flesh."

[It answers the question, 'When push comes to shove, and you must decide "Shall I compromise on my moral principles just a little bit and eat, even if I know what I am doing is immoral? or, Shall I obey what I know Jesus wants me to do even when it will cost me cold hard cash?" WHO WILL I PUT FIRST? ME ... OR HIM?]

1. One view: flesh is "evil" and must be mortified. Nothing that is enjoyable can be holy. Black clothes; etc.
2. Another view: flesh 'does not connect' with faith; so what we do does not matter so long as we have "standing" with God (antinomianism)
3. The clear scriptural word is: Somehow the flesh must become the vehicle of expression of the spirit.

We hear quoted: "...they that are 'in the flesh' cannot please God" But also we read, "I beseech you ... present your bodies a living sacrifice" and that is "flesh!"

...and Paul writes of Christians: (Rom 8:) "Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you!"

- B. MAKING THE FLESH SERVE THE SPIRIT: this is the whole of practical Christianity. It isn't that we don't need material things.

1. God knows what we need! We do need clothes, food, etc. So it becomes a matter of trust! Not presumption. Not foolish laziness: "I'll pray all the time and God will supply the rent money and I won't have to work!" but rather: "in the choices of life I will deliberately seek to do what God will have me do, regardless of what the cost may be!"

2. If we will seek God's grace, He will provide for us BOTH to live IN Him and FOR Him, AND to make our way in this physical world.

[Transition to "Sacrament" and connection with text:]

But that is where 'means of grace' come in, and particularly the sacraments:

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SACRAMENTS AS MEANS OF GRACE

As I speak about the importance of sacraments as 'means of grace' let me raise some very simple questions:

- A. What is grace? Grace is unmerited favor of God; grace is that which bestows God's great LOVE on us; grace is God's attitude of forgiveness toward the sinner; grace is a quickening and strengthening of life within the soul.
- B. And means of grace are just that: the ways and means, the vehicles or channels by which God bestows His LOVE on our hearts. And what are the 'means of grace?' My list may not be complete, but I submit seven:
 1. Word of God; and with this I include the faithful the preaching of the Word, as well as reading in order to obey God's will.
 2. Prayer is probably the primary means of grace; and prayer combines with power with the use of the Word.
 3. The Fellowship of God's people is a significant and powerful means of grace. God never intends for us to make our way to heaven independent of other individuals, or of other families, or even other groups of believers. God intends that we bear one another's burdens.
 4. Corporate worship, in the large groups or celebrations, in the smaller groups united around a lesson or a ministry (congregations,) as well as in the accountability groups of prayer and sharing (cells,) is a means of grace.
 5. Personal worship may be the same as #2, prayer; but it involves the carrying forward of life in the spirit of 'the living sacrifice.'
 6. Wiley lists the Sabbath as a means of grace! It was introduced at the time of man's creation, and belongs to mankind generally and perpetually. Personally, I am convinced that there is great spiritual power waiting to be released in the

lives of the people who can tap the resources of the Lord's Day by observing it joyfully, not in bondage, but in rest and worship and refreshing.

7. But the last 'means of grace' I would mention are the sacraments of the church that were instituted by Jesus.

C. What are 'sacraments?'

We use the term 'sacrament' to signify an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us, ordained by Christ Himself as a means of receiving that grace, and as a pledge or assurance of Christ's promise. From the earliest times, the sacraments have been understood by the church to be religious rites that carry the most solemn obligation of loyalty to Jesus Christ and His Church.

1. The RC church teaches seven (7) sacraments: baptism, the Lord's supper (or "mass"), confirmation, ordination, extreme unction (or 'last rites'), penance (or 'confession'), and marriage.
2. All Protestant churches recognize but two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Sacraments are pledges of loyalty to Jesus Christ; they are testimonies that mark Christians as separate, different from those who do not believe.

- D. It is vitally important that we reach out for God's grace in every way we can. [Perhaps we do not take seriously the parables of Jesus when He warned us that it is mortally dangerous to have talents and not use them!] We are responsible not only for what we are, but for what we might be by God's free gifts of grace!

Along this line John Wesley once said: (in 1736) "I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the Mystics; under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace." GFH, p541

In other words, Wesley said that even people who seem to be so very, very spiritual nearly led him astray when they picked out which means of grace they would adopt, and which they would avoid. Wesley was saying 'I want to be faithful to God through Christ's church!'

- E. And if you wonder what John Wesley thought the 'true church' consisted of, here is a quote from H. Ray Dunning: "There were two major means that Mr. Wesley seemed to identify as constitutive of the church: the pure Word of God preached, and the sacraments duly administered. This puts him squarely in the Reformation tradition." GFH p542

III. COMMUNION IS A SYMBOL OF THE FLESH SERVING THE SPIRIT

- A. The salvation Jesus has provided is NOT (simply) a "spiritual salvation!" It is a TOTAL salvation. It will not be complete until we have a glorified BODY.

Jesus died on a very real cross. Jesus literally put His BODY on the altar for our salvation. And thus He became our very LIFE!

- B. Jesus expects us to glorify Him IN OUR BODIES! That is, not just "spiritually" but in the expression of His love in day- by-day living!

He wants us to give very real water and food and clothing to real people in His name! He wants us to flesh out His Presence by the way we live!

- C. That is why He wants us to use real bread and wine at His table, in His sacrament! Coming to the table of the Lord in faith is coming to that meeting place of spirit and body: it is acknowledging that Jesus really did DIE for us; it is saying that we will live in Him and by Him.

(Text) May this communion be a means of grace to us all: May we reaffirm the reality of the Christ-faith And may we pledge OUR FLESH TO SERVE HIS SPIRIT!

Worship the King of the Righteous Kingdom

Kingdom of God Series, Part 6 of 6

1. The Spirit of the Kingdom
2. Heroes of the Kingdom
3. Laws of a Righteous Kingdom
4. Kingdom Exploits
5. Kingdom Priorities
6. **Worship the King of the Righteous Kingdom**

October 9, 1988

Intro:

We come to the close of this brief series in which we have defined the Sermon on the Mount as the constitution of the kingdom of God, the Church of Jesus Christ.

We have looked at the Beatitudes as the spirit of the kingdom; we have seen that the heroes of the kingdom are those who live in that spirit, regardless of the cost. We have regarded the holy law of the kingdom, that it is written on the hearts of the king's loving servants; and we have examined the priorities and promises of the kingdom: and we believe that if we seek the kingdom of God first, God Himself knows what we need and will provide it.

Last week we looked at the entrance requirements for the kingdom; and we know that Jesus Himself says, "The gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life."

But there is one important truth that the Sermon on the Mount conveys that cannot fully be measured by its words. For these words were spoken by the King of the kingdom Himself!

The impact of these words reflect the powerful Personality of the One who humbly sat down on a hillside and taught His disciples. Here was the lowly Nazarene, the carpenter's son, the servant. But somehow the light of divinity shone through that

day in the authority, and the regal bearing of the Son of God as He spoke of His kingdom come to earth.

And so the people were amazed not only at what Jesus had said, but what they could sense of His power and authority— they were deeply moved by the KING of the kingdom!

I. JESUS IS THE KING OF THE KINGDOM!

THESE WORDS (THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT) ARE VALID ONLY IN THE VALIDITY OF THE ONE WHO SPOKE THEM.

- A. He proved it by His AUTHORITY: "Ye have heard it said, but I say unto you...!"

Christ's kingdom, the POWER to make it work, and the GLORY which sets it apart from all other pretenders to universal authority, springs from the authority and command of Christ's own Person. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth!"

- B. He proves it by His CHARACTER: The Beatitudes are a profile of the character of the King of the righteous kingdom.

Every kingdom must have a sovereign. And in an absolute monarchy, the character of the realm takes on the character of the ruler.

Jesus Christ embodies the spirit and truth of the Sermon on the Mount. If we want to see what heaven will be like; if we have the faith to see 'the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord' here on earth, and wonder what that will be like: here is the key, the clue: IT WILL BE LIKE JESUS!

II. JESUS WAS KING AS HE WALKED THE EARTH IN THE DAYS OF HIS HUMILIATION

Even then His glory shone through, and could not be denied:

I (we) cannot fully imagine what the humanity-deity of Jesus involved in His own consciousness, or how He appeared to His disciples. But from the very beginning of the incarnation, this glory shone through on significant occasions.

- at Bethlehem, in a stable, the glory of the Lord shone round about; kings bowed low, and offered up gifts.
- here on the Mount the multitudes were dumbfounded
- as Jesus walked on the water
- in the miraculous draught of fishes [Peter: "Depart from me!"]
- the mysterious transfiguration on Mt Tabor

III. JESUS IS KING JUST NOW

...IN THE AGE OF THE CHURCH MILITANT

- A. This glory, coming from the REGAL AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST, fell on the Church at Pentecost:
 - tongues of fire (the symbol— each saw on the other's heads!)
- B. JESUS was the central theme of GLORY that inaugural day of the Church; He was the theme of Peter's sermon when 3,000 believed and identified with the Church
- C. This same GLORY is available to the Church, if we are in contact with the living King, for we are in the Pentecost Age. The Spirit is available to those who want Him more than anything else.

God is not capricious. Jesus said: "All authority is given to Me: Tarry YE in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with POWER from on high!"

IV. JESUS IS THE ETERNAL KING!

WE HAVE JUST A GLIMPSE INTO THE REGAL GLORY THAT SHALL YET BE REVEALED:

The Bible gives us a glimpse into the glory of Jesus Christ yet to be revealed.

1. We may speak lightly or casually about the Second Coming, but if we were suddenly to be ushered into the Presence of the Risen Savior we would experience something very close to excruciating pain along with the joy; for we would see an almost unbearable

Worship the King of the Righteous Kingdom

glory! - and certainly it would be unspeakable! it would be something beyond our casual or 'take-it-for-granted' egalitarian attitudes.

2. In Revelation 1:8-17 we get just a hint at what we are in for when we see Jesus.

Here is John, the beloved, the one who knew Jesus best, humanly speaking. "The disciple Jesus loved!" When he glimpses the risen, glorified King he wrote: "I fell at His feet as a dead man!"

CONCLUSION:

What may we do about this Savior who spoke with authority?

1. We may worship Him!

How seriously do we take our public worship? Do we think first NOT as to what it does for US, but how together we honor the KING?

We cannot truly have the kingdom, and leave out the KING from the absolute center of our lives.

This is my quarrel with "Marches for Peace" and "Walks for Hunger"— and all the other GOOD things that are scheduled in conflict with the traditional times of worship, almost as if by design the WORSHIP is superseded by "something more important for the moment," —as if our week-by-week worship is not the most important corporate act that we, the church, can offer to the King!

2. We may swear to Him our allegiance forever! Psalm 2 says: "Kiss the Son!"

Jesus came by the lakeside where Peter and Andrew were washing their nets and said: "Follow Me!" It cost them their reputations, their routine, their comfort— and their very lives. But they saw in Jesus the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and they followed Him, and they see Him in His glory!

Has Jesus come by the place where YOU labor? Will YOU follow Him, and own Him as YOUR King forever? He will be absolute Ruler of all this Universe! You can depend on it! Can He be Ruler of YOUR life this day?

[EH] #52 *Ye Servants of God*