

20. The Message of the Kingdom

One of Jesus' best known parables is the sower and the seed. What may have been overlooked, though, is a basic spiritual understanding of what the seed really is. When Jesus began to explain the parable – that explanation being a privilege reserved for those to whom it has been given “to know the mysteries of the kingdom.” (Mt. 13:11) – He said, “When anyone hears the message *of the kingdom...*” (Mt. 13:19 - emphasis added) This is the seed that is planted in the soils, the hearts of men: the message of the kingdom of Christ and God.

What is the message of the kingdom? Put succinctly, it is that the King of everything stands before you and commands you to repent of all sin and selfishness and enter into the road that leads to eternal life through obedience to Him. In short, the message of the kingdom is that Christ is King.

Paul wrote, “And He died for all, that those who live should *no longer live for themselves, but for Him* who died for them and rose again.” (2 Cor. 5:15 - emphasis added) It is a basic requirement upon *all* those who hope to experience Christ's resurrection life to live *only* for Him. The “pastor,” no matter how eloquent or learned in the Scriptures or well-intentioned at heart, who uses the pulpit to gain followers (and their attendant affluence) to himself, is not spending his life living for Christ – he lives and preaches and presents himself as a godly man chiefly for some benefit to himself (no matter how he manages to convince himself and his followers otherwise).

Peter wrote that the saints – the average, ordinary persons called out of this world's darkness and into Christ's light – were “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that *you may obey Jesus Christ* and be sprinkled with His blood.” (1 Pet. 1:2 - emphasis added) This was so central to the preaching of Peter that he included it in his salutary greeting! It is a basic element in God's offer of salvation that those who would partake of that salvation must obey the King. That this message of the kingdom differs so greatly from the “gospel” preached at many a “church” – which “gospel” lures people in by appealing and catering to some desire in their hearts and which enables them to practice, in the name of Christ, whatever “religion” seems right in their own eyes to whatever degree that suits their own tastes and passions – is damning evidence that the “church” is something other than the work of God among men.

Jesus said, “When anyone hears the message of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” (Mt. 13:19) One can spend one's life at many a “church” and never once hear the gospel presented as a clear command to repent and obey the King. Those “churches” which give lip service to the kingdom of God but do not direct their attendees to practice close, personal obedience to the King, often present their version of the gospel of Christ in such a way that one could almost be excused for misunderstanding the message of the kingdom!

Paul wrote, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:12-14)

How does the wicked one (the devil, the demonic) snatch away the message of the kingdom? In our day and age, first by obscuring the simple message of the kingdom (the King is here – repent and obey!) behind smoke screens of “theology,” “philosophy of ministry,” denominational preferences and procedures, etc. – in a word, “church.” These things are very capable of causing

carnal, natural men – men who have attached themselves to their favorite teacher, “pastor,” “apostle,” “prophet,” whatever title their spiritual guru prefers (see 1 Cor. 3:4) – to dismiss the need to repent of sin and self and to live in strict obedience to the only King as being mere foolishness.

Jesus spoke of a second type of hearer: “he who hears the message [of the kingdom] and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the message, immediately he stumbles.” (Mt. 13:20-21) The message of the kingdom is not a simple presentation of words, ideas and facts. Yes, words, ideas and facts (particularly historical facts) are employed but that is not the most essential element.

Paul wrote, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) Whether that message is spoken directly to the heart of a man by God’s Spirit or whether it is a message spoken by men, or whether that message of God’s Spirit rests on the life of the speaker or simply rests on the words of God *in spite of* the speaker’s wicked heart or sinful lifestyle or the speaker’s own bondages to error (whether gross spiritual sin or even demonic error), all this is immaterial to the hearer. It is the message spoken by the Spirit of God to the inner spirit of the man which operates in the hearer’s heart. Wherever and however the Spirit of God has contacted a hearer with His message of the kingdom, with the hearer’s act of surrender and submission, the new life in the Spirit is begun.

Far too often, however, this new life - upon being hammered with fearful threats of the dangers of “falling away” (falling mostly away from the “church,” that is) – is coerced to practice routine attendance under spirit-numbing teachings and sermons and the new life is soon squelched. Should this new spark of life resist and rebel against the bondages of “church,” the leadership is all too well equipped (and often demonically assisted) to bring pressure on any dissenter who dares to challenge their established institution. Why, questioning the right of a “pastor” or “apostle” or “bishop” to exercise authority over other believers is tantamount to questioning the deity of Christ or blaspheming the Holy Spirit in many man-made “Christian” hierarchies. Under this level of pressure (from spiritual “experts” no less) many an immature, baby believer has crumbled under the tribulation and persecution and quietly become a faithful “church” member. Others have simply abandoned both the “church” and God and resubmitted their loyalty to the world and their own self-centered agendas.

Jesus spoke of a third type of hearer: “he who hears the message [of the kingdom], and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the message, and he becomes unfruitful.” (Mt. 13:22) Again, the message of the kingdom is the spiritual command to repent and obey the King and Head, Christ Jesus. But what are “the cares of this world”?

Jesus said, “Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Mt. 6:31-33) This too is the message of the kingdom: the Father of the King has promised to faithfully provide the necessities of life for the followers of Christ who obediently seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness (what is right in God’s eyes). The writer of Hebrews reminds us of God’s way: “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” (Heb. 10:38) The sin of unbelief – that God will not take care of us – will cause the message of the kingdom to be unfruitful.

The deceitfulness of wealth is equally capable of keeping the message of the kingdom (that Christ is the King to be personally obeyed) from being fruitful and bringing forth a harvest for the

King and His Father. Wealth is quite capable of deceiving us into thinking we are in obedience to the Father just because we are currently enjoying an abundance of things and a lifestyle of comfort and ease – or that the one who is not currently enjoying abundance or who is suffering in some way is somehow disobedient to God, perhaps even under His judgment.

The “church” assists in helping the deception of the followers of Christ by teaching the “tithes” – the means by which the clergy (who have no place in Scripture except to be condemned) enjoy a fully-funded (by carnal means) life of “faith.” The “tithes” is a means by which the ignorant sheep can give a standard percentage and do with the rest as they please – doing what is right in their own eyes (lawlessness) with the portion they are taught that God has placed no requirements on. Not to mention that, in the “church,” “tithes” are para-voluntary. Any “church” member who resists clerical pressure with enough in-“church” political clout can attend for free if they really choose to – or else they can go to the mega-“church” down the road and remain anonymous for the entire time they wish to attend “church.” This is nothing but obedience only to the personal wishes of the individual – subtle but pure lawlessness.

The New Testament obviously teaches differently. We are no longer our own but His because He bought us with His own blood (1 Cor. 6:20) and *everything* we do is to be under His authority and dominion! (Col. 3:17) The multitudes of luxuries, excesses, baubles and gadgets – and especially the multitudes of “church” buildings that serve chiefly to divide the people who claim to follow Christ – bought by those who claim to be His, are going to be a great weight for many on judgment day because they were obtained, first, in disobedience to His Spirit and, second, at the expense of the sufferings of orphans, widows and the least of Christ’s brothers.

Jesus spoke of a fourth type of hearer: “he who hears the message [of the kingdom] and understands it, who indeed bears fruit [for the kingdom]...” (Mt. 13:23) Jesus intricately linked the kingdom of God and doing the will of God. (Mt. 6:10) When we understand the nature of having a sovereign king – that the king issues commands and the subjects do what the king wishes – we can readily see that the kingdom of God among men is wherever men choose to do the will of God.

Paul wrote, “The kingdom of God...is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17) These are the essential, core elements of God’s kingdom. Whenever men are truly choosing to do God’s will, truly seeking first God’s kingdom, there men will practice righteousness (what is right in *God’s* eyes), they will be at peace with God and one another and they will be experiencing the joy that comes from living rightly with and in the Spirit of God. Anything less or anything other simply indicates that someone is not seeking first God’s will and kingdom.

The first fruit that a genuine follower of Christ will bear for the kingdom of God is individual. This is the transformation of his character into the likeness of Christ. (Gal. 5:22-23) During this process of being made like Christ, of doing what is right in God’s eyes, his interactions with others will bring forth fruit for God’s kingdom, the corporate aspect of his life in Christ. His interactions with those of like spirit will be characterized by peace and mutual submission in the fear of the Lord (Eph. 5:21) even as his interactions with others of a different spirit (even those who claim the name or teachings of Christ) will more resemble Jesus’ relations with the Pharisees – stormy and turbulent as the kingdom of God clashes with the kingdoms of men and the devil.

Many have taught this parable throughout church history, separating the analogy away from the message of the kingdom. It is often taught that the seed is “the gospel” (meaning an evangelistic sermon of some sort) or that the seed is “the Word” (meaning Jesus Himself by His Spirit coming to live in one’s heart). And there are elements of truth contained in those ideas but the specific words that *Jesus did use* point directly at a number of errors which many now routinely practice in His

name. Error and spiritual malpractice will always ensue whenever we fail to genuinely seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 19: The Keys of the Kingdom

<http://paidionbooks.org/girard/tgotk/19tkotk.pdf>

Chapter 21: The Eternal Gospel

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